



# The role of fashionability in second-hand shopping motivations



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## ABSTRACT

Second-hand consumption has been quietly undergoing a makeover in recent years. As part of this shift, the concept of shopping for second-hand goods has been redefined. In today's retail marketplace, a mix of thrift stores, high-end stores, and online retailers are recognising the value of second-hand and hosting flea markets or launching their own vintage product collections. However, limited research attention has been paid to role of 'fashionability' as a motivation for consumers to shop for second-hand goods. In this study, we explore modern consumer second-hand shopping behaviour and motivations, inclusive of fashionability. Through a segmentation of second-hand store shoppers, we identify four distinct segments. While we find a polarisation of fashionability motivations, the vast majority (83%) of second-hand shoppers are driven by fashion when shopping in second-hand stores. The findings present several implications for second-hand retailers, including new ways to expand their customer base by tapping into elements of fashionability.

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## 1. Introduction

Second-hand consumption has evolved over three distinct periods: emergence and expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; decline and stigmatization in the twentieth century; and de-stigmatization and renewed popularity since the 2000s (Weinstein, 2014). The past decade has seen rapid growth in second-hand consumption across many global markets (Guiot and Roux, 2010), which is attributable to a number of marketplace shifts. First, and following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the second-hand sector offered a new form of value to shoppers as they adapted to financially hampered circumstances (Tuttle, 2014) and in evaluating and selecting brands across a wide range of categories (Quelch and Jocz, 2009). Second, a rise in consumer interest in sustainability, and sustainable fashion in particular, has occurred (De Brito et al., 2008). Third, second-hand clothing has become fashionable in its own right (Beard, 2008). This is the case even in markets where consumers typically dislike wearing used clothes, as is the case in China where a variety of specialised second-hand stores have opened (Cervellon et al., 2012).

Second-hand shopping clearly offers a genuine alternative to conventional options (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Chu and Liao, 2007; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Williams and Paddock, 2003). Further, second-hand stores have become an accepted and

established retail channel offering a genuine alternative to traditional options (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Chu and Liao, 2007; Williams and Paddock, 2003). Accordingly, the underlying meaning of second-hand shopping has been redefined and social stigmas have faded (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Williams and Paddock, 2003). However, few studies address the motives that explain why consumers turn to second-hand shopping channels (Guiot and Roux, 2010). Further, little is known about how current second-hand shopping motivations are driving growth in the sector. While Guiot and Roux (2010) consider second-hand shopping in terms of critical, economic, and recreational motivations, prior research has not considered the role of fashionability.

Taken together, consumer and marketplace shifts have led to steady growth in second-hand retail, forcing traditional retailers to take note. For example, New York high-end fashion retailer Bergdorf Goodman recreated the second-hand experience by hosting a flea market to launch its vintage collections (Jordon, 2015). Even luxury brands such as Ralph Lauren are seeking second-hand vintage pieces to sell in flagship stores alongside new collections (Cervellon et al., 2012). Indeed, the way in which consumers engage with the material world has undergone radical transformation (Weinstein, 2014) and today's consumer appetite for second-hand goods has never been greater, with associated revenues estimated at \$15 billion in the US (IBISWorld, 2015). Given recent growth in the second-hand retail market and developments in consumption practices, we explore second-hand shopper behaviour and motivations, inclusive of fashionability, to determine current drivers of shopping at second-hand stores.

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In this paper, we investigate critical, economic, recreational, and fashion motivations of second-hand shoppers and identify segments on this basis. This understanding is required in order to continue to build second-hand retail models and marketing strategies that elicit customer attraction and enhance business and sector performance. Following a discussion of relevant literature, the study method and results are presented. We conclude with a discussion of implications for theory and second-hand retail management practice.

## 2. Second-hand consumption

Second-hand consumption is best contextualised within broader consumption theory, which offers a range of perspectives on why societies and individuals consume. Early work in consumption theory is devoted to objects as a medium for cultural meaning and messages in society (McCracken, 1986). Developing work focuses on symbolic forms of consumption as it relates to the construction of the self and individual identity (Gregson and Crewe, 1997; McCracken, 1986). More recently, identity construction through consumption has also been shown to be just as much about distancing the self from certain meanings and messages as it is about aligning the self with others (Weinstein, 2014). Thus, consumption is a highly strategic practice and can relay cultural, social and personal meanings (Holt, 1995). This notion exists in second-hand consumption research as a process whereby consumers actively construct and express identity, meaning, and experience (e.g., Roux and Korchia, 2006; Na'amneh and Al Husban, 2012).

Prior research focuses on second-hand consumption from two perspectives: (1) disposing of goods and (2) acquiring used goods. These two perspectives are intertwined and linked phases in the consumption cycle, as disposing may result in acquiring, which keeps the cycle of consumption developing (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). Second-hand consumption has also been examined in a range of contexts, including vintage (Cervellon et al., 2012; Roux and Korchia, 2006) and luxury (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). Indeed, second-hand consumption has become rewarding in its own right (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). There is also a developing stream of literature that explores the underlying motivations for second-hand consumption (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Stone, Horne and Hibbert, 1996).

### 2.1. Second-hand consumption motivations

The second-hand consumption literature offers varied and nuanced explanations for second-hand consumption motivations. In line with motivation theory (McGuire, 1974), second-hand consumption motives are primarily geared towards individual gratification and satisfaction. Accepting that people are complex consumers with varied and fluid incentive structures, second-hand consumption scholars have examined many motivations across groups of consumers, as well as within individuals (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Belk et al., 1988; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Stone, Horne and Hibbert, 1996). Economic and recreational motives are commonly discussed as the main and intertwined drivers to second-hand consumption (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Guiot and Roux, 2010). According to Guiot and Roux (2010), motivations for second-hand shopping span three categories: economic, recreational and critical motivations. Building on this, we explore a fourth category of second-hand shopping motivations, namely fashion.

#### 2.1.1. Critical motivations

Critical motivations allow consumers to disassociate from the mainstream market for moral or ethical reasons, including distance from the system (i.e., buying second-hand goods distances one from the distaste of consumer society) and ethics and ecology (i.e., recycling, fighting against waste) (Guiot and Roux, 2010; Pierce and Paulos, 2011). In terms of distance from the system, shopping second-hand is a way for consumers exercise rebellion against a society that promotes waste and 'throw-away' behaviours (Roux and Korchia, 2006), as well as to express anti-corporate motivations such as avoiding large corporate chains (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010). In this way, consumers create and express a socially conscious self through the choice of second-hand consumption (Roux and Korchia, 2006). In terms of ethics and ecology, second-hand shopping enables consumers to express sustainable and conscientious consumption practices (Carrigan et al., 2013). Indeed, an eco-movement has emerged among consumers who are expressing concerns about what is seen as excessive, wasteful and/or environmentally unsound and are seeking to reduce the impact of the production of goods on their health, the environment and society at large (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Cervellon et al., 2012; Ha-Brookshire and Hodges, 2009).

#### 2.1.2. Economic motivations

Economic motivations largely stem from price sensitivity or price consciousness and include the gratifying role of price, the search for a fair price and bargain hunting (Guiot and Roux, 2010). These motivations therefore concern the budgetary allocation that consumers must make across different kinds of expenditures, which often lead to priority management and price appraisals. In this way, second-hand shopping is able to ease the financial pressure on shoppers by enabling them to satisfy their primary needs without depriving them of less essential acquisitions (Guiot and Roux, 2010). Economic motivations appear in the earliest studies in the field, which broadly emphasise the financial benefits of second-hand shopping (Williams and Paddock, 2003), as well as in later studies conducted in recreational contexts about shoppers' hopes to find cheaper products and obtain bargains (Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Stone, Horne, and Hibbert, 1996). For low-income consumers, purchasing second-hand is a conflict-avoidance strategy to alleviate the burden of poverty (Hamilton, 2009). Since second-hand goods are generally cheaper than newer ones, the indirect price discrimination between used and new goods also encourages thrifty consumers to buy second-hand products (Anderson and Ginsburgh, 1994).

#### 2.1.3. Recreational motivations

Recreational motivations include visual stimulation and excitement due to the plethora of goods, treasure hunting, authenticity, social interaction, and nostalgic pleasure (Belk et al., 1988; Guiot and Roux, 2010). Moreover, the pleasure of browsing, bargaining and the freedom from daily routine (Belk et al., 1988; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon, 2001) are also pleasures uniquely provided by second-hand retailers. Given that the characteristics of second-hand retailers differ from traditional channels, second-hand shopping experiences also offer theatricality and improvisatory products sales (Guiot and Roux, 2010). These motivations have given rise to second-hand shopping enthusiasts and collectors. For these shoppers, and closely linked to the thrill of the hunt and of finding the unexpected, is the hope of finding something meaningful that are often markers of identity (Belk, 2001; DeLong et al., 2005). According to DeLong et al. (2005), second-hand retailers offer opportunities to experience a museum-like atmosphere in the stores, with touchable merchandise. Further, the socialisation that occurs within these environments creates a sense of community between buyers and sellers

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