

Beyond Price and Sustainability: Young Consumers' Second-Hand Purchasing Intentions on Digital Resale Platforms

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Abstract. The growing popularity of second-hand products among young consumers has attracted increasing attention due to their economic, environmental, and digital marketplace implications. This study examines the key factors influencing young consumers' intentions to purchase second-hand products within the context of online resale platforms and circular consumption systems. Using a qualitative research design, focus group interviews were conducted with 18 participants aged 18–30. The analysis identified five primary influences: economic motivations, need for uniqueness, perceived value, environmental beliefs, and the functionality of online platforms. Affordability, cost-effectiveness, and savings emerged as major drivers of second-hand purchasing intentions. However, these benefits were often evaluated alongside perceived risks related to product quality, hygiene, authenticity, and transaction reliability. Findings indicate that online platforms play an important role in reducing these uncertainties by functioning as digital service systems that support information transparency and trust-building. Features such as user reviews, seller ratings, secure payment systems, and curated product information were perceived as important trust mechanisms that enhance confidence in second-hand transactions. The need for uniqueness was linked not only to style differentiation but also to self-confidence and identity formation, extending existing knowledge on symbolic consumption. Environmental beliefs also influenced purchasing intentions, although sustainability often served as a secondary justification for purchases primarily driven by economic or stylistic motivations. By positioning second-hand consumption within platform-enabled circular retail systems, this study contributes to the literature on digital consumption and service systems by demonstrating how online marketplace functionalities and trust mechanisms shape consumer participation in second-hand commerce. The findings provide practical implications for businesses, online platforms, and policymakers seeking to strengthen digital trust, promote sustainable consumption, and support circular economy initiatives.

Keywords: economic motivation, qualitative study, second-hand products, sustainability, young consumers

1. Introduction

The rising demand for second-hand products among young consumers has become a significant trend, driven by social, economic, and environmental considerations. This shift reflects not only budget-conscious purchasing but also growing alignment with sustainable consumption practices. As resale platforms and circular economy initiatives expand globally, understanding why young consumers increasingly adopt second-hand products has become a relevant and timely research concern (Koay, Cheah, & Lom, 2022).

Previous research has identified several drivers shaping second-hand consumption. For example, affordability remains a dominant motivation, as second-hand purchases provide cost-effective solutions for both essential and discretionary needs. Beyond economic motivations, the search for uniqueness and individuality encourages young consumers to pursue rare or distinctive items that enable personal expression (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012). The digitalization of resale markets has further enhanced convenience and accessibility, with online platforms offering product variety, price transparency, and ease of transaction (Widia, Setyanto, & Laksana, 2021). Environmental considerations also increasingly influence consumer behavior, as concerns about sustainability, waste reduction, and resource conservation shape positive attitudes toward second-hand markets (Prisco, Ricciardi, Percuoco, & Basile, 2025).

While these factors are well established, existing studies often examine them in isolation rather than exploring their interconnections. As researchers point out, the literature remains fragmented, offering limited insight into how economic, social, and environmental motivations interact to influence purchase intentions. Moreover, research on young consumers, a demographic that is simultaneously more digitally active, environmentally aware, and financially constrained, remains underdeveloped (Moon, Kuris, & Tahara, 2023). Clarifying how these multiple drivers converge in shaping second-hand consumption is critical, both theoretically and practically, for understanding sustainable consumer behavior.

This study addresses this gap by examining how economic motivations, perceived value, individuality, online shopping usefulness, and environmental beliefs collectively influence young consumers' intentions to purchase second-hand products. By adopting a qualitative approach through focus group interviews, the research moves beyond reiterating known drivers to uncover how these motivations intersect and shape purchasing decisions in practice. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- (i) To what extent do economic perceptions influence young consumers' intention to purchase second-hand products?
- (ii) How does perceived value shape these intentions?
- (iii) In what ways does the desire for individuality and self-expression affect second-hand consumption?
- (iv) How does the perceived usefulness of online platforms influence young consumers' purchase intentions?
- (v) How do environmental concerns and sustainability values contribute to young consumers' decision to buy second-hand products?

Through addressing these questions, this research aims to generate nuanced insights into the decision-making processes of young consumers. The findings are expected to inform both academic debates on sustainable consumption and managerial strategies for second-hand product brands, enabling them to design offerings that resonate more effectively with consumer motivations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous studies

Research on second-hand consumption has grown steadily, with scholars identifying a range of economic, social, technological, and environmental factors that influence consumer behavior. Table 1 summarizes key studies, highlighting the multidimensional nature of this phenomenon. Prior work consistently underscores the significance of affordability, perceived value, uniqueness, digital accessibility, and sustainability in shaping consumers' decisions, particularly among younger demographics.

Table 1: Summary of previous studies

Factor	Key findings	Studies
Economic motivations	Affordability is a key driver for young consumers, particularly students and early-career professionals. Economic benefits significantly shape consumer attitudes toward second-hand products.	Guiot and Roux (2010); Lestari and Asmarani (2021)
Perceived value	Perceived value, including quality, price, and utility, enhances consumer trust and confidence in purchasing second-hand goods.	Koay, Cheah, and Lom (2022); Lou, Chi, Janke, and Desch (2022)
Need for uniqueness	Consumers seek unique and rare items to express individuality and differentiate from mainstream fashion trends.	Guiot and Roux (2010); Cervellon, Carey, and Harms (2012)
Usefulness of online platforms	Online platforms improve accessibility, convenience, and ease of comparison, attracting a tech-savvy younger demographic.	Widia, Setyanto, and Laksana (2021); Yang, Xu, and Xing (2022)
Environmental beliefs	Awareness of environmental issues encourages sustainable consumption and the preference for second-hand products as a waste-reducing option.	Guiot and Roux (2010), Ek Styvén and Mariani (2020)
Purchase intention	Economic, social, and environmental motivations influence young consumers' purchase intentions. Aligning marketing strategies with consumer values fosters brand loyalty and drives sales.	Koay, Cheah, and Lom (2023); Lou, Chi, Janke, and Desch (2022)

2.2. Critical review of key concepts

2.2.1. Economic motivations

Economic considerations remain central to second-hand consumption. Young consumers, often constrained by limited financial resources, perceive second-hand products as cost-effective solutions for accessing a variety of goods without compromising quality. Guiot and Roux (2010) emphasize affordability as a critical driver among students and early-career professionals, a finding echoed by Lestari and Asmarani (2021). However, most studies examine affordability as a stand-alone factor, offering limited insights into how it interacts with other motivations such as sustainability, digital trust, or online shopping convenience.

2.2.2. Perceived value and platform trust

Perceived value, encompassing price, quality, and utility, strongly influences consumer trust and willingness to purchase second-hand products. Weisstein, Choi, and Andersen (2019) found that concerns about quality and hygiene are especially salient for young consumers, who seek assurance before committing to purchases. In digital resale environments, these concerns are increasingly addressed through platform-based trust mechanisms such as user reviews, seller ratings, secure payment systems, and return policies. Prior studies suggest that online platforms do more than facilitate

transactions; they function as “credibility brokers” that reduce uncertainty and strengthen trust through information transparency and reputation systems. Nevertheless, existing research often treats perceived value as a rational and utilitarian calculation, overlooking how digital marketplace governance and trust mechanisms shape perceptions of authenticity, reliability, and purchase confidence.

2.2.3. Need for uniqueness

The desire for individuality and self-expression is a recurring theme in second-hand consumption. Young consumers pursue rare or distinctive items to differentiate themselves from mass-market trends (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012). While this insight is valuable, prior studies have not fully examined how digital platforms simultaneously enable access to unique products while commodifying them at scale through algorithmic recommendations and marketplace visibility.

2.2.4. Usefulness of online platforms

The digital transformation of resale markets has revolutionized consumer access and convenience. Online platforms allow consumers to compare prices, evaluate options, and transact efficiently, making second-hand goods highly accessible to digitally literate youth segments (Widia, Setyanto, & Laksana, 2021; Yang, Xu, & Xing, 2022). Beyond functionality, platforms also shape trust, authenticity, and community engagement through reputation systems, curated product displays, and platform governance mechanisms. However, the literature still places greater emphasis on ease of use and accessibility than on the broader role of platforms as digital service systems that influence consumer decision-making and participation in circular retail ecosystems.

2.2.5. Environmental beliefs

Sustainability concerns increasingly shape young consumers’ decision-making, with second-hand products viewed as a way to reduce waste and conserve resources (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020). Yet, while the environmental rationale is widely acknowledged, prior studies often treat it as a generic driver rather than examining its relative importance compared with economic, symbolic, or platform-related motivations in actual purchase decisions.

2.2.6. Purchase intention

Young consumers’ intentions to purchase second-hand products reflect the interplay of economic savings, uniqueness, digital trust, platform convenience, and environmental values. Existing research highlights these dimensions individually (Koay, Cheah, & Lom, 2022; Lou, Chi, Janke, & Desch, 2022), but offers limited insight into how they combine or conflict in shaping purchase intentions within online resale ecosystems. This fragmented approach underscores the need for studies that integrate multiple motivations with digital marketplace dynamics to develop a more holistic understanding of second-hand consumption.

2.3. Research gap

In sum, while prior studies have provided important insights into the factors influencing second-hand consumption, the literature remains fragmented. Existing research largely examines motivations such as affordability, sustainability, uniqueness, and convenience in isolation, with limited attention to how these factors interact within digital resale environments or shape the experiences of young consumers specifically. Moreover, although online platforms are increasingly central to second-hand commerce, insufficient attention has been paid to their role as digital service systems that facilitate trust, information transparency, and platform-enabled consumer decision-making. Current studies tend to emphasize platform functionality and accessibility while overlooking how reputation systems, reviews, secure payment mechanisms, and marketplace governance influence perceptions of credibility and purchase confidence.

As argued above, this fragmented perspective limits understanding of the multidimensional and digitally mediated nature of second-hand purchasing behavior (Moon, Kuris, & Tahara, 2023).

Addressing this gap requires a qualitative approach that not only identifies key motivations but also explores how economic, symbolic, environmental, and platform-related factors intersect to shape young consumers' purchase intentions within online circular retail ecosystems.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the multifaceted factors influencing young consumers' intention to purchase second-hand products. A qualitative design was considered suitable because it allows for an in-depth exploration of consumer motivations, perceptions, and experiences that may not be easily captured through quantitative surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus group interviews were adopted to generate interactive discussions among participants, providing a rich understanding of collective and individual perspectives on second-hand consumption (Sinh, 2024a).

3.2. Sampling and data collection

In line with previous studies on young consumer behavior, this research defined "young consumers" as individuals aged between 18 and 30. Within this range, participants were segmented into three age groups: 18-21, 22-25, and 26-30. This segmentation ensured coverage of late adolescents, university-aged consumers, and early-career professionals, capturing variation in life stage and consumption priorities, consistent with prior classifications in consumer and sustainability research (Fernando, Sivakumaran, & Suganthi, 2018; Sinh, 2024b).

A total of 18 participants took part in three focus group discussions, with six participants in each group. The focus groups were conducted offline in a meeting room at a university campus to facilitate interactive discussion and observation of participant engagement. Each session lasted approximately 90-120 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Participants were recruited through online announcements on social media platforms, university student groups, and peer referrals to ensure diversity in demographic and consumption backgrounds. Eligibility criteria required that participants had either purchased or expressed a genuine interest in second-hand products, ensuring relevance to the research focus. To encourage participation, participants received a small refreshment allowance after completing the session.

Each focus group followed a semi-structured interview guide designed around six conceptual factors identified in the literature: economic motivation, perceived value, need for uniqueness, usefulness of online platforms, environmental beliefs, and purchase intention. A trained moderator facilitated the discussions to encourage open dialogue, balanced participation, and deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. Follow-up probing questions were used when necessary to clarify responses and capture richer insights.

Prior to participation, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained before each session began, and ethical protocols were followed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Although the sample size may appear modest, qualitative research prioritizes depth of insight over breadth (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2013). Theoretical saturation, the point at which no new themes emerged, was achieved across the three groups, supporting the adequacy of the sample. Table 2 summarizes the participant profiles.

Table 2: Participant profile

	Characteristics	N
Age	18-21	6
	22-25	6
	26-30	6
Gender	Male	8
	Female	10
Occupation	University students	9
	Full-time employees	6
	Freelancers/Self-employed	3
Monthly income	Below average income/student allowance	8
	Moderate income	7
	Stable professional income	3
Second-hand shopping experience	Regular buyers	10
	Occasional buyers	5
	Interested but limited experience	3
Primary purchase channel	Online resale platforms	12
	Physical thrift stores	3
	Both online and offline channels	3

3.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, an iterative process that enables the identification of patterns and themes across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and systematically coded. The analysis followed several stages, including data familiarization, initial code generation, theme development, theme review, and refinement. Initial codes were derived both deductively from the conceptual framework and inductively from participants' responses to capture emerging insights beyond the existing literature.

To enhance trustworthiness and analytical rigor, two independent coders reviewed the transcripts and coding structure. Each coder initially analyzed the transcripts separately and developed preliminary coding categories. The coders then compared their coding results and discussed discrepancies in interpretation, category definitions, and theme boundaries. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus-building, with revisions made to the coding framework where necessary to improve clarity and consistency. This iterative process helped refine overlapping categories and strengthen the coherence of higher-order themes.

Inter-coder agreement was assessed during the coding process to ensure consistency in theme identification. The level of agreement between the two coders was considered satisfactory, indicating reliability in the interpretation of the qualitative data. In addition, reflective discussions among the research team were conducted throughout the analysis process to minimize subjective bias and ensure that the final themes accurately represented participants' perspectives.

The analysis revealed five significant themes shaping purchase intentions: economic motivation, perceived value, need for uniqueness, usefulness of online platforms, and environmental beliefs. The thematic structure presented in Figure 1 was developed through a hybrid deductive–inductive approach. The initial coding framework was informed by the six conceptual factors identified in the literature and incorporated into the semi-structured interview guide. However, during the coding process, additional patterns, relationships, and sub-themes emerged inductively from participants' discussions, leading to the refinement and consolidation of categories. For example, issues related to trust, hygiene, authenticity, and platform credibility emerged more strongly than anticipated and became integrated into the broader themes of perceived value and online platform usefulness. While affordability was the most frequently cited driver, participants also expressed concerns about quality, hygiene, authenticity, and transaction risk when considering second-hand goods. The desire for uniqueness and the trust-

building functions of online platforms further influenced purchasing decisions, while environmental awareness reflected a broader commitment to sustainable consumption practices. This combination of deductive guidance and inductive refinement enabled the analysis to remain theoretically grounded while still capturing unexpected insights from participants' experiences.

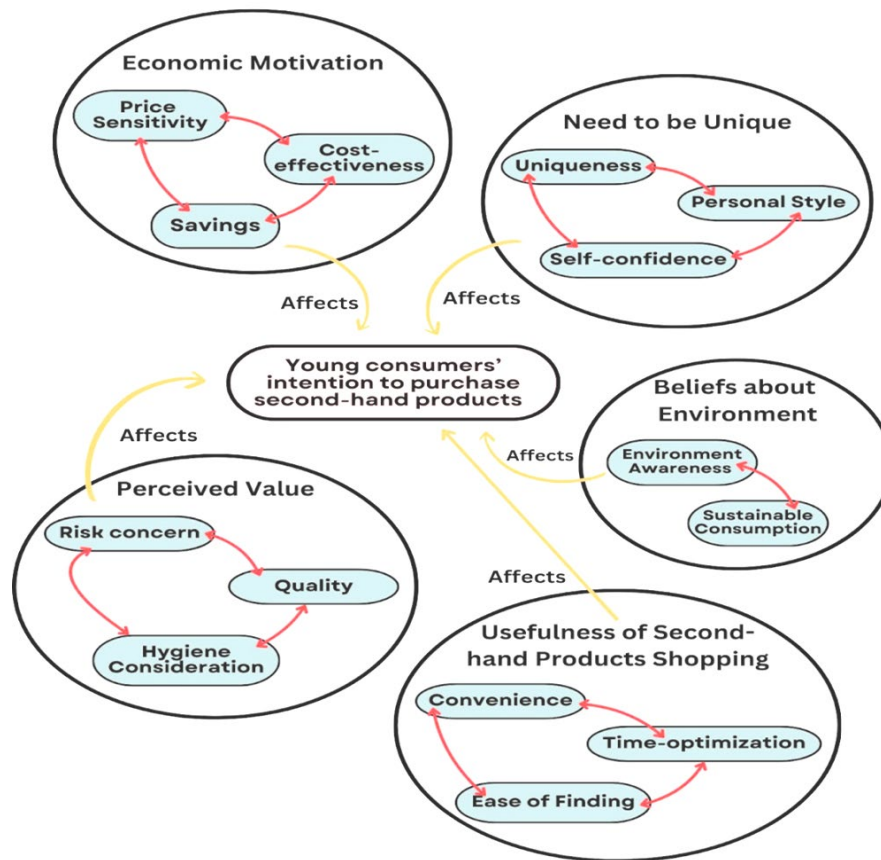


Fig. 1: Coding diagram

To ensure the rigor and reliability of the findings, several validity tests were conducted. First, triangulation was applied by comparing themes across different focus groups to confirm consistency. Second, peer debriefing was used, with two independent coders reviewing the coding and interpretation of themes to minimize individual bias. Third, member checking was employed by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants, allowing them to verify the accuracy and resonance of interpretations. Finally, an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic memos was maintained to enhance transparency and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These steps collectively strengthen the trustworthiness of the study and support the validity of its conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The thematic analysis revealed five dominant factors influencing young consumers' intention to purchase second-hand products: economic motivation, need for uniqueness, perceived value, environmental beliefs, and usefulness of online platforms. While consistent with prior studies, the findings also uncover how these factors interact, reinforce, or sometimes conflict in shaping decisions. Table 3 summarizes the themes.

Table 3: Thematic analysis

Themes	Categories	Interpretation	Links
Economic motivation	Price sensitivity; Savings; Cost-effectiveness; Value comparison	Economic considerations strongly shape second-hand purchasing decisions. Young consumers are motivated by affordability, financial efficiency, and the ability to maximize limited budgets.	Greater affordability and cost savings increase willingness to purchase second-hand products and support continued purchasing behavior.
Need for uniqueness	Personal style; Self-expression; Uniqueness; Self-confidence	Young consumers use second-hand products to express individuality, differentiate themselves from mass-market trends, and strengthen self-confidence.	The desire for self-expression and individuality positively influences purchase intention toward second-hand products.
Perceived value	Product quality; Hygiene considerations; Risk concerns; Trustworthiness	Consumers evaluate second-hand products by balancing expected quality, durability, and utility against concerns about hygiene, fraud, and transaction risk.	Positive perceptions of quality and trust increase purchase intention, while concerns about hygiene and risk weaken purchase intention.
Environmental beliefs	Environmental awareness; Sustainability; Eco-consciousness; Sustainable consumption	Environmental concerns motivate consumers to participate in sustainable and responsible consumption practices.	Sustainability beliefs positively reinforce intentions to purchase second-hand products.
Usefulness of online platforms	Convenience; User experience; Time optimization; Platform trust; Risk in online purchases	Online platforms enhance accessibility, convenience, and efficiency in second-hand shopping, while trust and safety concerns continue to influence platform usage.	Convenient and trustworthy online platforms strengthen purchase intention by reducing uncertainty and improving shopping experiences.
Purchase intention	Continued preference for second-hand products; Future purchase intention	Purchase intention reflects the combined influence of economic, environmental, symbolic, and platform-related motivations.	Young consumers demonstrate continued willingness to engage in second-hand consumption when perceived benefits outweigh risks.

Across the focus groups, participants emphasized affordability and savings as central to their purchasing decisions, but these were often balanced against concerns about quality and hygiene. The search for individuality was also prominent, with rare or distinctive items enhancing confidence and self-expression. Online platforms acted as both enablers and gatekeepers, facilitating access but also raising concerns about authenticity and trust. Environmental awareness provided an additional moral justification for second-hand purchases, though often secondary to economic and value considerations.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Economic motivation

Economic factors significantly influence young consumers' decisions to purchase second-hand products, echoing prior findings that affordability and cost savings are primary drivers (Lestari & Asmarani, 2021; Koay, Cheah, & Lom, 2022). Participants consistently emphasized that second-hand products should be substantially cheaper than new alternatives. As one participant explained: "I pay a

lot of attention to the price when purchasing second-hand products. After all, the item is already used, so the price must be reasonable” (Interviewee 4, #21).

The findings show that economic motivation is primarily associated with financial efficiency, affordability, and the opportunity to maximize limited budgets. Participants viewed second-hand consumption as a practical strategy for reducing expenses and allocating money to other needs. For example, one participant noted: “Finding affordable second-hand items allows me to save money for other purchases” (Interviewee 2, #144).

These findings reinforce prior research highlighting the importance of affordability in second-hand consumption. However, while economic motivation explains why consumers are attracted to second-hand markets initially, affordability alone does not guarantee purchase intention. Consumers still evaluate whether the product is trustworthy, hygienic, and reliable, suggesting that economic motivation operates as an initial driver rather than a complete assessment of the product.

4.2.2. Need for uniqueness

The desire for individuality and self-expression emerged as a powerful motivator, confirming prior studies (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012). Participants described second-hand products as tools for identity construction: “It reflects my personality through clothing and makes others think I have a better sense of style” (Interviewee 5, #102). The appeal of exclusivity was also central: “I am interested in second-hand products as long as they feel unique and one-of-a-kind” (Interviewee 4, #73).

Importantly, uniqueness was linked to emotional empowerment. One noted: “Feeling confident when wearing second-hand products, feeling unique, non-duplicated, and different” (Interviewee 4, #39). This suggests that second-hand products do more than differentiate consumers stylistically – they also reinforce confidence and self-worth. This adds nuance to the literature by showing how uniqueness supports not only personal style but also broader identity and self-efficacy needs, extending beyond what prior research has highlighted.

4.2.3. Perceived value

Perceived value, referring to consumers’ evaluation of quality, durability, hygiene, risk, and trust, strongly shaped purchasing intentions, consistent with Koay, Cheah, and Lom (2022). Unlike economic motivation, which focuses on affordability and savings, perceived value reflects the balance between expected benefits and perceived risks associated with second-hand products. Durability was viewed as essential: “Quality is very important to me, so the durability of the item for me is indispensable” (Interviewee 5, #94).

At the same time, concerns about fraud, authenticity, and hygiene emerged as major barriers. One participant worried: “I’m afraid that the store might deliver the wrong items or something completely inappropriate” (Interviewee 2, #35). Another admitted: “My biggest concern is cleanliness... I would wash the item multiple times and clean it thoroughly before wearing it” (Interviewee 1, #37). These concerns align with earlier studies (Han, Lang, & Qiu, 2022; Lou, Chi, Janke, & Desch, 2022), but the findings further demonstrate that consumers continuously weigh product quality and trustworthiness against perceived risks.

Importantly, online platform mechanisms such as reviews, guarantees, return policies, and seller ratings helped reduce uncertainty and strengthen perceived value. This suggests that perceived value is not fixed but shaped through credibility and trust mechanisms embedded within digital resale platforms.

4.2.4. Usefulness of online platforms

Digital platforms were indispensable in enabling second-hand shopping, consistent with Widia, Setyanto, and Laksana (2021) and Yang, Xu, and Xing (2022). Participants stressed convenience: “It’s

very fast and convenient... also saving time and my energy” (Interviewee 4, #52). Curation features enhanced efficiency: “While buying online, the stores have filtered out all the clothes, so when I scroll to find the right one, it is faster and easier to find” (Interviewee 2, #49). Accessibility and delivery further motivated purchases: “It’s very convenient that I can easily find models and products at suitable prices, and can be delivered door-to-door” (Interviewee 5, #48).

Beyond convenience, however, the findings reveal that platforms function as credibility brokers. Features such as reviews, secure payment systems, and clear descriptions actively reduce risk perceptions and strengthen perceived value. This extends prior studies, which emphasized accessibility, by showing how digital trust mechanisms mediate economic and quality concerns in second-hand shopping.

4.2.5 Environmental beliefs

Environmental awareness was recognized as a motivator, consistent with Silva, Santos, Duarte, and Vlačić (2021) and Prisco, Ricciardi, Percuoco, and Basile (2025). One participant reflected: “Reusing items that are still usable is more environmentally friendly” (Interviewee 6, #187). Others emphasized sustainability through extending product lifespan: “I’ll buy it again and use it until it’s completely worn out” (Interviewee 1, #113).

However, the findings suggest that environmental beliefs often function as secondary justifications rather than primary purchase drivers. Participants commonly viewed sustainability as an added benefit that supported decisions already motivated by affordability, uniqueness, or convenience. This finding aligns with the attitude–behavior gap literature, where positive environmental attitudes do not always translate into environmentally driven purchasing behavior. Instead, sustainability appears to act as a form of moral justification that reinforces economically or stylistically motivated consumption choices.

These findings extend prior research by showing that environmental beliefs alone may be insufficient to drive second-hand consumption unless combined with practical and personal benefits such as affordability, uniqueness, and platform convenience.

4.2.6 Integrative insights

Overall, the findings demonstrate that young consumers’ second-hand purchasing intentions are shaped not by isolated motivations, but by continuous trade-offs among utilitarian, symbolic, and moral considerations. Affordability creates initial interest, but purchase decisions are often constrained by concerns about quality, hygiene, and transaction risk. Similarly, consumers value uniqueness and self-expression, yet still question the authenticity and reliability of products found through online platforms. Environmental beliefs also influence decisions, although sustainability is frequently balanced against convenience, accessibility, and price advantages.

Three central tensions emerged from the findings: (i) affordability versus hygiene and quality risk; (ii) uniqueness versus authenticity in digital marketplaces; and (iii) environmental values versus convenience and economic benefits. These trade-offs reveal that second-hand consumption is not a straightforward sustainability behavior, but a negotiated decision-making process shaped by competing motivations and mediated by online platform trust mechanisms.

By emphasizing these intersections and tensions, this study extends prior research that has typically examined second-hand consumption drivers independently. The findings suggest that second-hand purchasing should be understood as an integrated decision system in which motivations converge, conflict, and are continuously evaluated within digitally mediated resale environments

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Conclusion

This study explored the factors shaping young consumers' intentions to purchase second-hand products, highlighting the roles of economic motivations, need for uniqueness, perceived value, environmental beliefs, and online platform usefulness. While affordability, cost-effectiveness, and savings were confirmed as central drivers, the findings show that second-hand purchase decisions are shaped by ongoing trade-offs rather than by isolated motivations. Economic benefits attracted consumers to second-hand products, but these advantages were frequently weighed against concerns about quality, hygiene, and transaction risk (Lestari & Asmarani, 2021; Koay, Cheah, & Lom, 2023).

The findings also revealed that the desire for uniqueness extended beyond individuality and personal style (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012) by contributing to self-confidence and identity construction. At the same time, consumers continuously balanced the appeal of unique products against concerns about authenticity and reliability in online marketplaces. Perceived value therefore emerged as a negotiated balance between cost advantages and perceived risks (Koay, Cheah, & Lom, 2023; Lou, Chi, Janke, & Desch, 2022), while online platforms functioned as credibility brokers that reduced uncertainty through reviews, secure payments, seller ratings, and curated product displays (Widia, Setyanto, & Laksana, 2021; Moon, Kuris, & Tahara, 2023).

Environmental beliefs also influenced purchasing intentions, although sustainability often acted as a secondary justification rather than the primary driver of behavior. Participants frequently viewed eco-consciousness as an added benefit that reinforced decisions initially motivated by affordability, convenience, or uniqueness (Prisco, Ricciardi, Percuoco, & Basile, 2025). This reflects a broader tension between environmental values and practical consumption considerations such as price and convenience.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to consumer behavior literature by demonstrating that second-hand consumption is best understood as a dynamic negotiation among utilitarian (economic), symbolic (uniqueness and identity), and moral (environmental) motivations mediated by digital trust mechanisms. By emphasizing key tensions, such as affordability versus hygiene risk, uniqueness versus authenticity, and eco-consciousness versus convenience, this study extends prior fragmented research and offers a more integrated understanding of second-hand consumer decision-making within digitally mediated resale ecosystems

5.2. Managerial implications

The study provides several actionable implications for businesses and policy-makers seeking to strengthen participation in second-hand consumption and digitally mediated circular retail systems.

5.2.1. For businesses

(i) Balance affordability with trust: Price-sensitive consumers expect second-hand products to be cheaper than new ones, but hygiene, authenticity, and quality concerns can reduce willingness to purchase. Businesses and digital platforms should strengthen trust mechanisms through transparent product descriptions, product condition grading systems, seller verification, hygiene certification, and return guarantees. Escrow payment systems and secure transactions can further reduce perceived risk.

(ii) Enhance digital service-system functionality: Since online platforms function as credibility brokers, platform operators should invest in digital trust and information transparency mechanisms. Features such as verified reviews, AI-assisted product authentication, detailed product imagery, authenticity indicators, and algorithmic matching systems that recommend rare or personalized items can improve both trust and user experience.

(iii) Highlight uniqueness and individuality: Marketing strategies should position second-hand products not only as affordable alternatives but also as symbols of individuality, self-expression, and

identity construction. Personalized recommendations and curated collections of unique products may particularly appeal to younger consumers seeking differentiation.

(iv) Position sustainability as added value: Although environmental concerns were often secondary motivations, businesses can integrate sustainability messaging with practical benefits such as affordability, convenience, and uniqueness. Framing second-hand shopping as both economically beneficial and environmentally responsible may strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5.2.2. For policy-makers

(i) Support circular economy platforms: Governments and public institutions can encourage the growth of second-hand digital marketplaces through incentives, partnerships, and policies that promote reuse, recycling, and circular retail systems.

(ii) Develop resale and hygiene standards: Policymakers could introduce certified resale standards, hygiene guidelines, and consumer protection frameworks to increase trust in second-hand transactions and reduce concerns about product quality and safety.

(iii) Promote consumer education: Public education campaigns should encourage sustainable consumption by providing guidance on product cleaning, safe reuse practices, and the environmental benefits of second-hand consumption. Such initiatives may help normalize second-hand shopping among younger consumers.

(iv) Normalize second-hand consumption culture: Public campaigns and collaborations with educational institutions, influencers, and online platforms can help reposition second-hand shopping as a socially acceptable and environmentally responsible consumption practice rather than merely a low-cost alternative.

Together, these measures can strengthen trust, improve platform credibility, encourage sustainable consumption, and support the long-term development of circular economy ecosystems.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the focus group sample was relatively small and geographically limited, which constrains generalizability. Future research could employ larger-scale surveys or cross-country comparisons to validate these insights. Second, while this study identified multiple drivers, it did not systematically analyze how motivations interact statistically. Quantitative approaches such as structural equation modeling could explore these relationships more rigorously. Third, product categories may shape perceptions differently (e.g., clothing vs. electronics); future work could examine category-specific dynamics. Finally, as digital platforms evolve, longitudinal studies could investigate how emerging trust mechanisms (e.g., AI-driven verification, blockchain) reshape second-hand consumption patterns.

By addressing these limitations, future research can build on this study's qualitative insights to develop a more comprehensive understanding of young consumers' adoption of second-hand products.

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Appendix

Coding and categories

Themes	Categories	Codes	Quotes	Insights
Economic motivation	Price sensitivity	Savings	“Emphasizes cost savings” (Interviewee 3, #16).	Economic considerations play a significant role, with a strong focus on affordability and perceived value, reinforcing cost-saving and price sensitivity.
		Cost-effectiveness	“Balances shopping and other expenses” (Interviewee 2, #18). “Cost-effectiveness is key when comparing second-hand and new products” (Interviewee 3, #22).	
	Value comparison	Comparison of price and quality	“The relation between price and quality affects decisions” (Interviewee 1, #23).	
Need for uniqueness	Personal style and self-expression	Uniqueness	“Expresses personal style through rare items” (Interviewee 3, #38; Interviewee 4, #39). “Second-hand shopping helps create a unique personal style” (Interviewee 1, #40).	Young consumers are motivated by the ability to express their individuality through unique, one-of-a-kind items.
		Self-confidence	“Shopping second-hand boosts self-confidence by reflecting individuality” (Interviewee 4, #39).	
Perceived value	Product quality and risk concerns	Quality	“Quality is a crucial factor in second-hand purchases” (Interviewee 3, #26; Interviewee 1, #27).	Perceived value, including quality and hygiene, plays a central role in shaping purchasing intentions.
		Hygiene considerations	“Concerns over hygiene affect purchasing decisions” (Interviewee 5, #32).	
		Risk concerns	“Low expectations help minimize perceived risks” (Interviewee 4, #31).	
Environmental beliefs	Sustainability and eco-consciousness	Environmental awareness	“Buying second-hand products reduces waste” (Interviewee 1, #50). “Sustainability influences decisions” (Interviewee 4, #116).	Environmental concerns are a strong motivator for purchasing second-hand products, reflecting a desire to reduce waste and promote sustainable consumption.
		Sustainable consumption	“Sustainability aligns with eco-conscious consumption habits” (Interviewee 2, #51).	
Usefulness of online platforms	Convenience and user experience	Convenience	“Ease of use and convenience enhance shopping experiences” (Interviewee 5, #45).	The convenience of online platforms significantly impacts purchase decisions, but trust and safety concerns remain barriers for some consumers.
		Time-optimization	“Online platforms save time in finding products” (Interviewee 1, #42; Interviewee 3, #49).	
	Risk in online purchases	Risk concern	“Trust in the quality and safety of online second-hand products varies” (Interviewee 4, #110).	

Purchase intention	Continued preference for second-hand products	Future purchase intent	“Intends to continue buying second-hand products due to cost-effectiveness” (Interviewee 3, #54).	Overall, the factors discussed above contribute to a growing trend of second-hand product consumption among young consumers, with intentions supported by economic, environmental, and personal style motivations.
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