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Authors and affiliations:

Junestrand, Lauren-London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (onsite)

Alexander, Bethan-London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (onsite)

Title: The tri-dimensional role of sustainable secondhand clothing consumption in circular systems: a conceptual framework

Abstract

Problem definition

Sustainable fashion scholarship has advanced, yet the industry's unsustainability persists (Abbate et al., 2024; Mukendi et al., 2020; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Textile waste remains a key issue, exacerbated by unsustainable consumption (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Tang, 2023). Whilst circularity is seen as a model for circular transitions, its environmental impact reduction is debated, especially regarding clothing reuse (Corvellec et al., 2021; D'Itria and Aus, 2023; Sandin and Peters, 2018). Secondhand consumption (SHC) is booming (Herjanto et al., 2019) and remains crucial for achieving sustainability, given the role of the consumer in CE (Machado et al., 2019; Turunen and Gossen, 2024; Valor et al., 2022). There is a surge in scholarly calls challenging the crux of SHC, concerning when and how SHC consumption contributes to sustainability, which remains absent (Iran and Schrader, 2017; Moon, 2024; Sandberg, 2021). This study addresses this, proposing a conceptual framework to guide scholarly and practitioner avenues for further research.

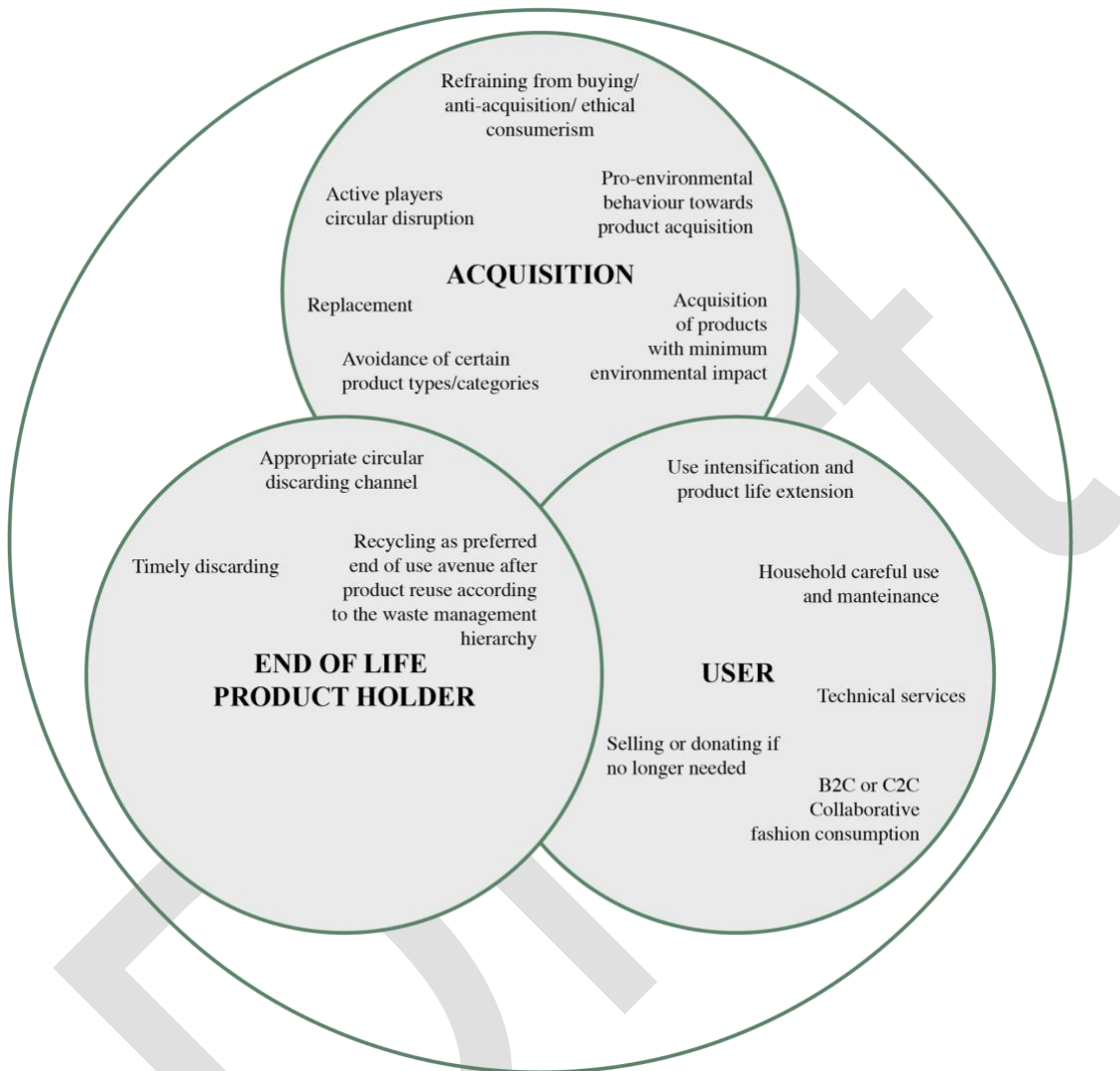
Methods

The research adopts a semi-systematic literature review methodology to explore key themes in sustainable consumption, circularity, circular fashion, secondhand consumption, textile waste management and retail models (Sinha et al., 2023). Drawing on Shevchenko et al's (2023) tri-dimensional model, we examine SHC across acquisition, use and end of life, to develop a consumption centric conceptual framework.

Results

Emerging from the literature review, we conceptualise:

Figure 1: “Tri-dimensional role of sustainable secondhand clothing consumption in circular systems framework” (Authors own).



The framework represents and examines the conditions under which SHC becomes sustainable within the three phases of circular consumption:

Acquisition

Whilst pro-environmental motivations and attitudes are favourable, these do not always translate into sustainable behaviours (Machado et al., 2019; Paras et al., 2018; Park and Lin, 2020). Ethical and anti-acquisition values can enhance the sustainability of SHC consumption, alongside slowed down consumption (Centobelli et al., 2022; Vesterinen and Syrjäla, 2022). It requires meeting replacement rates, avoiding unconsidered purchases and focuses on product quality and type (Farrant et al., 2010; Moon. 2023; Piippo et al., 2022).

User

Intensifying the use and extending the product lifetime is key to underutilisation avoidance (Sandin and Peters, 2018). Product care and maintenance, collaborative consumption, resale and redistribution and social recycling, are options for further maintaining textiles in the circular loop (Iran and Schrader, 2017; McQueen et al., 2022).

End of life

Robust waste management systems need to be established and used for timely and appropriate disposal of SHC goods, as solid infrastructures for the separate collection of textile waste and textile to textile recycling technologies are still in their infancy (Baloyi et al., 2023 Fortuna & Diyamandoglu, 2017; Öztürk & Şahin, 2023).

Significance to sustainable consumption

This study fills the scholarly lacuna on when SHC becomes sustainable through a literature review and conceptual framework, contributing to advancing theory and practice on circular transitions. It identifies critical factors that make SHC sustainable through a tri-dimensional lens, demonstrating how these interact to foster sustainability in circular systems. This study informs future research and practice and highlights pathways for advancing circular transitions.

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