

Second-hand garments staging a dramatic comeback



KAMAL AHMED

It was in the era of President Nixon when commercial import and selling of second-hand garments became an obvious alternative to millions of Bangladeshis who could not afford new outfits. Trading centres of those second-hand garments somehow gained their identity as Nixon Market. Demand for reusable garments, however, waned slowly with the economic advancement of the country and supply of cheap new garments bearing top global brand names coming through so-called stock lots of export-oriented industries. Some of the remnants still cater to the needs of low-income groups in urban centres.

Now, after almost five decades, Nixon markets are making a dramatic comeback. It's happening in the west utilising the advantage of up-to-date technologies. The most striking elements of this new phenomenon are: i) it is driven by millennial and Generation Z; and ii) their concerns about the sustainability of the earth. These younger generations are seriously concerned about the impact of climate change and keen to cut emissions in every possible way. This new market of second-hand and unused garments and other consumer items is called fashion resale market or e-commerce and it is largely based on re-commerce platforms.

Until recently, trading of unused garments and luxury items in the western hemisphere had been almost an exclusive exercise by charity organisations like Oxfam, cancer Research Societies or Heart

Foundations. It has been a long established culture to exchange gifts among family and friends during religious and New Year celebrations. As a result, many people get too many gifts including the same items which they do not need. Charity organisations open their doors for receiving those "unwanted gifts" as donations which in turn allow them to cash in, albeit, at a reduced price. But, this resale market no longer remains their exclusive domain, instead it emerges as a very attractive business model for tech-based companies. Besides, many sought-after brands themselves have started their own recycling programmes by encouraging return of unused items and reselling them.

The fashion resale market is growing so fast that some experts are terming

After almost five decades, Nixon markets are making a dramatic comeback. It's happening in the west utilising the advantage of up-to-date technologies.

it "supersonic growth" as they claim that it is 11-time faster than the broader clothing retail sector. Projections show that in the next five years the size of the resale market will be reaching somewhere between USD 65 billion and USD 75 billion. One of the largest online resale platforms thredUP says



Projections show that in the next five years the size of the resale market will be reaching somewhere between USD 65 billion and USD 75 billion. PHOTO: UNB

the growth is driven by a greater quality of products on the resale market by more and more keen sellers as it gets easier to quickly offload pre-loved items online. It notes that an estimated 9 billion clothing items are still sitting idle in consumers' closets in the US alone. Wall Street is also finding investing in these firms attractive and promising. Last week, a NASDAQ-listed company, Etsy completed its acquisition of resale fashion app business Depop for more than USD 1.6 billion. Depop now has a community of approximately 30 million registered users spread across nearly 150 countries.

A 2019 consumer survey by First Insight, known for predicting Gen Z's behaviour, found that 62 percent of both Gen Z and millennials prefer to buy from sustainable brands. It showed some of them now shop almost exclusively second-hand for apparel and footwear. The reasons given were access to higher-quality products they

might not otherwise be able to afford and to minimise their consumption footprint.

US magazine *Forbes*, quoting a recent survey from Boston Consulting Group, reported that sustainability's impact on the buying decisions of consumers of all ages grew from 38 percent in 2019 to 53 percent in 2020. First Insight too suggests that a majority of every generation now says they prefer shopping from secondary markets. Another premium and luxury resale platform is Bestiaris Collective which has more than 10 million members worldwide. Its CEO Max Bittner says, "If a 15- or 16-year-old is doing it today, chances are pretty high that you and I will be doing the same thing in a few years." (Source: McKinsey & Company, Insights, December 2020.)

Fashion Revolution, a non-profit advocacy group, has been pressing on all fashion brands and retailers to become transparent about their carbon footprint. It has started publishing

annual Fashion Transparency Index of global brands and the index includes sustainability standards. Research carried out by European Environment Agency estimates that the fashion industry is responsible for 10 percent of global carbon emissions which is more than international flights and maritime shipping combined. It also says textile production is responsible for 20 percent of global pollution of clean water. It suggests laundering synthetic clothes accounts for 35 percent microfibers released in the environment. These statistics are quite crucial in judging the sustainability of the textile sector.

Bangladesh being one of the top sources of readymade garments supply in the world has already felt the question of standards, in particular concerning workplace safety and workers right to organise unions. Some of the suppliers have been coming under increased pressure on sustainability issues—especially use of water and pollution. Now less consumption and recycling are emerging as essential acts on the part of consumers for the future of our world. As the world is experiencing weather extremes like more frequent floods, drought and forest fires, these younger generations are moving towards a lifestyle that cuts carbon emission. Technology also enables them to keep track of their carbon footprints.

Affordable and cheap supply of garments, though attractive for consumers, is not that good for the future of our world. The world seems to be moving towards less consumption, particularly of such consumables that harm the environment and is opting for recycling. We too need to catch up.

Kamal Ahmed is a freelance journalist and his twitter handle is @ahmedka1

Recruitment during a pandemic

How companies need to adjust their hiring practices in light of the Covid-19 crisis



FEIHAN AHSAN

HERE has been no part of our personal and professional lives that has been untouched by the Covid-19 crisis, and that includes recruitment. The economic

impact has been big in many industries affecting the recruitment market itself. According to the Asian Development Bank, new job postings reduced by 87 percent within a month of Covid emerging in Bangladesh. Thus, instead of recruiting more people to expand, companies have been forced to decrease the number of employees and minimise the less profitable or more problematic areas.

However, the effect has been asymmetrical, to say the least. Some industries, particularly in the service sector, have experienced a sharp decline in their business leading some of them to temporarily close shops while other industries have seen their business flourishing during this pandemic. Therefore, the effects of Covid on recruitment have been different from one organisation to the next. But one thing is for certain, this is a time of uncertainty and as such, requires a much more empathetic and holistic approach to recruitment than usual.

So, even though the Covid crisis has been a strong limiting factor, this does not necessarily mean that companies have stopped hiring. In order to understand the effects of Covid on hiring, we first need to understand what has changed.

Going virtual

Recruitment in Bangladeshi companies has traditionally been a physical phenomenon. Face-to-face interviews and in-person assessment tests have been a staple of the recruitment process for as long as one can remember. And for good reason. Physical evaluations tend to give the best approximations of a candidate's ability, where interaction skills and body language can be judged. Even though virtual methods are not

of which have been key enabling technologies during the lockdown. The hiring process itself has had to change to keep up with the pandemic. Where previously a physical selection process or a blend of physical and online were used, nowadays a fully digital recruitment process has become the norm for most companies. According to a report, 86 percent of businesses globally are now conducting virtual interviews, with Bangladeshi companies



ILLUSTRATION: AMIYA HALDER

unheard of, physical assessments have formed the meat of the recruitment process for most companies.

However, with the advent of Covid-19, all that has changed. Answering pandemic demand and replacing lost business have meant taking on new products and technologies and exploring new opportunities, and this has driven recruitment, particularly anything involving digital communications, streaming and virtual events—all

following suit. "The whole recruitment process had to be revamped," explains Mashfiq, who works at a HR consultancy firm in the city. "We now have a fully digital process replacing the pre-Covid combination of onsite, in-person interviews and technical tests. "We also do everything virtually using technologies like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Webex," he adds. He suggests that "meeting" candidates online can give you good insight, particularly

when you're seeing them in their own home rather than a formal interview setting. This tends to reduce the stress and tension levels associated with an interview. However, some candidates seem to dislike it, as an online interview does not provide as accurate an insight into the role, the team or the company as it does during a face-to-face interview.

In other areas, recruitment is changing in significant ways due to the pandemic. Bdjobs recently launched their "Video Resume" feature, which lets users record a short video of themselves explaining their skills and competencies and answering a predetermined set of interview questions. They then upload this video to the database, which is then sent to companies for selection purposes. This can be a very useful tool, particularly in the earlier stages of the selection process, when interview etiquette and body language is important. This also facilitates remote screening of candidates, which is invaluable during this pandemic.

When it comes to job advertisements, circulars that offer remote work options are getting far more applications than if they remain as an on-site offer. Since interaction between candidates and company is lower than usual, it is important to follow a good, transparent communication policy in job advertisements. Companies need to highlight features like flexible working hours, telecommuting, and health insurance—benefits that candidates look for in these uncertain times. Thus, it is important for the HR department to work together with the PR and marketing teams to deliver uniform, consistent messages.

Geographic flexibility of candidates
The pandemic has widened the talent

pool in terms of geography, says HR executives. Location has also become less relevant, thanks to remote working.

While many expect a hybrid, flexible model of working to become the norm post-pandemic, the need to live "nearby" is widely recognised as less important today, according to recruiters.

Traditionally, for jobs that require local involvement and frequent coordination with the head office, candidates who live nearby are preferred. However, since virtual working took off, managers have been more flexible with their location requirements. This has significantly increased the number of applications from candidates. Pre-Covid, employers may not have been so eager for such an arrangement.

The way forward

The current Covid-19 situation has forced companies to test new ways of hiring employees and re-evaluate their old practices. The combination of remote working acceptance and online interviews has widened the talent pool geographically and increased the mobility of work. Going forward, HR departments will be more accommodating for interviewing schedules thanks to technology. Indeed, the current pandemic experience has taught us new techniques and ways of doing things, the best of which can be absorbed into our future normal. The ultimate goal is to give employees of today and tomorrow the best possible job experience. And that experience starts with the recruitment process.

Feihan Ahsan is a faculty at BRAC Business School, BRAC University, specialising in Human Resource Management & Industrial Relations. Email: fahsan@bracu.ac.bd

QUOTABLE Quote



AUDRE LORDE (1934-1992) American writer

When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

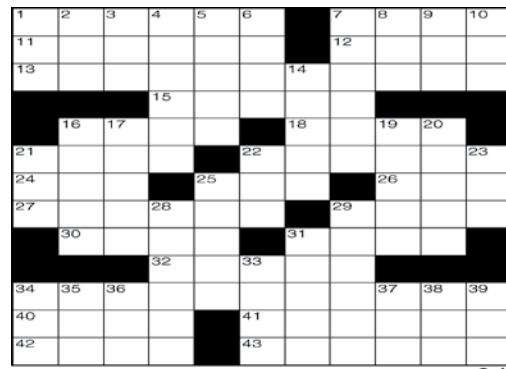
- 1 Leave
- 7 Second gentleman Emhoff
- 11 Mideast region
- 12 Different
- 13 Piece of gymnastics equipment
- 15 Cousin of culottes
- 16 Bakery buys
- 18 Capital of Italia
- 21 Minnow's home
- 22 Team spirit
- 24 Unoriginal
- 25 Singer Tillis
- 26 Raucous bird
- 27 James Clavell book
- 29 Igloo shape

- 30 Harvest
- 31 Flying: Prefix
- 32 Brooch part
- 34 Piece of gymnastics equipment
- 41 Diva's piece
- 31 Redirected route
- 42 College bigwig
- 43 Solution

DOWN

- 1 Bit of ointment
- 2 Memorable period
- 3 Crony
- 4 Humbled
- 5 Skating spots
- 6 Folded food
- 7 One in the red
- 8 Bullfight call

- 9 Mex. neighbor
- 10 Ring feature
- 14 Flynn of films
- 17 Small movie
- 19 College study
- 20 Texas mission
- 21 Poker prize
- 22 Chess pieces
- 23 Needle feature
- 25 Syrup choice
- 28 Arcade muncher
- 29 Train stops
- 31 Pallid
- 33 Alan of "M*A*S*H"
- 34 Spot of jot
- 35 Vein makeup
- 36 Soccer's Hamm
- 37 Join the crew
- 38 Take to court
- 39 Go wrong



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

P A P A S I S A A C
A L E R T R A T I O
L E T M E O X I D E
Y A R N T E N
D O U B L O O N
A R L O B R A S I L
M A N O R E V A D E
P L A T E S Y U L E
S H A M B L E S
R A G E P E E
I B I Z A D A T E D
F E V E R I N A W E
F L E E S A S P E N

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.