

“Thrifty fit check”: Generation Z's knowledge-attitude-practice gap in second-hand clothing consumption - a preliminary study

Linh N. Phung¹

DOI: [10.29180/978-615-6886-04-0_14](https://doi.org/10.29180/978-615-6886-04-0_14)

ABSTRACT

Second-hand fashion consumption is a notable alternative for those seeking a sustainable source for clothing acquisition. This study aimed to examine how young consumers from Generation Z perceived the discourse surrounding second-hand clothing - an area that received relatively limited attention. This paper provided first a literature review of existing theories and then insights from three focus groups. The main findings did not support a consistently positive correlation between the level of knowledge and improved perception or higher frequency of second-hand purchases. Instead, they revealed a gap between knowledge-attitude-practice, which can vary significantly among individuals.

Keywords: Perception of second-hand clothing, Generation Z, social media, knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap, Sustainable Consumption Communication (SCC)

1. Introduction

For people living in the Western world, mass consumption of fashion is likely not an uncommon concept. Clothes seem to no longer be viewed as a valuable commodity as they were in the past, but rather as disposable objects by modern consumers. The constant turnover of trends and availability of low-cost garments, along with many other reasons, have encouraged consumers not only to purchase more but also to discard clothes at an alarming rate (Vasquez, 2022; **Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2016**). Mass fashion consumption has led to various problems, including strained natural resources, unsustainable and unethical production methods, growing textile waste, etc (Vasquez, 2022).

There are many options for more ethical and sustainable fashion consumption, but these avenues are often inaccessible to a young audience that still needs to prioritize affordability.

¹ Linh N. Phung, student, Communication and Media Science, Faculty of International Management and Business, Budapest Business University. e-mail: phungnguyetlinh@gmail.com

For example, the “slow fashion” market, which is an aspect of sustainable fashion that supports clothing and garment manufacture with respect to people, the environment and animals (Clark, 2008), is also burdened with the seemingly impossible endeavors of defining “truly” ethical and sustainable production. Radicalized approaches such as the zero-waste movement, or minimalism often have little consideration or even trivialize the existence of marginal consumers whose personal styles and consumption principles do not align with them.

As society grapples with the consequences of this relentless pace of consumption, there is a growing awareness of the need for more responsible approaches to fashion consumption, emphasizing quality, longevity, and ethical production practices. Second-hand clothing (often referred to as thrift clothing) with its distinctive attributes emerges as an elegant answer to these problems, continuing to captivate enthusiasts around the world. Since the early 1990s, the second-hand clothing industry has rapidly expanded (Hansen, 2010; NARTS, 2023). Evidence shows that clothing resale is a multi-billion-dollar industry and is among the fastest-growing segments in retail (ThredUp, 2023).

Buying second-hand fashion has always been a topic of much debate. Although embracing second-hand fashion can be a conscious choice that promotes a variety of benefits such as affordability, mindfulness, ethical consumption, and environmental responsibilities, there are certain concerns and risks associated with it.

2. Research purposes, specific aims and objectives

The drive for this thesis was generated primarily by a personal interest. As a student, I am a frequent visitor to different thrift stores in Budapest when I need cheap clothing and accessories. I consider myself to be a mindful consumer, in that I always attempt to lower my frequency of purchases and opt for the choices that I consider to be more ethical. I often reflected upon my second-hand clothing purchases as a somewhat “superior” option to engaging in the mainstream market: with proper filtering the clothes are often very cheap; I feel good about not relying on an apparel industry that perpetuates unsustainable and unethical production practices; and most importantly, they are unique pieces that also align with my personal style.

Additionally, I realized that my preference for second-hand clothing was developed after long-term exposure to thrifting-related content on social media, notably those made by a fashion creator called “*bestdressed*”. Among her most famous videos are “thrift hauls” (showing a collection of items bought in one or multiple visits to second-hand stores), “thrift flips” (altering or tailoring thrifted clothes for sizing or other fashionability-related purposes), and “thrifted

outfits lookbook” (the showing of fashionable outfits consisting of second-hand garments). These contents, which I watched in my adolescent years, totally transformed my view: I went from associating second-hand clothing with hygiene risks, outdated silhouettes and strange patterns to recognizing the significance of the circular fashion industry and appreciating the uniqueness and vibrant personalities that second-hand clothes can bring.

After observing my classmates who have different fashion consumption habits, I wondered if there are any differences between their perceptions and mine, what the driving forces could be among groups who choose to get involved with the second-hand market at different levels, and whether other experienced thrift shoppers also went through the same perception formation process through social media as I did.

Though there have been some previous academic materials done on the motivations and barriers of consumers towards second-hand clothing, there is still room for further examination. One of these shortcomings is the lack of discussion on the gap between a consumer’s knowledge, attitude, and practice of consumption (KAP gap), as well as comparison among groups who choose to commit to second-hand fashion and those who do not, and the recognition of various levels of sustainable consumption awareness within each group. Given the research background and that the purpose of this thesis is to research second-hand shopping, an empirical study with three focus groups is conducted to explore the concepts mentioned above. In particular, the main research questions are formulated as follows:

(1) Are there any similarities or differences between groups in terms of knowledge, perception/attitude, and consumption practice for second-hand clothing? Why do such differences exist?

(2) Can social media be recognized as an effective tool for sustainable consumption communication (SCC), capable of bridging the knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap in the second-hand clothing industry?

3. Structural outline

This paper is based on secondary and primary research, providing first a literature review and then insights from three focus groups conducted with GenZ-ers who are at different levels of commitment to thrifting. The following section will deal with the existing literature concerning the perception of the second-hand clothing market in different eras of history, and the background conditions for the revived popularity of thrifting in the 21st century. There will also

be an examination of the motivations and barriers to shopping second-hand, and how sustainable consumption communication (SCC) can potentially be used to address the gaps between consumers' knowledge, perception, and consumption behaviors.

The methodology used for this investigation is described and explained in the next chapter. Focus groups were determined as the best strategy for answering the research questions. This chapter will finish with an examination of the methodology's shortcomings and limitations. Following the theoretical framework, next, I will present the findings in a descriptive manner, and interpret what they truly mean. The research questions will also be addressed in this section. Finally, the paper will finish by summarizing the results, evaluating their implications, and making recommendations for future research.

4. The backdrop for the renewed popularity of second-hand fashion

From my desk research, it is evident that academic research on the topic was sparse in the 20th century but has steadily grown in number since the beginning of the 21st century. This is no coincidence, as this surge in academic materials occurred around the same time as the destigmatization and revived popularity of the second-hand clothing markets. The revived popularity of second-hand fashion in the 21st century was the result of a combination of different factors. However, I will examine two elements that I believe are the most relevant: Generation Z and social media.

Generation Z

Generation Z, often short as GenZ, is defined as the group of people born in the late 20th century to early years of the 21st century (Elridge, 2023). As of 2023, this generation is entering the workforce and emerging as the new major consumer generation. There are two big factors that set Generation Z apart from previous generations. Firstly, they are the first generation to grow as true digital natives. Most Gen Z-ers have grown up in a time of ubiquitous access to social media and the digital world (Elridge, 2023). Secondly, in terms of economic background, Gen Z-ers, have been undeniably shaped by the Great Recession of 2007–09 and the COVID-19 pandemic (Elridge, 2023). This has undoubtedly set GenZ apart for their outlook on consumption and consumerism. There has been a shift from ease and volume to an emphasis on quality of consumption with limited financial resources, which is what has been setting the background for second-hand fashion to step back into the spotlight. Additionally, GenZ's

presence on social media in the fashion field is often paired with critics of consumerism, heightened sustainability, as well as environmental and ethical awareness. The act of buying clothing second-hand is now assessed in a different light by a generation that has a growing interest in economical and sustainable fashion consumption. Buying clothes second-hand, or thrifting is viewed as an “ethical” alternative to the “problematic” mainstream realm dominated by fast fashion. Whether or not thrifting is truly a good replacement for mainstream apparel is still a matter of debate, but it is undeniable that buying clothes second-hand has captivated GenZ enthusiasts all around the world.

Social media

Social media have been interwoven into almost every single aspect of our lives, especially that of young people belonging to the Z generation (Kastenholtz, 2021). Social media also play a part in influencing decision-making in the garment sector (Bilah et al 2014). Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, are the most widely utilized tools for facilitating quick and effective communication, as well as the medium for disseminating information to a larger audience (Merchant, 2012; Irwin et al., 2012; Kimmons, 2014). Hence, the power of such social media could be further harnessed for the benefit of growing the second-hand market. The nature of communication surrounding second-hand clothing, and how its benefits and drawbacks are highlighted on social media, can have influential and sometimes unpredictable impacts on the future of the resale industry. Interest of second-hand fashion and other related agendas such as sustainability, ethical consumption, economic value, etc have been gaining more and more traction on the internet. The sheer volume of content and the growing number of creators specializing in second-hand fashion have undoubtedly increased thrifting’s presence in the fashion realm.

5. Potential motivations and barriers for second-hand clothing consumption

Motivations

The values identified among second-hand clothing consumers include economic motivations, hedonic motivations, and environmental concerns (Hur, 2020, Hansson and Morozov, 2016).

The motivations for shopping second-hand are predominantly believed to be economic factors (Williams, 2003). While not all second-hand shoppers have to rely on second-hand shopping out of financial necessity, it has been proven that those who are skilled at thrifting and buy

second-hand apparel for economic reasons frequently have lower-than-average incomes. (Christiansen and Snepenger, 2005). Apart from economic necessity, Guiot and Roux (2010) also proposed additional economic motivation: the desire to receive products at a fair price and the desire to get more for less (gratification effect of pricing). They also proposed in 2008 that frugality - price concern and being thrifty - was positively associated with economic and critical incentives to shop second-hand.

In most cases, economic and hedonic-oriented agencies often co-exist (Williams and Windebank, 2005), although the degree to which these factors impact each population can vary greatly. Various hedonistic agencies have been identified and examined in previous studies, including concepts such as treasure hunting, originality, nostalgia, etc (Williams, 2003, Bardhi and Arnold, 2005, Roux, 2006). The hedonic pleasure of treasure hunting deriving from shopping in second-hand stores is supported by studies conducted in 2003 by Williams and in 2005 by Bardhi and Arnold. For these shoppers, thrifting is an exciting and fun hobby that allows them to hunt for things that fulfill their desires (wants rather than needs). People treasure uniqueness and individuality, especially in a field that is closely knitted to self-expression and identity like fashion. Clothes in the mainstream markets like fast fashion brands do not provide the same level of individuality and personality as thrifted clothes. Taking this a step further, thrifted retro or vintage clothing was even used to construct an individual identity separated from the mainstream and to show how one belongs to a group of like-minded people (Jenss, 2005). This is why thrifting is often particularly popular among members of certain alternative subcultures, for example, punk second-hand fashion boutiques (Sklar et al, 2022). Nostalgia has also been coined as one of the hedonic agencies that drive people towards thrift shopping. Consumers of fashion may discover hedonic values in their attraction to items that are old rather than new, either because they are thought to be more authentic, have a history, or evoke the past (Roux, 2006).

Some consumers are concerned about resource scarcity and thus want to reject waste and consumption (Roux, 2006). This is a motivation that Guiot and Roux (2010) termed critical motivations as by buying second-hand, they avoid throwing away usable things and fight waste. Buying second-hand clothing is in keeping with their values (Roux, 2006). Overall, there is evidence that there is a rise in environmental concern regarding fashion which in turn impacts consumers' purchases of clothing (Beard, 2008). Yan, Bae, and Xu (2015) also claim that young adults who buy used apparel are more environmentally conscious than non-shoppers. They do, however, comment that environmentalism does not appear to be an indicator of how frequently a customer would buy used apparel. Furthermore, they propose that just because a student is

concerned about the environment doesn't necessarily mean that they are well informed about environmental issues or that they would act on them (Yan et al, 2015).

Barriers

On the other hand, there are various barriers that might prevent consumers from shopping for second-hand clothing, including fear of contamination, the garments' characteristics, and personal values (Roux, 2006, Yan et al, 2015)

The fear of contamination associated with second-hand clothing can be either rational or irrational. For instance, for some consumers, used clothes are associated with being too "contaminated" by the previous owner (Roux, 2006). The psychology of possession reveals that we often imbue owned items with an essence that defines their identity (Hood, 2014). Clothing is considered to be an extension of the self and may symbolize the owner, therefore even when discarded, the "contamination" of the previous owner cannot simply be washed away (Roux, 2006). Furthermore, according to Baxter et al. (2017), fighting irrational fear of contamination with reasoning is particularly difficult. Contamination can also manifest in second-hand clothing in tangible and physical form, such as bad odor, stains, etc. According to Yan, Bae & Xu (2015), the more the previous consumer has touched a product, the more contaminated that garment seems to be, and the less likely customers will purchase it.

Price alone was insufficient to guarantee a consumer's decision to buy used apparel (O'Reilly et. al, 1984), consumers are usually much more likely to purchase clothes that can satisfy multiple utilitarian standards outside of the price factor. The items available in thrift stores are not always in the most modern colors, patterns, or silhouettes, simply because these pieces of clothing have had a previous life before being donated or sold as second-hand merchandise. Other utilitarian factors such as proper sizing and body fit constitute another element that might function as a barrier (Kristoffersson, 2015), since sizing in second-hand garments often falls short of catering to all body types. Even for customers who do not feel the need to be fashion-forward, these characteristics of the garments available can greatly decrease their purchase desire.

Another point of view is that some consumers believe that thrifting through second-hand apparel is a negative thing. Buying second-hand does not indicate thriftiness or saving money to them, but rather the inability or failure to purchase newly made products (Roux, 2006). Furthermore, there exists the belief that second-hand clothing doesn't boost originality, on the contrary, wearing someone else's clothes makes them feel less unique (Roux, 2006).

6. KAP gap and SCC discourse in second-hand clothing consumption

The phenomenon of people being knowledgeable about the issues surrounding a certain production practice (in this case: mainstream newly made garments) but their engagement is not adjusting in accordance has been examined in previous studies and coined the knowledge-attitude-practice gap (short as the KAP gap). Cohen et al (2001) and Vermeir et al (2006) found that there was an inconsistency between the positive attitudes consumer expressed towards sustainability and their behavioral patterns. Thus, consumers' buying behaviors do not reflect their positive attitudes toward ethical products.

“Sustainability is often denounced as a bulky, blurry, fuzzy, ambiguous and wicked term, an empty or buzzword” (Weder F. et al, 2021). Sustainable Consumption Communication (short as SCC) promoting second-hand clothing is particularly challenging because it involves many multifaceted arguments. I believe targeting and addressing the KAP gap can be the key to substantially increasing second-hand consumption. How the KAP gap manifests itself within different individuals can vary greatly, because of people's varying levels of awareness of the complex set of ethical, technological, legal, and societal considerations (Godemann, 2011). Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible, which can make addressing the drawbacks and boosting the benefits of second-hand clothing a much more meandering endeavor. Advocators for second-hand clothing should examine how the motivations or barriers had different levels of influence on individuals to construct a communication objective and plan that can cater to various fashion consumers. Given the indication of connectivity and that none of the listed motivations and barriers above seem to contradict each other, I can summarize all these factors in a framework. I will do this by adapting some elements of Hansson and Morozov's framework in their 2016 paper. The framework is visually demonstrated in Appendix I.

7. Methodology

The focus group method & sample characteristics

An empirical study was conducted on second-hand clothing perception focusing on the correlation between the level of knowledge about second-hand clothing and consumers' perception of it and how different perceptions might influence or alternate consumption behaviors. The focus groups were also meant to evaluate social media as a potential Sustainable

Consumption Communication (SCC) tool, by exploring different groups' level of content exposure on social media platforms.

Each focus group session lasted from 45 to 60 minutes; all discussions were recorded and transcribed. The focus group meetings were friendly and informal in nature, emulating daily conversations. I also decided against video recording of the meetings in hope of increasing the participants' willingness to freely share their opinions. Instead, a note-taking assistant was present at the meetings to document and observe the dynamics, attitudes, and tones of the participants (for example, sarcasm or humor) which could not be displayed in the audio recording. These on-site accounts later further aided me in the interpretation of the content.

Data for the study were collected from a convenient sample based on the researcher's judgment, and the sample was chosen by using personal networks and connections. Given that the research is still at the preliminary stage of the investigation and is exploratory in nature, the sampling is justifiable (Denscombe, 2017). Furthermore, I also believe that this sample consists of people who have a wide variety of perceived motivations and barriers for shopping second-hand.

A total of 15 participants were carefully selected and categorized into 3 focus groups based on their level of involvement with thrifting/second-hand clothing purchases. The first group are Non-Thrifters, consisting of 5 people having no previous experience with thrifting, and only buy their clothes new. The second group are Novice Thrifters, with 6 participants who had little to no experience with thrifting, and do not rely on thrifting to acquire most of their clothes (less than 30% of clothes are thrifted). The third group are Avid Thrifters, with 4 participants identifying as relying on thrifting for the majority of their clothes (more 70% of clothes owned are thrifted) and having shopped second-hand at least once in the last month leading up to the focus group.

The final questionnaires contain 11 questions. The complete questionnaires are provided in Appendix II and III.

Limitations

Now that the main focus of this paper has been clearly stated I have to briefly mention the implicated limitations of my study. Due to my location, the research will be based on the existing resources in Budapest, Hungary. This will account for the selection of the focus group participants. This research focus on retail second-hand stores and briefly mention online

channels, I will be mostly talking about thrift or charity shops as they are prevalent in my geographic research area, even though in practice there can be many other categories of outlets.

The use of a small convenience sample is another significant limitation of this study. I am acquainted with the majority of the respondents. As a result, it is possible that some participants did not express their true thoughts but instead provided a self-filtered response out of respect. Another drawback is that all participants were university students in Budapest who were well-educated and more open-minded. As a result, they did not accurately represent the general public. Furthermore, this paper will exhibit qualitative research as it was found to be the most suitable approach for answering the research question and providing the necessary insights. As a result, the findings of the research should not be generalized, and no statistical inferences should be drawn.

8. Findings

A summary of the study's findings is provided in Appendix IV. Among the total number of participants, 20% had a mixed perception, most people either had a highly positive or highly negative perception of second-hand clothing.

However, all three groups unanimously agreed on the economic value that second-hand clothing brings. No participants expressed any perceived embarrassment or shame towards second-hand consumption; their concerns were mainly reserved for more practical issues, the primary of which is fear of contamination. Furthermore, all 15 participants recognized the risks and concerns associated with second-hand clothing. These barriers were particularly more influential on people of the first two groups, preventing them from purchasing second-hand garments. Avid Thrifters participants had a tendency to compromise and often overlooked some drawbacks that are present in second-hand clothing.

Interestingly, it is not the Avid Thrifters group who were the most conscious about the environmental and social impacts of their fashion consumption habits, or the potential altruistic side that thrifting may bring, but the Novice Thrifters. Compared to the other two groups, the Novice Thrifters seemed to be more knowledgeable about the environmental and social aspects and were overall more mindful and practical consumers. The second group identified economic values as their primary motivations for shopping second-hand, while the Avid Thrifters heavily gravitated towards hedonistic agencies such as fashionability, uniqueness, treasure-hunting, etc.

Non-Thrifters group

The findings confirmed that people who did not engage in the second-hand clothing market often have a negative perception of thrifting. Newly manufactured clothes made up the majority of their wardrobe, and all respondents identified fast fashion brands such as H&M, Bershka, Pull&Bear, etc. as their main source of obtaining clothes. Some other minor sources included hand-me-downs from family members and designer brands.

All five participants recognized the tangible and practical economic value of second-hand clothing. However, to them, the lower price range itself was insufficient to justify purchasing used clothes, due to some risks and concerns. This confirms O'Reilly et al (1984)'s suggestions that price alone might not be sufficient motivation. All participants associated second-hand clothing with negative vocabulary, mainly those related to fear of contamination, which was also the identified primary barrier preventing them from thrifting. Other barriers included culturally rooted superstitions and stigmas (Four out of five participants came from Eastern countries, whose cultures have superstitions about used clothes bringing misfortunes), and outdated or obsolete fashionability that do not align with their personal style.

The participants pinpointed some issues and negative consequences around fashion production practices such as exploited cheap labor and negative environmental impacts. Interestingly, all five participants were aware of and expressed dissatisfaction with some items' low production quality when buying from fast fashion (which is where the majority of their clothes come from), but four out of five participants stated that they were unwilling to modify their purchase patterns and would maintain their fashion consumption behaviors in the future. This has confirmed the existence of the KAP gap, as explained in the previous chapters. Only one participant expressed some interest in potential future purchases of second-hand clothing and other sources such as mid and high-end sustainable brands.

The participants also named some reasons explaining their preference towards newly made clothes, namely fast fashion. These included: accessible price ranges, easiness of finding basic and neutral garments, and the availability of items that could be harmoniously styled with clothes they already owned. Overall, the Non-Thrifters group had a minimalist approach to fashion, were unwilling to explore styles out of their comfort zones, and viewed buying clothes second-hand as something risky, both in terms of hygiene and fashionability.

The Non-Thrifters had a high frequency of engagement with social media, reporting daily use of applications such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc. They are often exposed to mainstream fashion content such as neutral outfit styling videos, influencers' fashion, clothes hauls, etc.

Social media was also their main source of information about second-hand clothing, and they knew about the growing popularity of thrifting culture. All five participants of this group believed that social media did not have a big impact on their personal style or choice of fashion consumption. Instead, they used social media as a minor additional frame of reference when styling their clothes and creating outfits.

Novice Thrifters group

This group included participants who had had some thrifting experiences in the past and were willing to rely more on second-hand clothing in the future. Overall, the participants who were on the higher end of the commitment spectrum to second-hand clothing held more positive perceptions, while three participants who had purchased less than 3 items were more skeptical and had mixed opinions. Other than thrifting, they also listed fast fashion brands as the main source to buy clothes from. One other minor method of obtaining clothes is hand-me-downs from family members and friends.

The participants associated second-hand clothing with both negative and positive vocabulary. Some respondents mentioned a few hedonic motivations like treasure hunting, but all emphasized that economic value was the key factor driving them to shop second-hand. They were also aware of environmental and ethical issues that were present in the apparel manufacturing industry but admitted that they would have to continue purchasing newly made clothes, especially from fast fashion brands, at least on a yearly basis for intimate items, such as underwear, socks, etc.

All six participants recognized the risks that might be present in second-hand clothing and cited the fear of contamination as the main barrier hindering them from a greater commitment to thrifting. The respondents also expressed some dissatisfaction with the fashionability of second-hand items, as they often had a hard time finding clothes in the right sizes, or modern silhouettes, but to them, this factor was not a make-or-break criterion when deciding whether to purchase an item or not. They are also aware of other negative aspects, such as inflated prices or scamming resellers in online thrifting, etc.

This group has a very practical approach to fashion. They often opted for clothes with a reasonable price range and versatility and were also very adamant about taking good care of the clothes they already owned. They are slightly more willing to experiment with fashion compared to the Non-Thrifters but would likely prioritize practicality over fashionability. This group's members were also knowledgeable about what is considered a high-quality garment:

they paid attention to the materials and tailoring of the fabric, often opted for natural fibers instead of synthetic ones, and were much more likely to purchase an item if they considered the style to be long-lasting or timeless, instead of following trends.

The Novice Thrifters particularly stood out compared to the two other groups because they were very knowledgeable about the environmental and social aspects of fashion consumption. Three out of six participants confirmed that they considered thrifting to be a fun but risky experiment and were actively in search of information before being ready to have any first-hand experience with it. The Novice Thrifters were also the most utilitarian, environmentally, and ethically minded people. This came as a surprise because they still have a low level of involvement and commitment to second-hand fashion as well as other sustainable sources. The second focus group further confirmed the KAP gap in second-hand clothing consumption: a considerable level of knowledge and a positive perception does not always translate into consumption behaviors.

The Novice Thrifters reported a medium frequency of social media usage. They often consumed content on video-sharing platforms like Instagram reels, YouTube, TikTok, etc on a weekly basis. These participants rarely got exposed to fashion-related content on social media. They get information about second-hand fashion from multiple sources, in descending order of importance: word-of-mouth, first-hand experience, and social media. They also considered themselves to possess personal fashion styles that were not easily influenced by social media.

Avid Thrifters group

As predicted, the group with the highest level of commitment to thrifting had a very strong positive perception of second-hand clothing. They believed that shopping second-hand satisfied their fashion-forward nature, and by doing so they were also giving support to an eco-friendly and ethical alternative to the “problematic fast fashion”.

The Avid Thrifters associated thrifting with highly positive vocabulary, which, interestingly, included a lot of specific words pointing to particular subcultures, or individualistic fashion influences. They recognized all the aforementioned (economic, hedonic, sustainability concerns) as motivations to shop second-hand. The participants also made the observation that the second-hand garments that they often came across, most of which were manufactured over a decade ago, had much higher quality compared to newly made clothes nowadays, and they feel like they are getting “more for their buck”. However, it is important to note that all four participants in this group gravitated towards hedonistic agencies, with a heavy emphasis on the

uniqueness of styles and treasure hunting. To them, the economic and personal ideologies factors were more of an additional benefit to the clothes' fashionability and other hedonistic values, which they considered to be an integral and central influence that drove them to commit to shopping second-hand. Furthermore, it could be observed that there was no positive correlation between how cheap an item was and how likely they would purchase it. Some participants stated that they would often go for mid-range priced second-hand garments, believing that cheaper clothes should be reserved for those who financially need them.

To the Avid Thrifters, the perceived benefits are so great that they admitted they often overlooked the concerns, risks, or limitations of shopping second-hand. This group's members were very experimental with fashion, willing to step out of their comfort zones, and much more likely to take risks compared to the other two groups. They were aware of the hygiene concerns, and the fact that they could not mainstream trendy clothes in second-hand stores. They also had a higher tolerance towards items that were not considered to be in prime condition, which otherwise would be passed over if encountered by Novice or Non-Thrifters. Three participants stated that they were even willing to purchase items that might be very oversized on them or might not go with any items in their wardrobe and would try creating experimental outfits from them.

Notably, one participant mentioned that in their culture (in Mongolia), buying used clothes was considered to be a taboo that could bring bad fortunes, and the social norms' pressure had prevented them from purchasing second-hand clothing in the past, even though they had long known about and looked at thrifting favorably, and it had only been a socially acceptable thing to do and a possibility for them since moving to Hungary. This once again confirmed the existence of the KAP gap, but in a reverse manner compared to the one discussed in the Novice Thrifters group.

Unexpectedly, the Avid Thrifters all had a very low frequency of social media usage, with most of the group reporting exclusively using texting applications only to stay connected with friends and family. Three out of four participants did not have a habit of consuming content on social media in the previous 3 months, and the other only came into contact with fashion-related content because of their profession - being a model in the fashion industry. The Avid Thrifters participants cited 90s television series, techno subculture, eccentric Japanese animations, punk rock musicians, etc. as some elements that have had minor influences on their fashion style. However, all four participants considered themselves to have unique individual fashion senses and were able to form their own opinions without any external impacts.

9. Discussions

Overall, the findings from the focus group suggest that there exists a correlation between consumers' perception of second-hand clothing and purchase frequency. This is especially clear and observable among participants who were on the two polar ends of the spectrum: People who were highly committed to thrifting held second-hand clothing in much higher regard compared to the other two groups, and Non-Thrifters were more easily subjected to a negative one-sided outlook which often heavily leaned towards the associated risks. The Novice Thrifters generally held positive perceptions, which was what had initially motivated them to experiment with thrifting. However, their opinions were still somewhat laced with skepticism, partly because they were highly practical and utilitarian-driven consumers. It is clear that second-hand clothing is something people often disagree about, since it offers great benefits but also contains certain risks that some cannot accept.

To the Non-Thrifters, none of the perceived motivations can outweigh the barriers. The Novice Thrifters, on the other hand, were particularly focused on economic motivations, while Avid Thrifters were more motivated by hedonic values especially treasure hunting and, uniqueness of clothes. The primary barrier identified among the three groups was fear of contamination. Garments' characteristics were listed as a barrier but were less influential to the more experienced respondents. Because of the generation-specific characteristics in GenZ (see chapter *backdrop for renewed popularity of second-hand clothing*), for all participants, second-hand consumption was not associated with any sense of shame or embarrassment. No one looked down on the practice of thrifting, rather their negative feelings were closer to concerns or fears. Therefore, personal values (see chapter *potential motivations and barriers*) were not considered a pronounced barrier for these participants.

The connection between the level of knowledgeable – perception – consumption practice is more nuanced. The KAP gap (see chapter *backdrop for renewed popularity of second-hand clothing*), was present but manifested in different levels of intensity in three focus groups. In terms of knowledge, all 15 participants possessed more or less some understanding of second-hand fashion and the issues surrounding their consumption habits. To be more specific, the Novice Thrifters were the most knowledgeable about the environmental and ethical impacts of fashion consumption. However, their perception and behaviors do not respond accordingly. In contrast, the experienced Avid Thrifters were less informed but were much more willing to make a purchase. Reports from participants who exclusively buy new clothes were the most

interesting out of the three groups: they were very much aware of the issues connected to how they sourced their clothes but were unwilling to alternate their consumption practices.

The study also identified two other key elements that could potentially be utilized: first-hand experience and word-of-mouth. Some participants reported changing their outlook after visiting thrift stores in person, mainly fueled by hedonic agencies. Many others revealed that they had negative perceptions and were unwilling to purchase second-hand clothing in the past, but had been influenced by friends, families, and other close members in the same community and gradually held thrifting in higher regard and started purchasing frequently.

With the absence of first-hand experience, the media would play a dominant role in spreading information about second-hand clothing. However, there was no solid evidence proving social media can be an element capable of influencing consumers' perceptions and alternating consumption behaviors in the second-hand garment sector. The more experienced participants displayed concrete individualistic preferences and opinions, and social media's influence on them was minimal. The SCC incentives that the participants were exposed to were somewhat effective in spreading information and knowledge but often failed to leave long-lasting impacts on perception and consumption practice.

10. Conclusions

Research aims and objectives

This paper sets out to investigate shopping for second-hand clothing. In particular, this research looked upon the knowledge, perception, and consumption practice and how they might be affected by SCC or be linked to one another.

In particular, the main research questions are formulated as follows:

- (1) Are there any similarities or differences between groups in terms of knowledge, perception/attitude, and consumption practice for second-hand clothing? Why do such differences exist?
- (2) Can social media be recognized as an effective tool for sustainable consumption communication (SCC), capable of bridging the knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap in the second-hand clothing industry?

With this paper, I strived to confirm the current literature as well as expand on it and develop a new framework based on the results. Therefore, I undertook qualitative research by conducting

3 focus groups with GenZ participants who had different levels of involvement with second-hand clothing. However, I first completed an investigation on the already existing theory. The review started with the historical perception of second-hand clothing, and the background conditions for the revived popularity of thrifting, then different motivations and barriers were examined to give a broad picture of the KAP gap and how SCC can potentially be utilized. By summarizing and structuring the given material, I was able to put together a descriptive framework that offered all the relevant details.

Based on my study's results, several fundamental conclusions can be drawn. The Novice Thrifters group had the highest level of knowledge, the Avid Thrifters had the most positive perception, and the highest rate of consumption. The Non-Thrifters had the lowest level of all three elements. There were several similarities among the three groups, however, the differences were stark and existed for a multitude of reasons, including personal fashion style, personal ideologies, cultural background, etc. These concepts were all discussed and examined in detail in chapters *findings* and *discussions*. Social media cannot be recognized as an effective tool for SCC, since there was no concrete proof of its ability to bridge the knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap in the second-hand clothing industry. Even though social media was identified to be the main source of information, indicating its potential to raise the level of awareness and knowledge for CSS incentives, its impacts on the perception and consumption practice of second-hand clothing were still very minimal.

Implications and future research

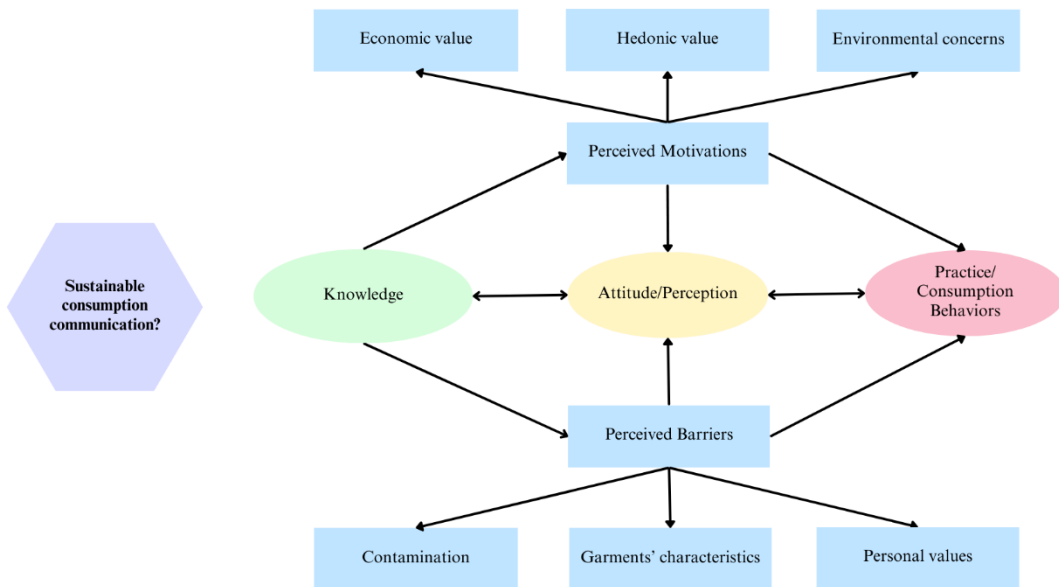
The outcomes of this research can facilitate a better understanding of the differences in perception formation and consumption behaviors present in the industry. As indicated in the previous chapters, how the KAP gap manifests in each individual can be vastly different, meaning SCC cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. The study suggested that SCC in the field of second-hand clothing is still ineffective, and advocates for second-hand clothing should closely examine how the motivations or barriers had different levels of influence on individuals, in order to construct a communication objective and plan that can cater to various categories of fashion consumers.

Due to some limitations of the focus group method, I suggest that future research can be conducted using more thorough methodologies capable of examining a more representative population. Some participants of the focus group mentioned culturally rooted stigmas, which can be a worthwhile area to investigate, for example, an exploration of how cultural norms

affect people's willingness to buy and wear second-hand items. Domains connected to legal issues surrounding second-hand clothing are also one area that has yet to receive academic attention in my opinion. Some dimensions such as copyright issues, product labeling, consumer protection laws for second-hand shoppers, etc. can be of great value to investigate. These research ideas can provide valuable insights into the complex and evolving world of second-hand clothing perception and consumption.

11. Appendices

Appendix I. Frameworks summarizing the concepts stemming from the literature, as adapted from Hansson and Morozov (2016)



Source: As adapted from Hansson and Morozov (2016), modified by the author

Appendix II: Questionnaires used in focus group Non-Thrifters.

Q1. Form a word cloud: What comes to your mind when “second-hand clothing” is mentioned?

Q2. What is your perception of buying second-hand clothing/thrifting?

Q3. What attributes are important to you when you choose fashion products?

Q4. Which sources do you often get your clothes from?

Q5. What characteristics come to your mind when you think of second-hand clothes?

Q6. What are the factors that motivate you to shop for new clothes?

In your opinion, what positive impacts can second-hand clothing make?

Q7. What are the factors that prevent you from shopping second-hand? In your opinion, what negative consequences can second-hand clothing have?

Q8. Where do you get your information about the second-hand clothing industry?

Q9. What social media platforms do you use? What types of fashion or sustainability-related content are often displayed on them?

Q10. What impacts does social media have on your fashion consumption habits?

Q11. Hold up 1 to 5 fingers depending on how much you disagree or agree with these statements: 1 = totally disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = totally agree

- Second-hand clothing cannot be an integral part of my personal style.
- I know about the environmental and social impacts of my fashion consumption.
- I will continue to buy newly made clothing in the future.

Appendix III: Questionnaires used in focus groups Novice and Avid Thrifters

Q1. Form a word cloud: What comes to your mind when “second-hand clothing” is mentioned?

Q2. What is your perception of buying second-hand clothing/thrifted?

Q3. What attributes are important to you when you choose fashion products?

Q4. Which sources do you often get your clothes from?

Q5. What characteristics come to your mind when you think of second-hand clothes?

Q6. What are the factors that might motivate you to shop second-hand? In your opinion, what positive impacts can second-hand clothing make?

Q7. What are the factors that might prevent you from shopping second-hand? In your opinion, what negative consequences can second-hand clothing have?

Q8. Where do you get your information about the second-hand clothing industry?

Q9. What social media platforms do you use? What types of fashion or sustainability-related content are often displayed on them?

Q10. What impacts does social media have on your fashion consumption habits?

Q11. Hold up 1 to 5 fingers depending on how much you disagree or agree with these statements: 1 = totally disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = totally agree

- Second-hand clothing is an integral part of my personal style.
- I know about the environmental and social impacts of my fashion consumption.
- I will continue to buy second-hand clothing in the future.

Appendix IV. Summary of findings

Non-Thrifters	Novice Thrifters	Avid Thrifters
Very negative perception of second-hand clothing, high level of commitment to purchase new clothes.	Overall positive perception of second-hand clothing, low level of commitment to purchasing.	Strong positive perception of second-hand clothing, very high level of commitment to purchasing secondhand clothing.
Recognized practical and tangible economic benefits of thrifting, did not understand hedonic or sustainability as motivations.	Recognized all discussed values as motivations to shop second-hand. High emphasis on economic motivations.	Recognized all discussed values as motivations to shop second-hand. High emphasis on hedonic motivations.
Believed that the benefits is not worth overlooking the risks.	Identified the barriers as the reasons for low engagement.	Choose to overlook some barriers as a compromise to obtain unique clothes.
Associated second-hand clothing with negative vocabulary, mainly including practical risks and concerns	Associated second-hand clothing with both negative and positive vocabulary (including some related to economic and sustainability values).	Associated second-hand clothing with mainly positive vocabulary, mainly including those emphasizing hedonistic agenda.
Social media as main source of information about second-hand fashion. High frequency of social media usage and usually exposed to mainstream fashion content	Social media and first-hand experience and word of mouth as sources of information. Medium frequency of social media usage usually exposed to both mainstream and second-hand fashion content	First-hand experience and word of mouth as main source of information. Very low frequency of social media usage, and low level of exposure to second-hand clothing content.

Source: Results of the author's own research

References

This paper is a shortened version of the following: Phung, L.N. (2023): “Thrifted fit check”: Generation Z’s knowledge-attitude-practice gap in second-hand clothing consumption – a preliminary study. SSA (TDK) Conference, Bp. 30th November 2023. BBU FIMB

Bardhi, F. and Arnould, E.J. (2005) 'Thrift shopping: Combining utilitarian thrift and hedonic treat benefits,' *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4(4), 223–233. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.12>.

- Baxter, W. *et al.* (2017) 'Decontaminating experiences with circular offerings,' *ResearchGate* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319269943_Decontaminating_experiences_with_circular_offerings.
- Beard, N.D. (2008) 'The branding of ethical fashion and the consumer: a luxury niche or mass-market reality?,' *Fashion Theory*, 12(4), 447–467. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174108x346931>.
- Bilal, G. (2014) *Role of social media and social networks in consumer decision making: A case of the garment sector*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Role-of-Social-Media-and-Social-Networks-in-Making-Bilal-hmed/d6be5577edae9fa84e4fe7baf5c1279fe358f5b8>.
- Cartner-Morley, J. (2023) 'Low-rise waistlines: the return of Y2K's most debauched trend,' *The Guardian*, 26 January. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2023/jan/26/low-rise-waistlines-the-return-of-y2ks-most-debauched-trend>.
- Chisnall, P.M. (2001) *Marketing research*.
- Christiansen, T. and Snepenger, D.J. (2005) 'Information sources for thrift shopping: is there a “thrift maven”?,' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(6), 323–331. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760510623911>.
- Clark, H. (2008) 'SLOW + FASHION—an oxymoron—or a promise for the future ...?,' *Fashion Theory*, 12(4), 427–446. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174108x346922>.
- Cohen, M; Murphy J. (2001). *Exploring Sustainable Consumption: Environmental Policy and The Social Sciences*. Oxford: Elsevier Science
- Cox, R.H. (2006) *Environmental communication and the public sphere*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB19020059>.
- Denscombe, M. (2017) *The good research guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects*.
- Eldridge, A. (2023b) *Gen Z | Years, Age Range, Meaning, & Characteristics*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Generation-Z>.
- Ginsburg, M. (1980) 'Rags to Riches: The Second-Hand Clothes Trade 1700–1978,' *Costume*, 14(1), 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.1179/cos.1980.14.1.121>.
- Godemann, J. (2011) 'Sustainable communication as an inter- and transdisciplinary discipline,' in *Springer eBooks*, 39–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1697-1_4.

- Guiot, D. and Roux, D. (2010) 'A second-hand shoppers' motivation scale: antecedents, consequences, and implications for retailers,' *Journal of Retailing*, 86(4), 355–371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2010.08.002>.
- Hansen, K.T. (2010). Secondhand clothing, in Eicher, J. (eds.) *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, 10, 232–237. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hansson, A., Morozov E. (2016) *Driving forces towards shopping for Second-Hand clothing*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Driving-Forces-Towards-Shopping-for-Second-Hand-Hansson-Morozov/0f584c06f74741059dd91f892793fc75bbb1e145>.
- Hood, B. (2014) *How does the psychology of ownership differ between Western and Eastern cultures?* <https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/how-does-psychology-ownership-differ-between-western-and-eastern-cultures>.
- Hur, E. (2020) 'Rebirth fashion: Secondhand clothing consumption values and perceived risks,' *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 273, 122951. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.122951>.
- Irwin, C. *et al.* (2012) 'Students' perceptions of using Facebook as an interactive learning resource at university,' *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 28(7). <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.798>.
- Jens, H. (2005) 'Sixties dress only! The consumption of the past in a retro scene', in Palmer, A. & Clark, H. (eds.) *Old clothes, new looks*. Oxford: Berg, 177-195.
- Kastenholz, C. (2021) 'Gen Z And The Rise Of Social Commerce,' *Forbes*, 17 May. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/05/17/gen-z-and-the-rise-of-social-commerce/?sh=97f49c3251d0>.
- Kimmons, R. (2014) 'Social networking sites, literacy, and the authentic identity problem,' *TechTrends*, 58(2), 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-014-0740-y>.
- Kristoffersson, A. (2015). Environmentally friendly and affordable or worn and gross? A study on young adults' attitudes to second-hand clothes. *Miljövetarprogrammet, Karlstads Universitet*.
- Laininen E (2019) Transforming our worldview towards a sustainable future. In: Cook JW (ed) *Sustainability, human well-being, and the future of education*. Springer, Cham, 161–200. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78580-6_5
- Lemire, B. (1988) 'Consumerism in preindustrial and early Industrial England: The trade in secondhand clothes,' *Journal of British Studies*, 27(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1086/385902>.

- Lundberg, D. and Devoy, J. (2022) *The aftermath of fast fashion: How discarded clothes impact public health and the environment | SPH*. <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2022/the-aftermath-of-fast-fashion-how-discarded-clothes-impact-public-health-and-the-environment/>.
- Merchant, G. (2011) 'Unravelling the social network: theory and research,' *Learning, Media and Technology*, 37(1), 4–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2011.567992>.
- NARTS (2023) *Industry Statistics & Trends | NARTS: The Association of Resale Professionals* <https://www.narts.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3285>.
- O'Reilly, L. *et al.* (1984) 'The relationship of psychological and situational variables to usage of a second-order marketing system,' *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 12(3), 53–76. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02739319>.
- Phung, L.N. (2023): “Thrifty fit check”: Generation Z’s knowledge-attitude-practice gap in second-hand clothing consumption – a preliminary study. SSA (TDK) Conference, Bp. 30th November 2023. BBU FIMB
- Rous, A. (2023) *bestdressed Youtube channel*. <https://www.youtube.com/@bestdressed/videos>.
- Roux, D. and Korchia, M. (2006) 'Am I What I Wear? An Exploratory Study of Symbolic Meanings Associated with Secondhand Clothing,' *ResearchGate* [Preprint]. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259474955_Am_I_What_I_Wear_An_Exploratory_Study_of_Symbolic_Meanings_Associated_with_Secondhand_Clothing.
- Sklar, M., Brewster, M.L. and Whitley, B. (2022) 'Adjusting standard retail practices for nonstandard consumers: How punk and subcultural fashion boutiques find success and build community,' *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* [Preprint]. https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc_00131_1.
- Thanhauser, S. (2022) *Worn: A People’s History of Clothing*. Penguin UK.
- thredUP (2023) *2023 Resale Market and Consumer Trend Report*. <https://www.thredup.com/resale>.
- Ulväng, M. (2012) *Klädekonomi och klädkultur: böndernas kläder i Härjedalen under 1800-talet*. Möklinta: Gidlunds förlag.
- Van Damme, I. and Vermoesen, R. (2009) 'Second-hand consumption as a way of life: public auctions in the surroundings of Alost in the late eighteenth century,' *Continuity and Change*, 24(2), 275–305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0268416009007188>.

Vasquez, R. (2022) *Overconsumption in the fashion industry: Fashion Revolution*. <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/overconsumption-in-the-fashion-industry/>.

Vermeir, I. and Verbeke, W. (2006) 'Sustainable Food Consumption: Exploring the consumer "Attitude – Behavioral Intention" gap,' *Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics*, 19(2), 169–194. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-005-5485-3>.

Waller T. (1747) *A general description of all trades*.

Weder, F. and Milstein, T. (2021) 'Revolutionaries needed! Environmental communication as a transformative discipline,' in *Routledge eBooks*, 407–419. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367275204-30>.

Weinstein, J. (2014) *Reframe, Reuse, Re-Style: Deconstructing the Sustainable Second-Hand Consumer | Digital Collections*. <https://digitalcollections.wesleyan.edu/object/ir-1633>.

Williams, C.C. (2003) 'Explaining informal and second-hand goods acquisition,' *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 23(12), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01443330310790426>.

Williams, C.C., & Windebank, J. (2000). Modes of goods acquisition in deprived neighbourhoods, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 10(1), 73-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095939600342415>

Yan, R., Bae, S.Y. and Xu, H. (2015) 'Second-hand clothing shopping among college students: the role of psychographic characteristics,' *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 16(1), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.1108/yc-02-2014-00429>.

Zajonc, R.B. (1960) 'The process of cognitive tuning in communication.,' *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 61(2), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0047987>.

Zuvela, T. (2023) *The JBWells depop controversy: Is reselling second hand clothing ethical? | ELLE Australia*. <https://www.elle.com.au/news/jbwells2-tiktok-vintage-controversy-28312>

List of abbreviations

SSC - sustainable consumption communication

KAP - knowledge-attitude-practice

GenZ – Generation Z