

OVERCONSUMPTION

LOVING MAKING CLOTHES LAST



Re  **set**

**lessons from
lockdown**

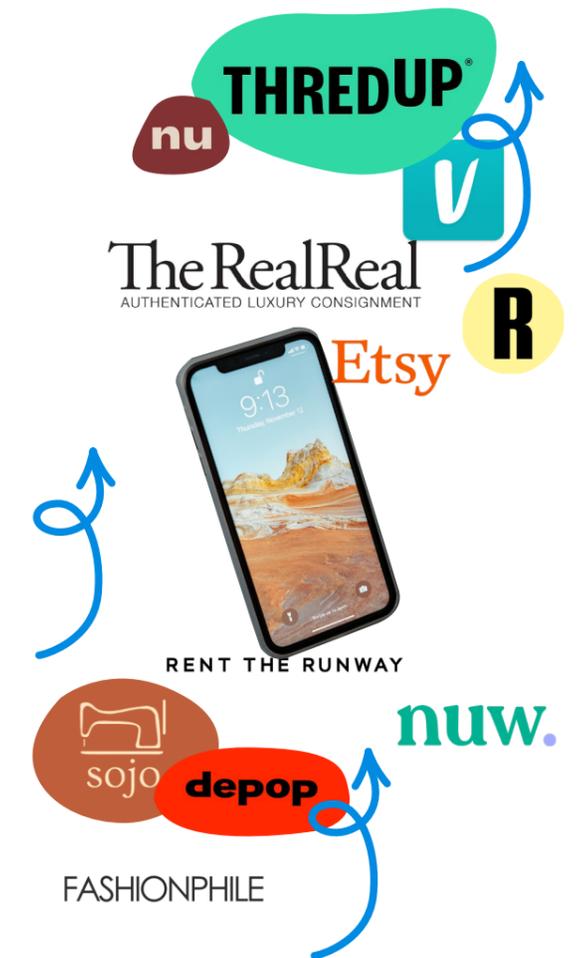
LOVING MAKING CLOTHES LAST



How the pandemic broke old shopping habits and we learned to love, mend, share, swap, sell and make clothes last

In the cracks of shopping habits broken by the pandemic, a new group of initiatives blossomed. Attitudes shifted towards clothing, fashion and shopping in a way that spells potentially good news for our well being and a more sustainable future. People began to slim down their shopping by swapping clothes, renting high fashion for special occasions instead of buying, repurposing old favourites or reselling unwanted items via peer-to-peer platforms.

Fashion is **one of the largest industries in the world**¹ and – according to **a 2020 report**² – to reach the relative safety of the internationally agreed 1.5-degree climate pathway, it would need to reduce annual emissions by 2030 to around roughly half of the current figure. It estimated that much of this could come from energy-efficiency improvements and a transition to renewable energy, but some 21% could come directly through the kind of changes in consumer behaviour we have seen during the pandemic. According to the Swedish researchers, **Mistra Future Fashion**,³ 80% of the climate impact of clothing stems from the production phase, before the garments even hit the clothing racks. This means that more uses per garment, minimalist approaches to fashion consumption and the use of secondhand markets and charity shops can have a sizable impact.



Stimulated originally by the freedom to dress differently when working from home and the inability to go shopping, the growing “shift to thrift” has also been boosted by an increased awareness of the impact of overconsumption on nature and the climate, and a wider re-prioritising of human health and wellness. Taking a cue from the success of food delivery firms, Sojo – a ‘two wheel’ delivery – service for clothes repairs and alterations – has **launched a pilot in London**⁴ connecting customers to local seamster businesses through its app and bicycle delivery service. Ireland-based app Nuw allows people to swap items, from high-street to designer, using a “swishing” system, earning tokens for each item you swap, removing the need to exchange directly with other users. Innovation is blossoming in these once niche areas and secondhand or repurposed clothing is fast becoming a part of the fashion industry and our routine behaviour.

For the past five years, **Thredup**,⁵ an online platform selling secondhand clothes, has been reporting on the growth of the secondhand clothing market. Its **2021 Resale Report**,⁶ shows this sector as one of the fastest-growing segments of retail, with global turnover projected to double to \$77 billion by 2025, and predicts that within 10 years secondhand clothing will outstrip fast fashion. Any stigma that once came with purchasing and wearing or using pre-worn goods has practically disappeared and many of the re-sale platforms are financially valuable. Thredup, Poshmark and The Real Real have now **gone public**,⁷ and London-based online reseller, Depop, was **purchased by the online homemade and resale platform Etsy**⁸ for \$1.63 billion. The French brand reseller **Vinted**⁹ created a market of 22 million people in just one year through an app that offers peer to peer mobile sales of secondhand clothing. Online influencers have contributed to this by linking self-regulated minimalism to mindfulness and well-being. The headline-grabbing Kardashian-Jenner family launched a resale apparel site '**Kardashian Closet**',¹⁰ while the anti-poverty charity, Oxfam's huge **#SecondHandSeptember**¹¹ campaign was fronted by top screenwriter and actor **Michaela Coel**,¹² helping to elevate resale to trend status.

More people than ever contributed to the **circular economy**¹³ during the pandemic lockdowns – decluttering, re-selling, eliminating waste and using the resources that they already have – even if not everyone is driven primarily by concerns for sustainability, or even aware of the beneficial impact of their actions on the planet. The pandemic generated millions of new secondhand shoppers as tighter budgets saw many turn to their own wardrobes for an additional source of income by selling unwanted pieces online. A massive **33 million consumers**¹⁴ bought secondhand apparel for the first time in 2020 and 76% of those first-timers planned to increase their spend on secondhand or 'pre-owned' items in the next five years. It also created an estimated 36.2 million first-time sellers in 2020 – people selling their own or other people's secondhand clothing, many of them doing it as a business.

"I think the lockdown has made people aware of how they use the space in their homes and the things that they need. Many more people are thinking about sustainability in regard to fashion by purchasing fewer items, wearing more of their existing wardrobe, mixing in preloved items, and thinking about the number of wears per item when purchasing new pieces."

Tracy Ross, Blissfully Organised

However, many people are directly motivated by climate change and the impact of their own behaviour. **Thredup's report**¹⁵ found that a third of consumers care more about wearing sustainable apparel than they did before the pandemic, and that half of consumers care more about longevity than before the pandemic. A full 43% of consumers reported caring more about clothing quality than they used to (which means longer lasting and fewer items) and over 50% cared more about avoiding waste than they did before. One in two mothers with young children questioned said they planned to spend more on secondhand in the next five years, representing the biggest behaviour shift of any group.



Resale companies like **Fashionphile**¹⁶ specialise in long-life luxury brand items such as scarves and bags, encouraging people to swap items in and out of the system - like renting for a few months - instead of buying new ones. Companies such as **Vestiaire Collective**¹⁷ and **Rebag**¹⁸ have also benefited from the last decade's obsession with handbags as prized fashion items, encouraging people to dig out their old ones and trade them in for cash. Top designer brands see which way this is going and several have joined in already: luxury brand **Gucci began a partnership**¹⁹ with reselling platform **The RealReal**,²⁰ while **Neiman Marcus**²¹ designerwear announced it was **facilitating resale opportunities**²² through Fashionphile. Even High street brands like **REI, Levi's, Patagonia**²³ and **Fabletics**²⁴ have introduced resale to their e-commerce or established resale partnerships with companies like resale platform ThredUp and resale tech company Trove. Sportswear resale is particularly strong and was one of the earliest segments to pick up speed, with some training shoes **selling for many times their original high prices**.²⁵

Clothing rental has also increased as part of the fashion industry and companies in this sector are now morphing to include resale as part of their model. **Rent the Runway**²⁶ in the US enables members to access new clothes that might otherwise be out of reach pricewise through a monthly membership plan. The company claims that 89% of their users buy fewer clothes as a result. They now offer **everything on their site**²⁷ for resale to both subscribers and non-subscribers, while competitor Nuuly launched a resale platform called **Nuuly Thrift**.²⁸

According to **Forbes**,²⁹ it's the younger generations really powering the demand for a lower impact approach to apparel. Gen-Z consumers are turning to resale for an ethical and greener shopping experience, with 37% of Gen-Z shopping second hand compared to 27% of Millennials and 19% of Baby Boomers (not sure what happened to Gen-X in this survey, but maybe they have returned to their punk homemade roots?). Up to **one in five people**³⁰ in the 16-24 age group also belongs to a 'virtual swap group' to share clothes, and just 11 per cent said they wouldn't wear clothes someone else has already worn, compared to the poll average of 13 per cent.

For these younger people, buying vintage or second hand can be an ethical badge of honour that also showcases their identity. Much of the creating and sharing is done online as part of social media entertainment where followers comment and share tips and trends. Instagram in particular has been key in promoting the idea of **making your own clothes**³¹ from sustainable fabrics, using homemade patterns and buying very little new. Young designer Tara Viggo's **#Zadiejumpsuit**³² has been tagged in almost 11,000 posts and is sold through **The Fold Line**,³³ a growing pattern website. Meanwhile, the hashtag #handmadewardrobe features in more than 900,000 posts.

The pandemic revealed to us just how fast the churn of our wardrobes and other household items had become, making a treadmill of consumption and reducing the real well-being attached to these very transient pleasure highs. The actions of many individuals here has already had an effect on the mainstream market, with second hand clothing moving from poor to cool. As sustainability criteria become more embedded in our wider economy, this new approach to clothes seems here to stay.



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This guide has been made possible by the support of ClimateWorks Foundation – climateworks.org – and is published by the Rapid Transition Alliance – rapidtransition.org – where you can find many of these examples explored in more detail.

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