

A Theoretical Lens on Sustainable Fashion in Online Shopping: Integrating SOR, TPB, and Second-Hand Shopping Motivation Theories

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Abstract

The fashion industry is heavily influenced by consumer demand and results on fast fashion sector, due to the frequent shifts in trends. Increasingly, consumers are leaning towards ethical consumption, such as second-hand clothing, as they become aware of the environmental consequences. This conceptual paper presents preliminary research aimed at identifying the factors influencing young consumers' purchase of second-hand apparel via social media platforms. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, the proposed conceptual framework integrates the Second-hand Shopping Motivation Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as moderating constructs. The research examines the relationships between these variables, with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) serving as the *Stimulus*, attitude and online engagement as the *Organism*, and purchase intention as the *Response*. Furthermore, the influence on purchase intention is moderated by ego involvement and treasure-hunting fun. Primary data for this empirical research will be collected through a questionnaire, focusing on Generation Z in Malaysia. It is anticipated that the findings will highlight the significance of key variables and their relationships in shaping the consumption of second-hand apparel on social commerce sites. Accordingly, this research is expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to industries such as upcycling, sustainable fashion, retail, and textile recycling.

Keywords: Generation Z, Fashion Industry, Purchase Intention, Second-Hand Clothing, Social Commerce Sites

Introduction

It is well acknowledged that the fashion industry plays a major role in various social and environmental issues, impacting the environment at every stage of its life cycle, from

manufacturing to the disposal of goods (McNeill & Venter, 2019). In recent years, fashion has been identified as one of the most unethical and polluting industries globally. Every phase of the life cycle, from cotton cultivation and dyeing to international shipping, contributes to environmental degradation, ultimately culminating in waste disposal and air pollution (Mizrachi & Tal, 2022).

Today, consumers wear their clothing for shorter durations than in the past (Zamani et al., 2017). Promoting sustainable fashion is facilitated by enhancing consumer awareness of the garment life cycle and its environmental impact (Harris et al., 2015). Opting for high-quality garments over fast fashion can increase the potential for reuse and extend the lifespan of clothing items (Degenstein et al., 2020). Consequently, consumers who make fewer purchases appear to be making more mindful decisions, driven by ethical and environmental concerns, to extend the life of their apparel. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged individuals to adopt mindsets that support more sustainable fashion consumption habits (Iran et al., 2022).

Key consumer segments across six different countries altered their attitudes towards apparel consumption during the pandemic (Chaithra et al., 2022). While some behavioural changes may not persist in the long term, others could have lasting effects on consumption patterns (Iran et al., 2022). Practices such as reuse, repair, and recycling address the waste generated through production and consumption processes. These practices also contribute to the creation of secondary raw materials, which can, in some instances, replace newly manufactured natural resources (Hysa et al., 2020). Contrary to popular belief, purchasing second-hand clothing reduces the negative social and environmental impacts of the fashion industry (Peña-Vinces et al., 2020).

The main drivers of second-hand clothing consumption include economic value, the hedonic experience of exploring a wide variety of products, and the social and environmental benefits of ethical consumption (Hur, 2020). Lower prices, greater bargaining power, enhanced value for branded items, nostalgic appeal, uniqueness, and comfort are all distinguishing features of the second-hand clothing market (Padmavathy et al., 2019). Furthermore, Ferraro et al. (2016) note that 83% of second-hand apparel consumers are motivated by the hedonistic, recreational, and economic appeal of fashion.

According to Pencarelli et al. (2019), Generation Z is characterised by critical thinking, thoroughness, and a conscientious approach to clothing choices, demonstrating a clear preference for garments with sustainable attributes. Additionally, environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly prominent trend in consumer behaviour. Younger consumers are more aware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry; they prioritise sustainability and actively seek engaging and meaningful shopping experiences (Tu et al., 2022).

Based on the formulation of the research topic, this research comprises nine objectives, which are as follows:

- i. To examine the influence of eWOM information adoption on attitude, online engagement, and purchase intention (**H1, H2, H3**)

- ii. To examine the influence of attitude and online engagement on purchase intention **(H4, H5)**
- iii. To measure the mediation effects of attitude and online engagement between eWOM information adoption and purchase intention **(H6, H7)**
- iv. To measure the moderating effects of ego involvement and treasure hunting fun between attitude and online engagement towards purchase intention **(H8, H9)**

Literature Review

Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion is considered a subset of the fast fashion industry (Woodside & Fine, 2019). Although fast fashion continues to dominate the clothing market, an increasing number of companies are adopting sustainable fashion principles. By modifying their production, distribution, marketing, and overall strategies, fashion brands are promoting more environmentally responsible purchasing behaviours (Chan, 2020). Consumers are encouraged to purchase fewer but higher-quality items, indicating a shift in priorities towards not only higher material standards but also trend-conscious, long-lasting fashion. As a result, garments are worn for extended periods (Jung & Jin, 2016), which reduces the likelihood of premature disposal (Hasanspahić, 2016).

While several global corporations are taking tangible steps to mitigate their environmental impact, the Malaysian fashion industry is beginning to acknowledge the importance of sustainable fashion. However, Malaysian consumers still require greater awareness regarding the environmental implications of their sustainable clothing purchases. Fast fashion companies typically offer trendy, affordable apparel to attract new customers and foster loyalty through low-cost fashion, thereby generating continued profit. Nonetheless, this business model significantly harms the environment (Rosli, 2018).

Second-Hand Clothing Consumption

In recent years, consumers have begun to recognise the drawbacks of fast fashion. As a result, many are increasingly turning to second-hand clothing and losing interest in disposable fashion (Ferraro et al., 2016; Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018). The second-hand apparel market is growing due to rising consumer interest in making environmentally friendly purchasing decisions (Liang & Xu, 2018). This market has experienced steady growth in recent years, particularly as younger consumers show greater interest in vintage and sustainable fashion (Su et al., 2019).

Second-hand clothing can be found through various channels, including consignment stores, flea markets, online retailers, and thrift shops (Sorensen & Jorgensen, 2019). In addition to physical storefronts, a growing number of online platforms now cater specifically to consignment and second-hand fashion (Ferraro et al., 2016; Romero, 2021).

In Malaysia, the primary outlets for second-hand clothing include flea markets, high-end consignment shops, haberdashery stores, and small kiosks. These venues typically offer pre-owned designer labels, vintage garments, and other second-hand items. The term haberdashery in this context refers to a business model in which clothing items are bundled together in sacks for resale. It describes establishments that resell clothing which has been

discarded or abandoned by its original owners. Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman is widely regarded as the birthplace of Malaysia's haberdashery trade (Kay, 2020).

Meanwhile, sustainable fashion has seen increasing popularity, particularly among Generation Z. Purchasing second-hand apparel is often referred to as thrifting or second-hand shopping. According to Holland (2021), over 40% of Generation Z purchased second-hand clothing within the past year. Previous studies on second-hand apparel consumers in Malaysia have shown that most respondents are young adults who are financially stable and able to meet their basic needs. These individuals also tend to be well-educated, have flexible schedules, and maintain a healthy work-life balance (Kay, 2020).

Second-Hand Clothing on Social Commerce Sites

Due to the rapid advancement of the internet and information technology, social networking platforms have evolved into global channels for social commerce (Al-Tit et al., 2020; Um, 2018). Online shoppers are increasingly seeking to learn from one another's knowledge and experiences to gather more information and make better-informed purchasing decisions (Horng & Wu, 2020). Social commerce refers to the direct selling of products and services through social media, where the entire shopping process occurs within social networking platforms. Social commerce features are now being integrated directly into popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok (Lamaj, 2023).

Similarly, whereas consumers in the previous decade often preferred to purchase second-hand goods from physical stores, this trend has shifted, particularly among the younger generation who now favour online shopping for a range of reasons. Digital platforms that minimise time and effort are increasingly preferred over traditional retail outlets (Xu et al., 2022). Expanding the resale of second-hand items online can improve retail sustainability by contributing to the development of a circular economy. In the fast fashion industry, the rise of online apparel resale has also been linked to a 36% decline in garment utilisation over the past 15 years (Iran & Schrader, 2017).

Younger consumers are increasingly engaging with these online marketplaces to buy and sell vintage band t-shirts, accessories, and used clothing. Platforms such as SellEzmudah.com, Carousell Malaysia, and other social media sites facilitate the buying and selling of second-hand goods (The Star Agency, 2021). In addition, second-hand clothing is sold through social networking sites like Facebook, where users can join groups to browse and purchase pre-owned items (Kudus, 2022).

Research Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative approach, focusing on analysing cause-and-effect relationships and making predictive inferences. For specific variables, analytical methods and statistical data will be employed (Apuke, 2017). The research design is conclusive, specifically utilising a cross-sectional format. This methodology is suitable for examining how young consumers' use of second-hand clothing on social commerce platforms influences various aspects of purchase intention, including attitude, online engagement, ego involvement, adoption of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information, and the enjoyment derived from treasure hunting.

To ensure that the sample reflected the intended demographic characteristics, non-probability sampling techniques were employed (Saunders et al., 2015). Although the data source was closely aligned with the research context, purposive sampling was used to reduce data collection errors (Obilor & Isaac, 2023). This research defines young consumers as individuals belonging to Generation Z (born 1997–2012), a cohort that is showing increasing interest in second-hand fashion (Chevalier, 2023; Entaban, 2022).

In alignment with the research questions, objectives, and hypotheses, this design informs the selection of the most appropriate instrument for addressing the research problem. Accordingly, surveys will be used to collect statistically significant data suitable for social research and quantitative analysis (Roopa & Rani, 2012). Thus, the research measurement items are listed in the table below.

Table 1.1
Component of the Instruments

Section	Number	Description	Scale	Items
A	1	Gender	Nominal	
	2	Age	Nominal	
	3	Occupation	Nominal	
	4	Education Level	Nominal	
	5	Range of Income	Nominal	
	6	Social Commerce Sites Usage	Nominal	
B	7-16	eWOM	Likert Scale	Credibility, Trust, Knowledge, Convenient, Agreement
C	17-19	Attitude	Likert Scale	Appeal, Good Idea, Positive Attitude
D	20-27	Online Engagement	Likert Scale	Knowledge, Learning, Attention, Updates, Passion, Enjoyment
E	28-30	Ego Involvement	Likert Scale	Importance, Image, Reflection of Self
F	31-33	Treasure Hunting Fun	Likert Scale	Experience, Interaction, Collectible Values
G	34-36	Purchase Intention	Likert Scale	Main Consumption, Increase, Preference

Furthermore, this research will employ Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse complex structural models comprising multiple constructs and indicators (Hair et al., 2011). PLS-SEM will be used to evaluate the relationship between the collected data and the proposed theoretical model, supporting the inductive reasoning approach adopted in this research (Fauzi, 2022).

In addition, mediation analysis will be conducted to examine intermediary variables that explain how or why an independent variable influences an outcome. Mediation analysis explores causal and temporal relationships to better understand the mechanisms through

which an intervention affects an outcome. According to Gunzler et al. (2013), when grounded in a suitable context and strong theoretical foundation, mediation analysis enables the development of more targeted and effective future interventions.

Moreover, the use of moderator variables has become increasingly common in empirical research on consumer-related phenomena. Moderators influence the strength or direction of the relationship between a predictor variable (X) and an outcome variable (Y), often altering the degree of association. To establish that a variable functions as a moderator, a statistically significant interaction (typically $p < 0.05$) between the predictor and the moderator must be demonstrated (King, 2013).

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The *Stimulus-Organism-Response* (SOR) theory has demonstrated applicability across various fields, including tourism, sustainable purchasing, and mindful consumer behaviour (Jung et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022). The selection of variables within the SOR framework in this research is informed by previous literature that has validated their relevance and function in each stage of the model. The current body of research provides a sound theoretical basis for the configuration of these variables, as the SOR framework operates through three interrelated stages: *stimulus*, *organism*, and *response*.

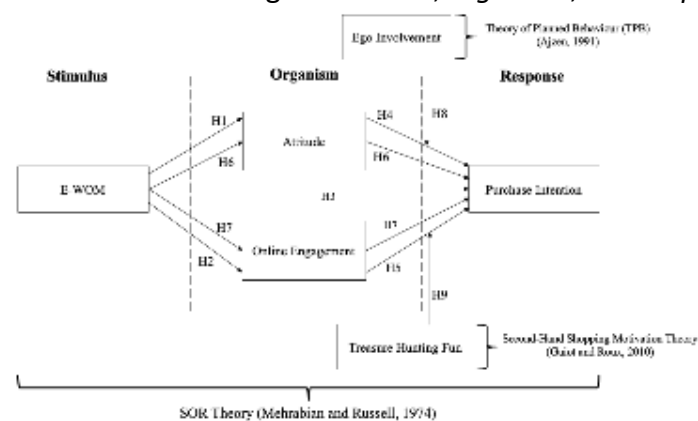


Figure 1.1 The Proposed Conceptual Framework

A research framework has been developed to examine the direct effects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as the *Stimulus*, online engagement and attitude as the *Organism*, and purchase intention as the *Response*, based on the conceptual structure illustrated in Figure 1.1. Furthermore, online engagement and attitude serve as mediating variables, given their intermediary position between *stimulus* and *response* in the SOR model. In addition, treasure-hunting fun is introduced as a moderating variable between online engagement and purchase intention, while ego involvement acts as a moderator between attitude and purchase intention. According to statistical analysis, the relationships among the variables are logically structured to illustrate their interconnections (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Across disciplines, the SOR model is typically applied in its entirety and is often complemented by additional theoretical perspectives (Sivasothy et al., 2024). Accordingly, to enhance the model's understanding purchase intention, this research integrates elements from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Second-hand Shopping Motivation Theory. This theoretical integration, which has previously been explored within broader

consumer behaviour contexts (Lai et al., 2018), is expected to yield deeper insights into the motivations driving second-hand apparel consumption.

According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), three primary constructs known as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intentions, which, in turn, determine an individual's behaviour. Yet, ego involvement is often overlooked in TPB-based research, despite its theoretical significance (Nawaz et al., 2021). In this research, ego involvement employed as a moderating variable. This decision is supported by previous research demonstrating the TPB's suitability for assessing ego involvement and confirming its relevance in understanding behavioural intentions and motivation (Park et al., 2015). Its role as a moderator between attitudes and purchase intentions is justified by the documented impact of ego involvement on behavioural outcomes (Dixit et al., 2019; Zahid et al., 2021).

A significant gap in understanding the drivers of consumer interaction with second-hand products is addressed by the Motivation Theory of Second-Hand Shopping (Guiot and Roux, 2010; Padmavathy et al., 2019). According to Guiot and Roux (2010), economic, critical, and recreational factors are the three primary motivations for second-hand clothing consumption. Given their emphasis on authenticity and distinctiveness, these characteristics remain highly relevant to contemporary consumer behaviour (Ferraro et al., 2016). This research focuses on recreational motivation as a moderating variable between online engagement and purchase intention, aiming to capture evolving behavioural trends among young consumers in the second-hand clothing market. This approach is grounded in previous research, which typically categorises the motivations for second-hand shopping within these three domains (Pencarelli et al., 2019; Prošić-Dvornić, 2022).

Expected Findings

This research will employ a range of analytical techniques to identify the factors influencing young consumers' decisions to purchase second-hand apparel via social commerce, thereby generating findings that are relevant and aligned with the study's objectives. Previous research has highlighted the significance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), attitude, and engagement in triggering the purchase of second-hand clothing (Jihad et al., 2020; Román-Augusto et al., 2022). Additionally, this research considers ego involvement and the treasure-hunting fun as moderating variables, both of which were identified as key factors driving purchase intention in earlier research on the sustainable fashion sector (Zahid et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). However, this research seeks to determine whether these factors significantly affect the purchasing intentions of young consumers. Key issues and participant characteristics will be examined within the specific context of second-hand clothing consumption via social commerce. Furthermore, by utilising dependent variables, the analysis will help refine less significant factors and highlight the most influential determinants of purchase intention within the specified demographic.

Conclusions

This article provides an overview of the research, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, and anticipated outcomes. It also proposes hypotheses aimed at identifying the factors influencing young consumers' decisions to purchase second-hand garments via social commerce. Furthermore, the research will involve surveying the target

population, which will serve as the primary source of data for analysis. The expected findings are anticipated to offer both theoretical contributions and practical implications across various industries. However, it is important to note that general demographic insights may differ from the anticipated findings, as the research focuses on a specific age group. Therefore, future studies are recommended to explore different demographic segments to examine how these variables may vary.

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