

Bachelor's Thesis

Sustainability or Consumerism? – Consumer Motivations and Behaviors in Second-Hand Apparel Shopping

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Abstract

The second-hand apparel market has seen substantial growth in recent years, both online and offline. Although second-hand shopping is often praised as a sustainable alternative to fast fashion, there is a significant gap in understanding how certain consumer behaviors, driven by the market's expansion, may unintentionally fuel consumerism. This gap is particularly evident in the disconnect between consumers' sustainable intentions and materialistic behaviors. Thus, the question arises whether second-hand apparel shopping represents genuine sustainable consumption or merely consumeristic behavior disguised as sustainability.

This thesis aims to address the knowledge gap by investigating consumer motivations and behaviors in the context of sustainability and consumerism. The study offers an in-depth analysis of sustainable and consumeristic behaviors and how they are related to motivations within the second-hand apparel industry. Using Social Identity Theory, the thesis investigates social influences that drive consumer decisions, emphasizing how social identity-based motivations shape buying behavior. This conceptual thesis is based on a review of existing literature, including journal articles, sustainability reports and book chapters. By analyzing the relationship between social identities and consumption patterns, this research offers a nuanced perspective on the intention-behavior gap present in today's second-hand apparel market.

The findings suggest that a combination of sustainability and consumerism, often in contradictory ways, shape consumer motivations and behaviors in second-hand apparel shopping. The five key motivations driving second-hand shopping are sustainability, uniqueness, economic motivation, nostalgia and treasure hunting. These motivations are all interconnected with social, identity-driven influences, such as social belonging and status, shaping consumer decisions. While sustainability remains a key driver, materialistic behaviors, amplified by online platforms and societal pressures, ultimately partially contradict the principles of sustainable consumption. Thus, the second-hand apparel market cannot be fully categorized as sustainable consumption, as consumeristic behaviors hinder its environmental benefits. However, the scope of these findings is limited by the availability of empirical data and the narrow sample, restricting the generalizability of the results across different demographic groups.