

# Research examines 18 to 35-year-olds' motivation to swap clothes on a large scale

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The fashion industry is responsible for nearly 10% of global carbon emissions and is the second largest polluter in the world, after oil and gas.

As consumers become more aware of the environmental impact of fashion, they are choosing to participate in collaborative consumption activities like swapping clothes.

Over the years, swapping clothes has evolved from an individual activity to a more collective practice. This shift is challenging traditional notions of resource allocation and transforming how people behave, according to a new article [published](#) by Concordia researchers in the *Journal of Consumer Behavior*.

The article, "Is it fashionable to swap clothes? The moderating role of culture," was co-authored by Farah Armouch, as part of her master's thesis with supervisors Michèle Paulin and Michel Laroche, both professors of marketing at the John Molson School of Business.

"It was fascinating to me to see how people are revolutionizing the way we consume fashion by focusing on the idea of expanding the lifespan of garments and building a sense of community while keeping their wallets happy," Armouch says.

She wanted to understand the motivations that drive 18 to 35-year-olds to swap clothes and how their culture impacts their decision to do so. This age cohort includes Generation Z and Millennials, two groups shown to be the most environmentally conscious.

Armouch, Paulin and Laroche distributed a questionnaire to people within this age range in various countries via social media over a period of four weeks. To examine the [cultural influences](#), respondents were asked where they came from rather than where they currently live. The study focused on individual responses because people from the same country can still have different cultural experiences.

Out of the 279 responses, 49.5% identified as female, 35.1% were

between 25 and 29 years old, 58.1% had a bachelor's degree, 51.6% were workers and 28% were students. The researchers found that there were no significant differences between continents and countries, showing that clothes swapping and collaborative consumption are global trends.

"We found that people participate in clothes swaps because it allows them to refresh their wardrobe at a low cost while having fun, socializing with other people and building a community of like-minded people," Armouch shares.

In addition, survey respondents cited the [environmental benefit](#), and some were motivated by the anti-consumption aspect of swapping, making it unnecessary to purchase new items.

To analyze the cultural influence of clothes swapping, the researchers used Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory.

The findings related to cultural motivations were:

1. Group-oriented cultures are driven by the joy of doing it and the environmental and activist elements.
2. Masculine cultures are more focused on the [economic benefits](#) whereas feminine cultures are more likely to develop activist and sustainable behaviors.
3. Cultures that question authority and equally distribute power are driven by the environmental and activist elements.
4. Low uncertainty-avoidance cultures are those that encourage new ideas and welcome personal freedom. These cultures are driven by activism.
5. Environmental and activist factors drive 18 to 35-year-olds in indulgent societies, or those that prioritize pleasure and enjoyment. People from this culture tended to demonstrate

altruistic behaviors and were driven to swap clothes because of its [environmental impact](#) and societal benefits.

The researchers noted that culture was not studied previously as a motivation for clothes swapping, and this study could provide a jumping-off point for further investigation of its impact.

## The future of fashion

"Companies need to pay attention to their marketing strategies to avoid false claims and greenwashing. Today, more than ever, companies need to be transparent and focus on ethical marketing that allows for value co-creation with customers," says Paulin.

Case in point, online businesses like ThredUp, Depop and Poshmark, among many others, help customers get more life out of their clothing through resale, while respecting social, cultural and ecological footprints.

"The study shows how the [fashion industry](#) is evolving. Younger people are leading the shift when it comes to the way people engage in the traditional marketplace as new, more sustainable practices emerge," Armouch adds.

Paulin points out that Europe is ahead of the curve on sustainable practices in the second-hand clothing market and could serve as a model for North American cities.

"Being more aware of socio-[environmental challenges](#), 18 to 35-year-olds are redesigning the way people access fashion items and are developing new communities centered around a circular lifestyle and sustainable practices," she says.

**More information:** Farah Armouch et al, Is it fashionable to swap

clothes? The moderating role of culture, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/cb.2351](https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2351)

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