Accessible Components: Dropdown Sort

Have you ever been online shopping and needed to sort items from **low to high**, **price**, or that the **best-rated** products? You click on a dropdown menu, expecting to see options appear, but sometimes, it doesn't. Maybe you can't navigate it with your keyboard, or the options feel clunky on your phone.

Dropdown menus are **small but powerful** components in user interfaces. They help us organize and filter content, but if they're not designed well, they can become frustrating barriers.

This case study takes a deep dive into how different platforms **Amazon**, **Depop**, and **Sephora** handle dropdown sorting. We'll explore their **usability, accessibility, and design choices** to see what works, what doesn't, and how they could be improved.

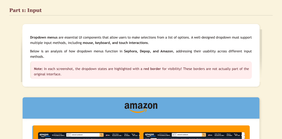
Dropdowns might seem simple, but the way we interact with them—whether by **clicking, tapping, or using a keyboard**—can make or break a user's experience. They're used by looking at layout methods: how these menus behave when using a mouse, keyboard, or touchscreen across different platforms.

Part 1: Input

Dropdown menus are essential UI components that allow users to make selections from a list of options. A well-designed dropdown must support multiple input methods, including **mouse, keyboard, and touch interactions**.

Below is an analysis of how dropdown menus function in **Sephora, Depop, and Amazon**, addressing their usability across different input methods.

Note: In each screenshot, the dropdown states are highlighted with a red border (for visibility) These borders are not actually part of the original interface.



Input Method	Interaction & Behavior
Mouse/Touchpad	• Amazon's dropdown menu opens with Sort by: Featured. • Sort has an underlined **focus state**. • Hovering over a dropdown item triggers a background color highlight in light blue. • Selecting an option closes the menu and applies the sort. • The dropdown still supports a hover-to-open behavior, but clicking/tapping remains more reliable.
Keyboard Interaction	• Pressing **Tab** focuses the dropdown. • Right-clicking opens full sort options, which could be more streamlined. • Keyboard navigation is functional, but lacks visual feedback in some cases. • Pressing Enter selects the focused option. • Navigation can be done using **Tab** or **Arrow Keys**. • Selections are applied immediately, with no confirmation step.
Touch Interaction	• Amazon's mobile app has a smoother, more intuitive dropdown. • Sort options appear in a full-screen overlay, minimizing accidental taps in the next row (like reading). • Pressing Done locks in the selected sort "Sort by" appears the dropdown. • Navigation can be done using **Tap** or **Arrow Keys**. • Selections are applied immediately, with no confirmation.

Amazon's sort dropdown has clear, consistent behavior across different input methods. The **mouse and keyboard interactions** are well-supported, with clear hover states, focus indicators, and an intuitive layout.

However, the **mobile app experience** differs significantly from the desktop version. The sort function is **harder to locate**, requiring users to go through the filter menu.

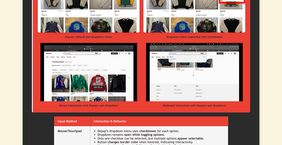
Overall, Amazon's dropdown is **highly functional** and maintains **cross-platform usability**, **memorability, and efficiency** for desktop users. The mobile experience, however, could be more intuitive.

Input Method	Interaction & Behavior
Mouse/Touchpad	• Depop's dropdown menu uses checkboxes for sort options. • Dropdown remains open while toggling options. • Only one checkbox can be selected, but multiple options appear selectable. • Hovering over an option changes the text color to black. • Dropdown remains open after selecting an option, allowing quick adjustments. • Clicking outside the dropdown closes it, but there's no "Apply" button—changes are saved instantly. • Hovering over the dropdown can be crowded, but clicking selects the checkbox as well. • Sort keys disappear when scrolled down. • Dropdown closes when scrolled, but reopening it keeps your selection. • Default sorting is Sort by: Relevance.
Keyboard Interaction	• No keyboard accessibility for sorting functionality. • Keyboard navigation is limited to **search bar and shopping cart**.
Touch Interaction	• Depop's mobile app handles dropdowns like desktop version. • Instead of checkboxes, the mobile version uses radio buttons. • Sort options appear in a full-screen overlay. • A "Show Results" button is required to apply changes.

Depop's sort dropdown has a **unique checkbox approach**, making it more interactive. However, it lacks **key** of keyboard support is a crucial accessibility flaw.

Also lower effort and persistent selection remains strong usability. Implementing keyboard support and improving the mobile interface would enhance accessibility and usability.

The mobile experience is streamlined with a full-screen pop-up and radio buttons, making it more intuitive than the desktop version.



Input Method	Interaction & Behavior
Mouse/Touchpad	• Sephora's dropdown menu opens with Sort by: Relevance. • Sort icon transitions a **downward** fill. • Hovering over an option changes the selected option clearly labeled as default. • Hovering over an option underline the text, ensuring clear visual feedback. • Selecting an option closes the dropdown and applies the sort immediately. • Right-clicking **selects the option** but also highlights the search open reopening the menu. • Sephora's dropdown loses **primary focus** when scrolling and the dropdown and sort options.
Keyboard Interaction	• **No keyboard accessibility** for sorting functionality. • Keyboard navigation is limited to search bar, cart, and shopping cart.
Touch Interaction	• The **Sephora app** implements sorting differently from the website. • When selecting **Sort: Relevance**, a full-screen filter & Sort menu appears. • The menu includes **radio buttons** for sorting options and additional filter categories below. • Tap "Show Results" to apply changes or "Clear" to reset filters. • The app integrates sorting with other filters, making it a combined functionality.

Sephora's sort dropdown isn't **simple yet visually distinct** interaction, with the underline effect providing clear feedback. However, the lack of **keyboard accessibility** is a major usability flaw.

Our **persistent focus indicator improves** user experience by maintaining visibility of the last focused option. However, right-click functionality creates an inconsistent selection state, potentially confusing users expecting one action.

The **mobile app implementation** is significantly different from the desktop version, with sorting embedded into the filtering system. While this integrates features well, it adds extra steps for users only looking to sort items.

Understanding how users interact with dropdown menus is just one part of the equation—how these menus **respond** is just as important. A dropdown should clearly indicate when an option has been selected, what is currently active, and whether any changes have taken effect.

Amazon and Sephora at least attempt to provide **some form of feedback**—whether it's a highlighted selection or an updated button label. But **Depop's** lesser users **guessing**. Selections don't always update visibly, keyboard users are left behind entirely, and the checkbox behavior feels unintuitive.

In the next section, we'll examine how **these dropdowns communicate state changes** or fail to do so. We'll look at visual cues, screen reader support, and interactive feedback to determine which platforms guide users effectively and which ones create unnecessary friction.

Part 2: Output

Dropdown menus **have a dropdown menu visually or audibly conveys its current state**. This includes changes in **color, highlights, borders, labels, and screen reader** output. Below is a comparison of how Sephora, Depop, and Amazon handle state changes.

Platforms	Mouse/Touchpad Interaction	Keyboard Interaction	Voice Over	Touch Interaction
Amazon amazon	• Selecting a new option updates the button text and closes the menu. • A blue outline appears around the dropdown to indicate focus.	• Tab keyboard navigation highlights the dropdown horizontal heading only. • Tab's element receives a blue outline, but the dropdown itself remains inactive.	• Voice over correctly announces the dropdown's purpose and selection changes. • However, Voice order is inconsistent, sorting options appear before items are announced as "selected sort." • Feedback is delayed.	• Selecting an option immediately updates the button text and closes the menu. • Lack of visual feedback after selection.
Depop d	• Dropdown remains open while selecting options, allowing multiple toggles without reopening. • However, the button text doesn't update immediately. The dropdown remains open, requiring manual dropdown reopening to check the current sort. • Selecting a new option closes the dropdown and updates the button text. • The dropdown lacks underlining, making it harder to see what is clickable.	• No keyboard navigation for sorting functionality. • Tab cycling functions only within the search bar and shopping cart. • Clicking Sort by: Relevance toggles the sort options. • Keyboard navigation is limited to search bar, cart, and shopping cart.	• Focus is misplaced, making it difficult to track. • The screen reader only announces the button "Sort," making it unclear what is being manipulated. • Too often does not work. Sort options have disappeared from the dropdown in some elements.	• Radio buttons highlight to hold other options. • Pressing the "Show Results" button applies selections, but a brief loading spinner appears before the results load. • Users cannot copy text from the dropdown.
Sephora SEPHORA	• Selecting a new option closes the dropdown, updates the button text. • The previous selection is underlined, making it clear which option is currently active. • The dropdown lacks underlining, making it harder to see what is clickable.	• No keyboard navigation for sorting functionality. • Tab cycling functions only within the search bar and shopping cart. • Clicking Sort by: Relevance toggles the sort options.	• Voice over correctly announces the dropdown's purpose and selection changes. • However, Voice order is inconsistent, sorting options appear before items are announced as "selected."	• Selected options turn bold and underline. • The "Show Results" button groups and after selection provides clear feedback. • The sort label updates immediately after selecting an option. • Users cannot copy text.

Across **Amazon, Depop, and Sephora**, dropdown menus are a core part of the shopping experience—helping users find the right products faster. But as we've seen, not all dropdowns are built equally. **Amazon's implementation** is structured and keyboard-friendly, **Sephora's** is simplified but inconsistent, and **Depop's** feel, it struggles the most.

From **missing keyboard navigation** to confusing visual feedback, Depop's dropdown creates unnecessary friction—especially for users who rely on keyboards or screen readers. Sephora's dropdown strikes a balance between clarity and usability, but inconsistent **feedback, engagement and state**, a frustrating interaction can be the difference between a purchase and an abandoned cart.

So, let's take a step back. How does Depop's dropdown actually function on a **technical level**? What states does it transition through as users interact with it in mouse or keyboard? By mapping out these **state models**, we can pinpoint **where the breakdown happens** and lay the groundwork for a more intuitive, accessible redesign.

Part 3: State Models & Component Redesign

In **Parts 1 and 2**, we analyzed how **Amazon, Depop, and Sephora** handle dropdown sorting, evaluating their **usability, accessibility, and state feedback**. Now, we'll take those insights and think critically about how users interact with this component—starting with **state models** that capture the different interaction modes.

For this section, we will be focusing on **Depop's dropdown component**, as our analysis has shown it **struggles the most**. With inconsistent **feedback, missing keyboard navigation, and misleading selection behavior**, Depop's dropdown creates friction that could easily be avoided. By mapping out its **state transitions**, we can pinpoint where these usability issues occur and start thinking about how to improve them.

Redesigning Depop's Sort Dropdown

Depop's current dropdown has **several usability issues**, including a lack of **keyboard support, unclear selection feedback,** and checkbox behavior that feels unintuitive. To address these issues, we propose a redesign focused on improving **clarity, efficiency, and accessibility** by replacing checkboxes with **radio buttons**, ensuring immediate feedback, and aligning with Depop's existing UI patterns.

Below, the first image displays the **original dropdown** in both **default** and **clicked** states. The second image showcases the revised version with annotations detailing the improvements.

In making these changes, we also considered **internal trade-offs**. One key decision was removing checkboxes in favor of radio buttons. While checkboxes could allow users to sort multiple options at a glance, they created confusion about whether multiple options could be selected simultaneously. The redesign opts for clarity over flexibility, ensuring users immediately understand that only one option can be selected at a time. Additionally, while keeping the dropdown open after selection might reduce friction for some users, it led to uncertainty about whether changes were applied. The redesign closes the dropdown upon selection, providing a clearer indication that the sorting action has taken effect.

Depop's dropdown redesign highlights an important reality of e-commerce: **small design choices can have a big impact**. From missing feedback to misleading checkboxes, lower usability issues added up to create an experience that was frustrating rather than seamless.

When navigation tell locations, users hesitate. When accessibility is overlooked, users are excluded. And when a simple sort feature doesn't function as expected, it disrupts the entire shopping flow. **As a competitive e-commerce space**, these friction points can be the difference between conversion and abandonment.

Our redesign demonstrates that **thoughtful, incremental changes** like improving contrast, refining button states, and aligning with platform conventions can **boost usability, efficiency, and accessibility** without requiring a complete overhaul. These principles don't just apply to Depop's dropdown; they are relevant to every interface in digital retail.

In the final section, we'll step back and reflect on **what this case study reveals about accessible e-commerce**. If a single dropdown menu can cause usability roadblocks, what does that say about the broader digital shopping experience? And more importantly, how can companies move toward more inclusive, user-friendly designs that benefit everyone?

Part 4: Reflection

Depop's original dropdown suffered from **unclear selection behavior, misleading checkboxes, and no keyboard support**, making it difficult to track what was selected and how to interact with it. The redesign addresses these issues by replacing checkboxes with radio buttons, ensuring immediate feedback, more clearly indicating active selections, improving contrast, and ensuring consistency with Depop's existing UI patterns. These changes make sorting more intuitive, **efficient, and accessible** for all users.

One of the biggest usability gaps in the original design was the **lack of keyboard navigation**. Without it, users who rely on screen readers or tab-based interactions couldn't use the dropdown at all. The redesign introduces **keyboard support, higher contrast** between selected and unselected options, and clearer visual indicators of all which ensure interface for users with color vision deficiencies, low vision, or cognitive disabilities.

Fitts' Law, a key principle in UI design, states that the time it takes to hit a target depends on its size and distance. The redesign makes **sorting more efficient** by increasing the clickable area of the dropdown and ensuring immediate feedback when a selection is made. This reduces **keyboard support, higher contrast** between selected and unselected options, and clearer visual indicators of all which ensure interface for users with color vision deficiencies, low vision, or cognitive disabilities.

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Hick's Law states that the more options a user has to choose from, the longer it takes to make a decision. The original dropdown presented this exact kind of mismatch by assuming all users can easily click with a mouse. The redesign reduces friction by **prioritizing keyboard navigation, clear visual feedback, and intuitive interactions**. By aligning with platform conventions and **clearer visual indicators** of all which ensure interface for users with color vision deficiencies, low vision, or cognitive disabilities.

- **Amazon's keyboard navigation** allows users to sort items using arrow keys and Enter—**removing barriers for screen reader users** and improving efficiency for anyone who prefers the keyboard.
- **Depop's lack of selection feedback** creates a mismatch for users with cognitive disabilities, who rely on clear, **confirming indicators** to know their active sort.

Mouse and touch interactions tend to be **prioritized in UI development** because they're the most common. But this often comes at the expense of **keyboard and screen reader users, creating unintended exclusion**. Minor oversights like missing focus states or poorly ordered tab order can make or break an experience. **Accessibility is not an afterthought**—it's a core part of design.

At the core of this redesign is the idea that **small design choices can have a huge impact**. A dropdown might seem like a tiny detail, but its inconsistency, where friction directly affects **engagement and sales**, accessibility isn't just about compliance—it's about creating a better experience for everyone. The more we recognize interactions and design around them, the more we move toward a digital world that includes, rather than excludes, by default.