

Paradigm Shift in Sustainable Consumption of Generation Z: An Environmental Law Study on The Impact of Thrifting in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to critically examine the practice of thrifting in Indonesia by analyzing its position at the intersection of sustainable consumption, environmental law, and regulatory governance. While thrifting has expanded significantly among Generation Z as an alternative to fast fashion and textile waste, its legal status—particularly concerning the import of second-hand clothing—remains contested and fragmented. Employing a qualitative empirical legal approach, this research draws on policy documents, online media reports, and observational data, analyzed through discourse analysis and actor-network analysis using Discourse Network Analyzer (DNA) and Visone software to map interactions among key actors and competing policy narratives. The findings indicate that thrifting reflects a shift toward reuse-oriented consumption aligned with circular economy principles; however, its environmental benefits remain conditional due to regulatory ambiguity, weak enforcement, and the risk of secondary textile waste accumulation. The study reveals that thrifting operates within a fragmented governance framework where trade regulation, environmental protection, and waste management are insufficiently integrated. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of environmental legal analysis with discourse network analysis to conceptualize thrifting as a contested socio-legal practice shaped by dynamic interactions between actors, regulatory structures, and sustainability discourses. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of environmental law and circular economy scholarship by emphasizing the importance of lifecycle-based regulatory integration, while practically, it highlights the need for coherent cross-sectoral policies, strengthened import supervision, and structured post-consumption waste management to ensure that thrifting evolves into a genuinely sustainable practice rather than a symbolic environmental trend.

Keywords: Circular Economy; Environmental Law; Generation Z; Sustainable Consumption; Thrifting

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world after China, India, and the United States.¹ According to Worldometer data, Indonesia's population is projected to reach 285,721,236 by 2025, up from 274,814,866 in 2020. Population growth contributes to increasing consumption patterns, including in the fashion sector, which in turn has implications for waste generation and environmental governance. Textile waste generally ends up in landfills or is incinerated, with very low recycling rates. In fact, the clothing industry is the second-largest contributor to waste worldwide and contributes approximately 10% to global carbon emissions² producing over 80 billion items of clothing annually. Although global statistics often place the clothing industry among major contributors to carbon emissions and waste, the more pressing issue in the Indonesian context concerns how

¹ Ayu Dear Pangesti et al., "Social Media Campaign: Thrifting sebagai Pencegahan Limbah Tekstil Fast Fashion," *Flourishing Journal* 3, no. 1 SE-Articles (14 Juni 2023): 17–21, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um070v3i12023p17-21>.

² Sara Beniulis dan Saidas Rafijevas, "Thrift Stores as Environmental Solution: Motivators of Buyers and Donors," *Studijos – Verslas – Visuomenė* 8 (2023): 36–44, <https://doi.org/10.52320/svv.v1iVIII.283>.

rising textile consumption intersects with domestic waste management capacity and environmental regulation

As the population grows, the demand for clothing also continues to increase. Since ancient times, clothing has been understood as a primary human need. However, over time, fashion has undergone significant changes influenced by social, economic, and cultural conditions.³ Fashion trends have subsequently evolved into lifestyles, particularly among the younger generation.⁴ This situation has driven the rapid growth of the fashion industry, particularly fast fashion, which offers trendy products at affordable prices, thus encouraging a consumer culture. Within environmental law scholarship, such consumer culture is increasingly scrutinized for its structural contribution to unsustainable production–consumption cycles.

Fast fashion is characterized by rapid production changes, the use of low-quality raw materials, and the rapid launch of new collections. The resulting consumer culture has drawn criticism for its significant environmental impact. In response to this linear production model, alternative consumption practices have emerged, including thrifting, which is frequently associated with the principles of reuse and circular economy. In Indonesia, thrifting has developed not merely as a lifestyle trend but as a growing socio-economic practice embedded in digital marketplaces and youth culture.⁵

Thrifting comes from the word "thrift," meaning "thrifty," and is now understood as the activity of purchasing used goods, especially clothing, for reuse or resale.⁶ This practice is considered effective in reducing textile waste through reuse. Historically, thrifting has been around for a century, coinciding with the emergence of mass clothing production during the Industrial Revolution, which transformed people's perceptions of fashion.⁷ In Indonesia, thrifting began to gain widespread recognition in the 2000s among vintage enthusiasts, and since 2013, the secondhand clothing trade has grown rapidly, including for branded items. During the pandemic, social restrictions did not hinder the growth of thrifting activities, especially among Generation Z.⁸ Data shows that in 2022, Indonesia imported 26.22 tons of secondhand clothing, with Australia and Japan as the main exporting countries,

³ Reka Mala Ramadhani, Izza Dennisa Amalia, dan Nezalina Putri Rachmah, "Generasi Milenial dan Generasi Z Surabaya: Perbedaan Persepsi dan Motivasi Trend Fashion Thrifting.," in *Seminar Nasional Ilmu Ilmu Sosial (SNIIS)*, vol. 3 (Surabaya: Universitas Negeri Surabaya, 2024), 1272–85, <https://proceeding.unesa.ac.id/index.php/sniis/article/view/3862?utm>.

⁴ Ramadhani, Amalia, dan Rachmah.

⁵ A. Anwar dan Jholanda, "Sustainable Fashion: Fenomena Thrifting dan Peran Subsektor Fashion terhadap Perekonomian Indonesia," *Jurnal Manajemen dan Bisnis (JMB)* 6, no. 1 (2025): 2745–2892, <https://jurnal.umat.ac.id/index.php/JMB/article/viewFile/1694/1456>.

⁶ Ramadhani, Amalia, dan Rachmah, "Generasi Milenial dan Generasi Z Surabaya: Perbedaan Persepsi dan Motivasi Trend Fashion Thrifting."

⁷ Indri Haryanti dan Asep Miftahul Falah, "Fenomena Thrifting sebagai Fashion Lifestyle: Studi Kasus pada Mahasiswa Universitas Muhammadiyah Bandung," *ATRAT: Jurnal Seni Rupa* 11, no. 2 SE-Articles (23 Mei 2023): 205–21, <https://doi.org/10.26742/atrat.v11i2.3188>.

⁸ Nevi Ristiani, Usman Raidar, dan Damar Wibisono, "Fenomena Thrifting Fashion di Masa Pandemi COVID-19: Studi Kasus pada Mahasiswa Universitas Lampung," *Jurnal Sociologie* 1, no. 2 SE-Articles (25 Oktober 2022), <https://jurnalsociologie.fisip.unila.ac.id/index.php/jurnal/article/view/74>.

indicating high market demand.⁹ Furthermore, Indonesia produces approximately 33 million tons of textiles annually, with approximately 1 million tons ending up as waste.

Generation Z is a key player in thrifting practices and views secondhand clothing as a means of self-expression and support for sustainability.¹⁰ For Generation Z, sustainable fashion is not just a trend, but a shift in mindset. Social media, particularly Instagram, plays a significant role in shaping these preferences by providing fashion references based on secondhand clothing.¹¹ However, existing studies predominantly frame this phenomenon as a matter of consumer awareness and lifestyle transformation, without sufficiently examining its concrete environmental risks, such as the accumulation of unsold imported clothing and the generation of secondary textile waste.

However, thrifting also raises serious problems. This practice is often associated with the illegal import of used clothing, which is considered a threat to the domestic textile industry and has led to mass layoffs. The government subsequently issued Minister of Trade Regulation No. 40 of 2022, which prohibits the import of used clothing. Meanwhile, Law No. 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management does not explicitly prohibit the import of used clothing, but does prohibit the introduction of waste into the environment.¹² This creates legal ambiguity that has sparked debate among thrifting businesses.

Besides legal and economic aspects, imported used clothing also poses health risks. Tests by the Ministry of Trade found mold in the fibers of imported used clothing due to storage in humid conditions, which can potentially cause health problems such as allergies and skin irritation.¹³ This normative configuration creates regulatory ambiguity regarding whether imported used clothing constitutes tradable goods or environmental waste, thereby placing thrifting at the intersection of trade regulation and environmental protection law. Other regulations, such as Law Number 18 of 2008 concerning Waste Management and Law Number 22 of 2011, stipulate that imported used goods must meet certain standards to prevent environmental and health impacts.¹⁴ Despite these regulatory instruments, the

⁹ Rohana Sham et al., "Influence of Thrifting Products Purchasing Behavior: Cases of young adults in Indonesia," *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal* 9, no. 27 SE-Other Environment 1 (24 Februari 2024): 369–76, <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9i27.5713>.

¹⁰ Dapit Edo, Puty Febriasari, dan Thea Geneveva J. Jesajas, "Sustainable Style: How Environmental Knowledge And Environmental Concern Influence Gen-Z's Fashion Choices," *Jurnal Ekonomi* 13, no. 04 SE-Articles (25 Desember 2024): 1315–23, <https://ejournal.seaninstitute.or.id/index.php/Ekonomi/article/view/5513>.

¹¹ A. Putri, "Perancangan Referensi Gaya Berpakaian Thrifting melalui Feed Instagram," *Jurnal Barik* 3, no. 2 (2022): 125–37, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jdkv.v3i2.46710>.

¹² Herlina Oktavia dan Emy Rosnawati, "The Legal Implications of Selling Imported Thrift Clothing: Environmental Impact," *In-Prolegurit* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–59, <https://in-prolegurit.upnjatim.ac.id/index.php/in-prolegurit/article/view/44>.

¹³ Azizan Fatah et al., "Pengaruh Larangan Impor Pakaian Bekas terhadap Pengusaha Thrift," *Jurnal Economina* 2, no. 1 SE-Articles (15 Januari 2023): 285–92, <https://doi.org/10.55681/economina.v2i1.288>.

¹⁴ Nika Nencyana Fadila, Raudhotul Alifah, dan Andhita Risiko Faristiana, "Fenomena Thrifting Yang Populer Dikalangan Mahasiswa," *Lencana: Jurnal Inovasi Ilmu Pendidikan* 1, no. 3 SE-Articles (8 Juni 2023): 278–91, <https://doi.org/10.55606/lencana.v1i3.1836>.

effectiveness of existing legal frameworks in controlling the environmental and economic risks of thrifting practices remains underexplored.

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that imports of used clothing increased significantly between 2018 and 2020. A 2022 Goodstats survey of 261 respondents revealed that 49.4% of respondents had purchased used clothing, while others had never purchased it or rejected the practice of thrifting. Furthermore, only around 65% of the clothing in a bale is sold, with the remainder being discarded or sold at very low prices, potentially increasing textile waste.¹⁵

Based on these conditions, the practice of thrifting in Indonesia presents two conflicting sides. On the one hand, thrifting has the potential to be a sustainable consumption solution by extending the lifespan of clothing and increasing environmental awareness. On the other hand, uncontrolled thrifting practices can exacerbate waste problems, violate regulations, and harm industry and public health. This tension highlights the need to position thrifting not merely as a behavioral phenomenon, but as a complex socio-legal issue within environmental policy discourse.

Research by Haryanti et al. (2022) makes an important contribution by highlighting the role of thrifting in reducing textile waste and increasing environmental awareness among consumers, particularly the younger generation. The strength of this study lies in its focus on the positive impact of clothing reuse on waste reduction and increasing sustainable consumption behavior. However, the study lacks an examination of broader regulatory implications and economic impacts, particularly regarding the mismatch between used clothing import practices and government policies, their impact on the domestic textile industry, and the economic consequences for thrifting businesses. A more in-depth analysis of how policies such as the ban on used clothing imports interact with market dynamics and local economic impacts has not been conducted; this study does not fully reflect the complexity of the current Indonesian context.¹⁶

Ristiani et al. (2023) review the development of thrifting in Indonesia and highlight the central role of Generation Z as a driver of the practice, including how social media shapes consumption preferences. The strength of this study is its recognition of the socio-cultural factors driving the growth of thrifting and its connection to the social identity and lifestyle of the younger generation. However, this research falls short in identifying the policy conflicts and environmental risks arising from this practice, such as the impact of piles of unsold clothing, the potential increase in new waste, and the health concerns of substandard imported clothing. Furthermore, its focus on social aspects prevents this research from

¹⁵ Yulia Saputra, "Tren 'Thrifting' Menjamur, Bagaimana dengan Dampak Lingkungannya?," *bbc*, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/ce7yke14lydo>.

¹⁶ Haryanti, A., et al., "Thrifting and Environmental Awareness: Opportunities and Challenges in Sustainable Fashion Consumption," *Journal of Environmental Sustainability Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.26742/atrat.v11i2.3188>

holistically capturing the relationship between the social practice of thrifting, public policy, and ecological consequences.¹⁷

Sham (2024) links thrifting to the circular economy framework in the context of sustainable consumption and offers a strong conceptual understanding of how circular economy principles can be applied to reduce textile waste. A strength of this research is its attempt to frame thrifting as part of a broader circular economy strategy, thus providing a rich theoretical foundation for sustainability studies. However, its main weakness is its normative nature and its lack of critical attention to the dynamics of actors and administrative practices, including the practice of importing used clothing, which in reality often involves informal business networks and poses environmental and regulatory challenges. A more critical analysis of how various actors (government, businesses, consumers) influence thrifting practices, as well as how these practices interact with trade and environmental protection policies, is lacking in the literature.¹⁸

Unlike those studies, this study comprehensively integrates social, environmental, and regulatory perspectives. Its strength is that it not only assesses consumer behavior (particularly Gen Z) within a sustainability context but also analyzes the policy impacts, health risks, and waste management of used clothing. Using qualitative methods and a discourse network analysis approach, this study maps the interactions between actors, regulations, and thrifting practices, providing a more comprehensive picture of the contributions and potential risks of thrifting practices in

Building upon these identified gaps, this study advances a more integrative analytical framework by positioning thrifting as a complex socio-legal practice situated at the intersection of social behavior, environmental sustainability, and regulatory governance. Existing studies tend to examine thrifting either as a consumption trend or within a circular economy narrative, yet they insufficiently address the interaction between consumer practices, institutional arrangements, and legal frameworks. This research therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a multidimensional analysis that captures the dynamic relationship between individual behavior, regulatory structures, and environmental outcomes. In doing so, it contributes to both theoretical development—by extending the discourse on sustainable consumption within environmental law—and practical policy formulation by identifying structural weaknesses in current regulatory approaches.

Accordingly, this study aims to critically analyze thrifting practices in Indonesia from social, environmental, and regulatory perspectives, with a particular focus on evaluating their actual contribution to sustainability and their potential unintended consequences. The

¹⁷ Ristiani, Nevi, Usman Raidar, dan Damar Wibisono, “Fenomena Thrifting Fashion di Masa Pandemi COVID-19: Studi Kasus pada Mahasiswa Universitas Lampung,” *Jurnal Sociologie* 1, no. 2 SE-Articles (25 Oktober 2022), <https://jurnalsociologie.fisip.unila.ac.id/index.php/jurnal/article/view/74>.

¹⁸ Sham, S. (2024). *Thrifting within a circular economy framework: Concepts and critiques*. *Journal of Sustainable Consumption*. <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9i27.5713>.

analysis examines how social values and consumer behavior interact with institutional and legal frameworks in shaping thrifting practices, and assesses the extent to which exists.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative empirical legal research approach, examining how environmental and trade regulations operate in the context of thrifting practices in Indonesia. The research does not merely analyze legal norms doctrinally, but investigates how these norms are articulated, contested, and implemented within public and policy discourses.

The primary focus of the study is the interaction between legal documents, media discourses, and policy actors related to thrifting and the import of used clothing. Accordingly, the main units of analysis consist of: (1) environmental and trade regulatory documents, including Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, Law No. 18 of 2008 on Waste Management, and Minister of Trade Regulation No. 40 of 2022; (2) online media coverage discussing thrifting practices and regulatory debates; and (3) policy actors appearing in these documents and media narratives, such as government officials, business actors, and consumer representatives.

Data were collected from credible national online media platforms and official government publications, as well as peer-reviewed scientific literature indexed in Scopus and Google Scholar. The selection criteria included relevance to thrifting practices, explicit reference to regulatory or environmental issues, and identification of policy actors and their stated positions. The period of analysis covers publications between 2018 and 2024, reflecting the significant rise of thrifting practices and the issuance of regulatory responses during this timeframe.

Data were analyzed using a discourse network analysis (DNA) approach, which is methodologically suitable for mapping relationships between actors and policy positions within public debates. This approach enables the identification of patterns of agreement, disagreement, and coalition formation among actors, thereby revealing how regulatory narratives and environmental arguments are constructed and contested. The use of Discourse Network Analyzer (DNA) software supported systematic coding of actors, concepts, and their positions, while network visualization tools were used to illustrate actor affiliations and discourse structures. The emphasis of the analysis lies not on the technical operation of the software, but on its relevance in uncovering the structure of policy discourse and evaluating the coherence and effectiveness of environmental governance in regulating thrifting practices.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Impact of Thrifting Practices by Generation Z on Environmental Conditions in Indonesia

Thrifting is a popular activity among Gen Z, who seek unique, sustainable, and cost-effective styles.¹⁹ Empirically, informants and media narratives consistently associate thrifting with environmental motives, particularly the intention to reduce textile waste and avoid fast fashion consumption. The positive aspect is that people obtain affordable prices and potentially reduce demand for new clothing production. However, the negative aspect includes the uncertain quality of goods, potential health risks, and the accumulation of unsold or unfit clothing that may eventually become waste.

From an empirical standpoint, the findings indicate that thrifting alters consumption patterns by extending the use-phase of clothing. This extension directly reduces immediate demand for newly produced garments, which in theory lowers upstream environmental pressures such as water use, chemical discharge, and carbon emissions. However, this positive impact is conditional. Field data and media reports also show that only a portion of imported secondhand clothing is marketable, while the remainder becomes residual textile waste at the local level. This residual waste introduces new environmental burdens, particularly when disposal mechanisms are inadequate.²⁰ Rather than reiterating the general concept of the circular economy, the analysis positions thrifting as a partial reuse mechanism within a broader framework of sustainable consumption. Its environmental contribution lies primarily in delaying disposal and reducing primary production demand. However, the environmental benefit is significantly weakened when post-consumption management is absent, especially in cases involving bulk imports of used clothing with uncertain quality control.²¹ Empirical evidence from Indonesia demonstrates that the textile industry remains a significant contributor to water pollution, particularly through liquid industrial waste.²² Cases in West Java, including river contamination linked to textile production, illustrate the ecological consequences of linear fashion systems. These data serve as contextual evidence explaining why alternative consumption practices such as thrifting emerge as social responses to industrial pollution.²³ However, the existence of industrial pollution does not automatically validate thrifting as environmentally sustainable; its contribution must be

¹⁹ Fitri Astuti Lestari dan Ratna Asmarani, "Thrifting Culture during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on the Environment," *E3S Web of Conferences* 317, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202131701006>.

²⁰ Henry H. Loupias, Kamilah Sa'diah, dan Dila Novita, "Thrifting Used Clothes Business as a Circular Economy Practice Based on Environmental Awareness and Waste Reduction," *The Fourth ICISSEE* 4, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.37715/moda.v1i1.706> Authors:

²¹ Katelin Opferkuch et al., "Circular economy disclosure in corporate sustainability reports: The case of European companies in sustainability rankings," *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 32 (2022): 436–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2022.05.003>.

²² Winda Fandira, Monik Solistiyowati, dan Tiodor Sibuea, "Circular Economy: Strategi Utama Dukung SDGs Guna Mencapai Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ekonomi dan Perpajakan* 3, no. 1 (2023), <https://conference.um.ac.id/index.php/taxcenter/article/view/8560>.

²³ Yuni Mariani Manik, "Ekonomi Sirkular, Pola Berpikir dan Pendidikan Keberlanjutan Ekonomi," *Journal Program Studi Pendidikan Ekonomi* 10, no. 1 (2022): 121, <https://doi.org/10.24127/pro.v10i1.5418>.

assessed in relation to measurable waste reduction and regulatory compliance.²⁴

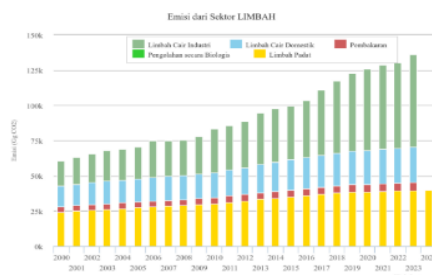


Figure 1. Industrial Liquid Waste Ranks

Source: signsmart.menlhk.go.id

Figure 1 shows that industrial liquid waste ranks highly among emission sources in Indonesia. This finding reinforces the structural environmental pressures generated by textile production. Nevertheless, the relevance of this data to thrifting lies in its causal linkage: if thrifting effectively reduces demand for new production, then it indirectly contributes to reducing industrial discharge. If not, its environmental significance remains symbolic rather than substantive.²⁵

At the regulatory level, thrifting is closely linked to Minister of Trade Regulation No. 40 of 2022, which prohibits the import of used clothing. Empirical findings reveal that large-scale imports—particularly through informal or illegal channels—often bypass quality control mechanisms. This situation creates a dual environmental risk: first, the potential classification of low-quality imported clothing as waste under environmental law; second, the absence of structured post-consumption responsibility once such clothing becomes unusable.²⁶ Data indicating the presence of textile waste in coastal areas and urban environments demonstrate that unsold or damaged secondhand clothing can transform from reusable goods into environmental liabilities. In this context, the legal ambiguity regarding whether imported used clothing constitutes “goods” or “waste” becomes central. Environmental Law No. 32 of 2009 prohibits the introduction of waste into the territory of Indonesia, yet enforcement mechanisms in the context of secondhand clothing imports remain fragmented. This fragmentation weakens regulatory effectiveness and creates uncertainty for business actors.²⁷ Cases of illegal importation through small ports, particularly in border regions such as the Riau Islands, further illustrate the environmental governance gap. Illegal distribution networks not only undermine trade regulation but also

²⁴ Lestari dan Asmarani, “Thrifting Culture during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on the Environment.”

²⁵ Enrico, “Dampak Limbah Cair Industri Tekstil Terhadap Lingkungan Dan Aplikasi Teknik Eco Printing Sebagai Usaha Mengurangi Limbah,” *MODA* 1, no. 1 (26 Juni 2019): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.37715/moda.v1i1.706>.

²⁶ Shovia Firdiyanti et al., “Etika Bisnis dalam Islam: Dampak dan Analisis Jual Beli Thrifting,” *OIKONOMIKA : Jurnal Kajian Ekonomi dan Keuangan Syariah* 5, no. 1 (22 Agustus 2024): 12–27, <https://doi.org/10.53491/oikonomika.v5i1.1176>.

²⁷ Adi Rahmadi, Noor Mirad Sari, dan Ekorini Indriyani, *Buku Ajar Pemanfaatan Limbah Industri* (CV Banyubening Cipta Sejahtera, 2022).

complicate environmental supervision, as monitoring mechanisms for sorting, disposal, and residual waste are largely absent. The environmental implications extend beyond terrestrial waste accumulation to potential marine pollution when unusable textiles are discarded improperly.²⁸ International comparisons, such as the textile waste crisis in Ghana, demonstrate how large-scale used clothing imports can generate secondary environmental disasters when post-market waste management systems are weak. This comparative example supports the argument that thrifting's sustainability value is highly dependent on regulatory capacity and downstream waste governance.²⁹

From the behavioral perspective, empirical findings confirm that Gen Z consumers are motivated by both affordability and environmental awareness. However, the data also indicate a paradox: thrifting can reduce linear consumption patterns, yet it may simultaneously encourage repetitive purchasing due to low prices. In such cases, the environmental benefit of reuse is offset by volume-driven consumption. Interpretatively, this suggests that thrifting does not inherently transform consumption into sustainable practice; rather, its environmental contribution depends on moderation, responsible purchasing behavior, and effective regulatory oversight. The causal relationship is therefore conditional: (1) When thrifting replaces new clothing purchases and is supported by proper sorting and waste control, it reduces environmental pressure. (2) When thrifting stimulates overconsumption or involves uncontrolled imports, it may generate additional environmental and regulatory burdens.³⁰ In synthesis, thrifting among Generation Z represents a socially driven shift toward reuse-based consumption that holds measurable environmental potential. However, this potential is contingent upon coherent trade–environment regulatory harmonization, effective import supervision, and structured post-consumption waste management mechanisms. Without these legal and policy safeguards, thrifting risks functioning merely as a symbolic sustainability practice while transferring environmental burdens to new locations within the waste chain.

From a broader analytical standpoint, the environmental impact of thrifting cannot be assessed solely through its immediate effect on reducing demand for new clothing production, but must be evaluated within a systemic consumption–waste nexus. The empirical findings suggest that thrifting operates as a transitional mechanism rather than a definitive solution within the circular economy framework, as its environmental contribution remains highly contingent upon downstream waste governance and regulatory enforcement capacity. In the absence of integrated monitoring systems and standardized

²⁸ Yayang Mulia Sari Puspita Dewi, “Tinjauan Hukum terhadap Penjualan Pakaian Bekas Impor melalui Media Elektronik dihubungkan dengan UU No. 8 Tahun 1999 tentang Perlindungan Konsumen Juncto UU No. 7 Tahun 2014 tentang Perdagangan” (Universitas Komputer Indonesia Bandung, 2023).

²⁹ Ria Anisa, “Thrifting Mengguncang Keamanan Maritim di Kepulauan Riau dalam Perspektif Blue Security,” *JISIP UNJA (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Ilmu Politik Universitas Jambi)* 9 (5 Mei 2025): 158–70, <https://doi.org/10.22437/jisipunja.v9i1.48137>.

³⁰ Vivi Alif Laila, “Dampak Gaya Hidup Thrifting dalam Perilaku Konsumsi Gen Z di Perguruan Tinggi Kota Metro” (IAIN Metro, 2024), <https://repository.metrouniv.ac.id/id/eprint/9748/>.

waste handling procedures, the redistribution of secondhand clothing may merely displace environmental burdens spatially and temporally, rather than eliminate them. This indicates that the sustainability value of thrifting is structurally dependent on the alignment between consumer behavior, market practices, and regulatory oversight. Consequently, without institutional mechanisms that ensure traceability, quality control, and residual waste accountability, thrifting risks functioning as a partial mitigation strategy that alleviates upstream production pressures while simultaneously generating unregulated environmental externalities at the local level.

3.2 Environmental Law Principles Applicable in Indonesia to Address the Environmental Impacts of Thrifting

To address the environmental implications of thrifting, environmental law principles such as state responsibility, the polluter pays principle, and intergenerational equity are frequently invoked. However, rather than reiterating their normative definitions, the crucial issue lies in assessing their effectiveness within the practical governance of thrifting activities in Indonesia. In the current regulatory landscape, these principles remain formally recognized but operationally weak when confronted with the complexity of secondhand clothing imports, informal distribution networks, and post-consumption textile waste. The Indonesian constitutional and statutory framework clearly mandates environmental protection and sustainable resource management. Yet the persistence of regulatory ambiguity surrounding used clothing imports reveals a gap between normative commitment and regulatory coherence. Minister of Trade Regulation No. 40 of 2022 prohibits the import of used clothing from a trade perspective, while environmental legislation focuses on prohibiting the entry of waste into Indonesian territory. The absence of explicit legal classification of imported secondhand clothing—whether as reusable goods or potential waste—creates cross-sectoral inconsistency between trade regulation and environmental governance. This fragmentation limits the state's ability to apply environmental principles effectively, particularly in preventive supervision and enforcement.

From the perspective of state responsibility, the government is obligated to ensure that economic activities do not compromise environmental quality. Empirically, however, enforcement mechanisms in the thrifting sector remain reactive rather than preventive. Illegal imports through small ports, inconsistent customs control, and the lack of standardized sorting obligations illustrate the limited institutional coordination between trade authorities and environmental agencies. As a result, the principle of state responsibility is formally acknowledged but insufficiently translated into integrated monitoring systems for post-market waste and residual textile disposal. Similarly, the polluter pays principle presupposes clear identification of responsible actors and measurable environmental damage. In the thrifting supply chain, responsibility is diffused among importers, resellers, logistics providers, and consumers, making the attribution of environmental liability legally complex. When unsellable clothing becomes waste, there is no specific regulatory

mechanism imposing extended responsibility on thrift businesses for collection, recycling, or remediation. This demonstrates a structural limitation of existing norms: while environmental law provides general liability provisions, it lacks sector-specific instruments tailored to secondhand textile circulation.

The principle of intergenerational equity underscores the need to prevent environmental degradation that burdens future generations. Yet the current regulatory regime does not incorporate long-term monitoring of textile waste flows generated by thrifting activities. Without reliable data on residual waste volumes, disposal pathways, and recycling rates, the implementation of this principle remains largely declaratory. The normative framework exists, but its operational indicators and enforcement tools are underdeveloped.

Beyond legal principles, thrifting also reflects a broader shift in consumption values among Generation Z. Empirical findings indicate that thrifting is associated with environmental awareness, identity formation, and digital community engagement. This suggests a paradigmatic transition from linear consumption toward reuse-oriented consumption patterns. However, the substantive depth of this transition must be critically assessed. In practice, low prices and trend-driven resale markets may encourage repeated purchasing, potentially reproducing high-volume consumption under a “sustainable” label.³¹ This creates a sustainability paradox: thrifting symbolically challenges fast fashion, yet without environmental literacy and regulatory safeguards, it may replicate overconsumption dynamics in a modified form. The environmental benefit of reuse is therefore contingent upon moderation, informed consumer behavior, and legally structured waste governance. If thrifting merely shifts consumption channels without reducing aggregate textile throughput, its contribution to sustainability remains limited.

Moreover, the relationship between environmental awareness and public policy remains indirect. While Gen Z demonstrates increasing ecological concern, this awareness has not yet been systematically translated into participatory input in environmental policymaking or structured compliance mechanisms within the thrifting industry. The regulatory response remains sectorally divided—trade authorities emphasize import prohibition, while environmental agencies focus on general waste control—without an integrated policy design addressing the entire lifecycle of secondhand textiles.

In critical reflection, the core limitation of the current legal framework lies not in the absence of environmental principles, but in the lack of harmonized cross-sector implementation and lifecycle-based regulation. Trade law treats used clothing primarily as an economic commodity to be restricted or permitted, while environmental law treats waste as a pollutant to be controlled. Thrifting exists in the regulatory grey zone between these categories.

³¹ Anwar dan Jholanda, “Sustainable Fashion: Fenomena Thrifting dan Peran Subsektor Fashion terhadap Perekonomian Indonesia.”

Thus, although thrifting among Generation Z indicates a meaningful shift toward reuse-based consumption and carries the potential to reduce upstream industrial pressure, its sustainability value remains conditional. Without coherent regulatory harmonization, clear legal classification, extended producer or importer responsibility mechanisms, and strengthened environmental literacy, thrifting risks evolving into a symbolic sustainability trend rather than a structurally transformative practice.³²

In analytical terms, the effectiveness of environmental law principles in governing thrifting practices ultimately depends on the transition from norm-oriented regulation to system-oriented governance. The current legal framework remains predominantly fragmented, addressing isolated aspects of trade prohibition and waste control without integrating the full lifecycle of secondhand textiles. This institutional fragmentation not only weakens preventive enforcement but also obscures accountability across the supply chain. A more effective regulatory approach therefore requires the adoption of a lifecycle-based legal model that connects import control, product quality verification, market distribution, and post-consumption waste management within a unified governance structure. Such integration would enable the operationalization of environmental principles into measurable regulatory instruments, including extended importer responsibility schemes, mandatory sorting standards, and traceable waste monitoring systems. Without this systemic transformation, environmental law risks remaining declaratory, while thrifting continues to operate within a regulatory grey zone that limits its potential contribution to sustainable consumption and environmental protection.

3.3 Generation Z's Sustainable Consumption Paradigm Shift Through Thrifting and Its Contribution to Environmental Conservation in Indonesia

The majority of Indonesia's productive-age population is Generation Z. Within the context of fashion consumption, their significance lies not merely in demographic dominance but in their role as a generation reshaping consumption values and market demand. Rather than focusing on general sociological traits, the relevant shift concerns how this cohort increasingly questions linear consumption patterns characterized by rapid purchase–use–disposal cycles. In recent years, thrifting has become one manifestation of this shift. Empirical findings indicate that a segment of Gen Z consumers consciously associates secondhand clothing with waste reduction and resource efficiency, reflecting a movement away from disposable fashion culture. In this sense, thrifting represents a transition from ownership-driven consumption toward reuse-oriented consumption. However, the depth of this transition requires critical examination. The extent to which thrifting replaces new clothing purchases—rather than supplementing them—determines

³² Sudi Fahmi, “Asas Tanggung Jawab Negara Sebagai Dasar Pelaksanaan Perlindungan dan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup,” *Jurnal Hukum Ius Quia Iustum* 18, no. 2 SE-Articles (15 April 2011): 212–28, <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol18.iss2.art4>.

whether the paradigm shift is substantive or merely stylistic.³³ Thrifting is frequently framed as environmentally beneficial because it extends the lifespan of garments and delays their entry into waste streams. From a policy perspective, this behavioral change has structural implications: reduced demand for newly produced clothing can theoretically lower industrial output, resource extraction, and pollution intensity. Yet this causal chain is conditional. If secondhand consumption coexists with continued high-volume new purchases, the environmental effect becomes marginal.

The relationship between environmental awareness and social identity is central to understanding this transformation. For many Gen Z consumers, environmental concern forms part of a broader identity construction process. However, this identity formation has legal relevance: when sustainability becomes a publicly expressed value, it shapes market signals that can influence regulatory agendas and policy discourse. In this regard, Gen Z should not be viewed solely as a social object of study, but as a policy subject whose collective consumption behavior affects environmental governance outcomes. At the same time, thrifting cannot be uncritically celebrated as a uniformly “green” practice. Empirical observations reveal that affordability and trend responsiveness remain significant motivations. This creates a structural tension: while thrifting may symbolize resistance to fast fashion, low prices can also stimulate repetitive purchasing, potentially reproducing high-turnover consumption patterns under a sustainable label. If consumption volume remains unchanged, the environmental gains from reuse are offset by aggregate material throughput.³⁴

From a regulatory standpoint, this shift in consumption patterns generates new governance challenges. Environmental law and trade policy in Indonesia were primarily designed to regulate industrial production and waste disposal, not secondary markets characterized by informal imports, small-scale resellers, and digital platforms. As thrifting expands, regulatory institutions must address questions of product quality control, residual waste management, and import supervision. The absence of lifecycle-based oversight mechanisms limits the ability of environmental law to capture the full ecological footprint of secondhand clothing circulation.³⁵ Moreover, the symbolic association between thrifting and sustainability may obscure regulatory gaps. When public discourse equates secondhand consumption with environmental responsibility, pressure for stricter regulatory oversight may weaken, creating a paradox in which a practice perceived as sustainable escapes rigorous environmental scrutiny. This condition illustrates how cultural narratives can indirectly shape policy priorities.

³³ Risma Tri Indarti dan Iwan Purwanto, “Implementasi Environmental Ethic terhadap Fenomena Thrifting sebagai Alternatif Konsumsi Berkelanjutan” (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2025), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/88150>.

³⁴ Rahmadi, Sari, dan Indriyani, *Buku Ajar Pemanfaatan Limbah Industri*.

³⁵ Sefira Rachma Julia, Rizqa Amelia Zunaedi, dan Perdana Suteja Putra, “Analisis persepsi Generasi Z terhadap pembelian pakaian bekas pada sosial media di Indonesia,” *Journal of Management and Digital Business* 4, no. 2 SE-Articles (15 Juli 2024): 157–74, <https://doi.org/10.53088/jmdb.v4i2.938>.

The paradigm shift reflected in thrifting operates on two interrelated dimensions. Substantively, it signifies an increasing awareness of resource constraints and the environmental consequences of fast fashion consumption. Structurally, it reveals the inadequacy of existing regulatory frameworks in governing emerging consumption patterns. In the absence of coherent harmonization between trade regulation, waste management obligations, and post-consumption monitoring, the environmental benefits of thrifting remain uncertain and potentially unsustainable.

From a critical perspective, thrifting practices among Generation Z indicate a transition toward more sustainability-oriented consumption values. However, the long-term viability of this paradigm is contingent upon two key conditions: enhanced environmental literacy to prevent excessive consumption, and integrated regulatory mechanisms to ensure effective import control and responsible post-use textile management. Without these conditions, thrifting risks developing into a sustainability paradox—projecting an image of environmental responsibility while simultaneously reproducing systemic environmental pressures within a reconfigured market structure.³⁶

From a critical analytical perspective, the paradigm shift among Generation Z toward thrifting should be understood not as a fully institutionalized transition to sustainable consumption, but as an emergent socio-ecological practice that remains structurally incomplete. While this shift reflects a meaningful reorientation of values toward reuse and resource efficiency, its transformative potential is constrained by the absence of systemic integration between market behavior, regulatory frameworks, and environmental governance mechanisms. The empirical findings indicate that sustainability in thrifting is not inherently embedded in the practice itself, but is contingent upon the extent to which it displaces primary production and is supported by lifecycle-based regulatory oversight. Consequently, the persistence of hybrid consumption patterns—where secondhand purchasing coexists with continued fast fashion consumption—suggests that the current paradigm operates within a reformist, rather than transformative, trajectory. This condition underscores the need to reposition thrifting within a broader policy architecture that incorporates behavioral incentives, regulatory accountability, and measurable sustainability indicators, thereby enabling it to function as a structurally embedded component of circular economy governance rather than a symbolic expression of environmental awareness.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that thrifting practices among Generation Z in Indonesia represent an emerging shift toward reuse-oriented consumption within the broader framework of sustainable consumption; however, this shift operates within a fragmented regulatory environment characterized by inconsistencies between trade law, environmental protection, and waste management regimes. The findings confirm that while thrifting has

³⁶ Aulia Rahmawati, Syafrida Febriyanti, dan Ririn Tutiasri, “Thrift Shopping and Indonesian Urban Youth Fashion Consumption,” *JOMEK Journal*, 9 Desember 2022, 119, <https://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.224>.

the potential to reduce upstream environmental pressures by extending the lifecycle of clothing, its sustainability value remains conditional due to weak regulatory harmonization, limited enforcement capacity, and the absence of structured post-consumption waste governance. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining environmental legal analysis with discourse network analysis to conceptualize thrifting as a contested socio-legal practice shaped by interactions among actors, regulatory frameworks, and sustainability narratives. This approach moves beyond conventional behavioral or economic analyses by revealing how regulatory fragmentation and policy discourse influence the environmental outcomes of secondary consumption practices. Theoretically, the study contributes to the development of environmental law and circular economy scholarship by emphasizing the importance of lifecycle-based regulatory integration in assessing sustainable consumption practices. Practically, it highlights the urgent need for coherent cross-sectoral governance, including clear legal classification of secondhand clothing, strengthened import supervision, and the implementation of extended responsibility mechanisms to manage residual textile waste. Ultimately, the study argues that without systemic regulatory alignment and environmental governance reform, thrifting risks remaining a symbolic sustainability practice rather than a structurally transformative solution within Indonesia's environmental policy landscape.

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