

Thrifting Culture during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on the Environment

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Abstract. Buying and wearing second-hand clothes are still considered taboo and embarrassing by many people in Indonesia. However, a new phenomenon has emerged, namely the thrifting trend among young people during this pandemic. Thrifting means an activity of hunting used clothes. This study aims to 1) explain the cultural changes among young people related to thrifting; 2) knowing the motivation of thrifting among young people; 3) find a relationship between thrifting and the environment. The author uses cultural theory and qualitative descriptive methods, namely utilizing data obtained through literature study. The results of this study indicate a cultural change related to fashion among young people, which is shown through thrifting activities. Thrifting motivation is driven by the desire to be thrifty, look unique, and different, and care for the environment. Thrifting among young people is not just a dress activity but also a desire to take part in saving the earth and reducing waste.

1 Introduction

The term thrifting in Indonesia refers to the activity of hunting used clothes. Thrifting comes from the word thrifty or frugal. Shopping for used clothes may no longer be a new phenomenon. Long before the pandemic, some people were familiar with and involved in buying used clothes. Even so, wearing used clothes is still considered taboo and embarrassing for most people. However, thrifting activities during this pandemic have even become a trend, even in the spotlight, because it is associated with the issue of protecting the environment from the bad effects of fast fashion. Thrifting that used to be taken for granted is now loved by young people. They are no longer ashamed to buy used clothes but openly hunt used clothes on social media or marketplaces.

Research that has been done related to thrifting includes "Macro-Environment of Second-Hand Clothing Business in Helsinki" [1], which explores the external factors that affect the used clothing business in Helsinki. In another article, "Motivation & Meaning in Maine's Thrift Culture" [2], this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the position of consumers in Maine. These markets respond to and inform a state-wide culture of reuse. Another study, namely "Phenomenology of Lifestyle of UNESA Students Using Used

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Clothing" [3], shows that UNESA students interpret the use of used clothing as a lifestyle of fashion trends. They choose used clothes because they are affordable, well-known brands, unique, limited edition, quality materials, add to their clothing collection and look fashionable. Their attitudes are influenced by the social environment, second-hand clothing stores and the mass media.

In contrast to previous studies, this study uses the framework and theory of cultural adaptation during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is related to the thrifting culture among young people. This study aims to explain cultural changes among young people related to thrifting, find out the motivation for thrifting among young people, and find the relationship between thrifting and the environment.

2. Theoretical Background

Culture manifests itself in language patterns, forms of activity, behaviours that serve as models, as measures of adaptation and communication styles that allow people to live in a society, at a certain level of technical development, and at a certain level of development at a certain moment. Culture is also concerned with the properties of a material object that plays an important role in everyday life, such as house models, tools used, transportation and others [4]. Based on this opinion, it can be concluded that human efforts or activities in adapting to certain conditions are a form of culture.

Culture in the concept of cultural adaptationist experts summarizes some of the main assumptions about culture, namely: (a) Culture is a system that connects human groups to their ecological environment; (b) Cultural change is basically a process of adaptation or natural selection; (c) Areas such as technology, economics, and elements of social organization that are related to production are the most adaptive cultural subjects. The occurrence of adaptive changes usually begins and develops in these areas; (d) The ideational components of cultural systems can have adaptive consequences in maintaining ecosystems, assisting in livelihoods, controlling populations, etc. [5]

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, which is intended to describe and describe the existing phenomena [6]. Data were obtained from literature studies on culture, pandemics, the environment, and other research on thrifting. Literature studies are sourced from books, scientific works, news about the pandemic and the thrifting phenomenon in Indonesia, and other sources.

4. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019. The virus was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization declared a Public Health Emergency due to International Concern regarding COVID-19 on 30 January 2020 and then declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020. This virus is suspected of having entered Indonesia around January 2019, and on 2 March 2019, the Indonesian government officially announced two cases of positive Covid-19 patients [7]. The emergence of this pandemic immediately forced many changes in society. This is reflected in changes in their activities, lifestyles, attitudes and actions, including how and what they buy related to the consumption of clothes or fashion. Fashion is an inseparable part of human appearance and lifestyle. Fashion can be defined as a style that is accepted and used by the majority of members of a group at a certain time [8]. A style that is popular in a certain time frame is

usually associated with a trend. Fashion consumption is carried out in line with changing trends. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a trend of thrifting among young people.

Thrifting is an activity of hunting or buying thrift items. Thrift is used goods or clothes that are usually obtained from import activities. On average, this thrift has a wearable condition or even looks like it is new. According to data from IBISWorld, currently, thrift stores are part of a large industry with a value of up to the US \$ 14.4 billion or around Rp. 205.149 trillion. Maybe in Indonesia, the value of this industry has not been calculated, but the reality that can be seen is the emergence of online and offline thrift shops that are growing rapidly. The proliferation of thrift shops indicates an increase or increase in consumer demand for used clothing. This industry in Indonesia is favoured by young people, marked by the rise of millennials who are proud to use second-hand goods [9]. Thrifting-related content has also been busy appearing in several media such as YouTube and Tik Tok, as well as other media. They upload a variety of content, starting from showing the thrift results, mix and match thrift clothes, to informing the thrifting locations in Indonesia. Uniquely, thrift in several cities has its own designation. For example, in Balikpapan and Sulawesi, thrift is known as *cakar*, which is an acronym for *cap karung*. It is called *cap karung* because used clothes are usually packed in sacks. Meanwhile, in Medan, thrift is familiarly called *monza*, which comes from the word Monginsidi Plaza, which is a satire term that refers to the phenomenon of used clothing traders on Jalan Monginsidi, Medan. The thrift in Semarang, Solo and Jogja is called *awul-awul*, which means tearing apart piles of clothes [10].

Of course, the phenomenon of buying used clothes is not something new in Indonesia. Used clothes in ancient times can be found in flea markets. However, buying used clothes at that time was considered taboo or shameful for most people. Now, used clothes are loved by young people through thrifting activities. They buy or even run the thrift clothing business openly. The popularity of thrifting cannot be separated from the situation and conditions during the pandemic. The pandemic has resulted in people having to adjust to new habits such as strict health protocols, namely obliging to wear masks, maintaining distance, washing hands, and not doing activities outside the home. The sluggish economy as a result of the pandemic has an impact on people's purchasing power. Throughout 2020, the pandemic has seen millions of people lose their jobs or experience a decline in income. The *PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar)* or large-scale social restrictions policy to prevent the spread of Covid-19 resulted in limited mobility and community activities, which resulted in a decrease in domestic demand [11]. Thrifting activities are considered to be appropriate in a pandemic situation. Frugality is a strategic action in dealing with decreased income. The thrift shop, which mostly uses digital media in running its business, is also a safe shopping alternative for the public. Relying on these phenomena if it is associated with Keesing's theory, this thrifting activity is actually a cultural change as a process of adaptation to existing situations and conditions.

Riri Rengganis, as Vice Executive Chairman of the Indonesian Fashion Chamber (IFC), stated that there are three factors that trigger why people like thrifting. First, thrifting challenges creativity when it comes to styling. There is an element of surprise in shopping thrift. The second trigger, because the price is cheap. Third, there is the awareness that clothes can be a huge source of waste and threaten the environment [12]. In line with this opinion, the research conducted by Prabaswari *et al.* on thrifting motivation carried out by adolescents in the city of Denpasar, consists of economic aspects, natural environmental aspects, and individual aspects. The desire to get cheap clothes as well as prestige from famous fashion brands is their goal in doing thrifting. Awareness of the natural environment and anti-consumerism attitudes are also driving factors. Used clothing is not only a consumption item but also a medium in developing creativity in combining clothes so that there is a transformation of new meanings in used clothes [13].

If seen from the factors above, it is not excessive if the thrifting or reuse trend is considered the opposite of fast fashion culture. The thrift shop provides space for the concept of zero waste. The availability of cheap goods that are suitable for use has attracted many people to join this movement. This activity is important to suppress the textile production cycle, which has an impact on environmental pollution. Fast fashion itself refers to a business strategy that reflects a quick response to trends by increasing designs and new products quickly and effectively to increase the value and quantity of demand for short-cycle fashion products [14]. Massive clothing production and rapid fashion changes in fast fashion, according to Baudrillard, gave rise to abundance [15]. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the production growth of large and medium manufacturing industries in the first quarter of 2019 increased by 4.45 per cent (y-on-y) against the first quarter of 2018. The increase was mainly due to an increase in the production of the apparel industry, namely an increase of 29.19 per cent [16].

The impact of this abundant clothing industry has a profound effect on environmental health. United Climate Change News said that the fashion industry contributes 10% of greenhouse gases arising from long supply chains and the use of energy in intensive production. The industry consumes more energy than the aviation and shipping industries combined. Apart from its carbon-intensive supply chains and production processes, the fashion industry consumes many other valuable resources. To make just one pair of denim jeans, it takes 10,000 litres of water to grow one kilo of cotton needed for a pair of jeans. In comparison, it takes one person 10 years to drink 10,000 litres of water. Cumulatively, the fashion industry generates about 20% of global wastewater. In addition, 85% of textiles end up in landfills or are burned when most of the material can be reused [17]. One of the cases resulted from an investigation by Greenpeace International in 2012 revealed that the clothing industry waste was the cause of ecological damage in several major springs that flow down Java Island. Another case occurred in the Cigondewah area of Bandung, where there was a fragment of the Citarum river flow, whose colour was always changing due to waste from the surrounding textile factories. The same thing happened in the Melong area, Cimahi, West Java. Due to a large number of textile factories, environmental impacts are emerging, ranging from yellowing groundwater to black dust due to coal-burning that covers the houses of local residents. The dust released from the factory in the Melong area caused a number of residents to suffocate and cough. Industrial wastewater also flows into the river that crosses the Cimindi-Cibaligo Melong area. Not to mention the case of river pollution that has occurred in Pekalongan due to batik waste [18].

Simultaneously, used textiles can be reprocessed into new clothes. However, recycling is not enough. Other efforts are needed to balance the rapid production of the textile industry and human consumption of fashion items. The presence of a thrifting culture is needed to balance the environmentally damaging fast fashion. The ideational components that appear in cultural systems, such as awareness in responding to environmental degradation, are adaptive consequences in maintaining ecosystems. Apart from that, from a cultural perspective, technological and economic elements and social organizations involved in production are the most adaptive main areas of culture. It is in this area that adaptive change usually begins and develops.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that there is a cultural change among young people through thrifting activities or buying used clothes. This change is an adaptation to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, which has an economic impact on the people of Indonesia. Thrifting motivation is driven by the desire to reduce expenses but still look unique, stylish and different, as well as the emergence of awareness in protecting the environment. Thrifting by

the young generation is not just a dress activity but is followed by a desire to take part in saving the earth and reducing waste in the fashion industry. The steps and ideal concepts through the thrifting movement as a counterweight to this fast fashion are an adaptive consequence as an effort to protect the ecosystem.

The limitation of this research is that it is not possible to collect data in the field directly due to the ongoing pandemic. So that new data collection is limited to literature studies sourced from previous research, as well as the phenomenon of thrifting trends, environmental issues and pandemics that are published in the mass media. Recommendations for future research may be able to fill these gaps by conducting field observations and interviews with the community of young people who like thrifting and thrift shops in several social media and marketplaces.

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