

# Overcoming Barriers to Sustainable Fashion Consumption: An Exploration of Non-consumption of Second-hand in Urban Europe

## Authors:

Lauren Junestrand, PhD Candidate, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London

Bethan Alexander, Reader, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London

## Purpose

This study examines non-second-hand consumption patterns limiting the sustainability potential of second-hand consumption among urban European mainstream consumers within a cross-generational, cross-country investigation into second-hand (non)consumption.

## Context and rationale

Post-consumer textile waste is a critical challenge for reducing environmental impact and improving resource efficiency in fashion (Biyada and Ubonavičious, 2025; Vladimirova et al., 2024). Post-consumer textile reuse is a priority in Europe's policy agenda (Puglia et al., 2024), but its implementation remains challenging (Lopes de Morais et al., 2021). Consumer behaviour is crucial for enabling circularity, making consumption a key research focus in textile reuse (Muranko et al., 2024).

The second-hand market serves as a key area of study in sustainability and circularity research, offering the potential to reduce new consumption, extend product lifespans, and slow fashion's pace (Farrant et al., 2010; Iran and Schrader, 2017; Klooster et al., 2024). Reike et al. (2022) noted that it is also one of the few circular fashion solutions with a well-functioning market, which is growing three times faster than the global apparel market and will reach \$350 billion by 2028 (ThredUp, 2024). Despite growth, global acceptance of second-hand fashion remains limited, and retailers struggle to reach mainstream consumers (Hedegard, 2023). Whereas second-hand consumers and their motivations have been widely studied, resistance towards second-hand consumption remains less understood (Halicki et al., 2024). Meanwhile, consumer resistance is an emerging area in sustainable fashion consumption literature (Busalim et al., 2024).

## Research question

*How can consumer resistance towards second-hand consumption among European urban mainstream consumers be better understood, and how does such resistance limit the sustainability potential of second-hand?*

## Methodology

The study deployed a mixed method sequential study across three European countries: England, Sweden, and Spain, as well as different generations. This comprised a questionnaire with 598 respondents followed by 50 semi-structured interviews. SPSS and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data.

## Findings

A significant proportion of disengaged and non-second-hand consumers in urban European contexts were observed. Resistance towards second-hand consumption was linked to several factors: preference for new products, shopping experience, social stigma, concerns about body closeness, smell, hygiene, fashionability, size and fit, and lack of knowledge and availability. Additionally, consumers exhibited resistance toward specific SHC product types and retail formats.

## Implications

This study contributes to existing sustainable consumption literature and emphasizes consumer resistance in advancing sustainable consumption research. It offers key recommendations for industry and policy to stimulate more sustainable consumption among European mainstream consumers. From an industry perspective, there is a significant opportunity to redesign and innovate the SHC market and its offerings by addressing consumer resistance. On a policy level, there is an urgent need to focus on engaging mainstream consumers to ensure the successful implementation of circular fashion ecosystems.

**Keywords:** post-consumer textiles, second-hand, non-secondhand consumption, (un)sustainability

**498 words (excluding references)**

## Key references

1. Biyada, S. and Urbonavičius, J. (2025) Circularity in textile waste: Challenges and pathways to sustainability. *Cleaner Engineering and Technology*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clet.2025.100905>.
2. Busalim, A., Lynn, T. and Wood, C.M. (2025) Consumer resistance to sustainable fashion: evidence from the USA and India. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 29 (3), pp. 371-394. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-02-2024-0052>
3. Farrant, L., Olsen, S.I. and Wangel, A. (2010) Environmental benefits from reusing clothes. *International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 15, pp. 726–736. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11367-010-0197-y>.
4. Halicki, D., Zaborek, P., and Meylan, G. (2024) Sustainable Fashion Choices: Exploring European Consumer Motivations behind Second-Hand Clothing Purchases. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(8).<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14080174>
5. Iran, S. and Schrader, U. (2017) Collaborative fashion consumption and its environmental effects. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 21 (4), pp. 468-482. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2016-0086>.
6. Klooster, A., Bellostas, B. C., Henry, M. Shen, et al. (2024) Do We Save the Environment by Buying Second-Hand Clothes? The Environmental Impacts of Second-Hand Textile Fashion and the Influence of Consumer Choices. *Journal of Circular Economy*, 2 (1). <https://doi.org/10.55845/ZZUG7076>.
7. Lopes de Morais, L.H., Pinto, D.C. and Cruz-Jesus, F. (2021) Circular economy engagement: Altruism, status, and cultural orientation as drivers for sustainable consumption. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 27, pp. 523-533. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2021.04.004>.
8. Muranko, Ž., Gomes, G.M., Aurisicchio, M. and Ometto, A.R. (2024) Psychological and systemic factors influencing behaviour in circular consumption systems. Lessons from the fast-moving consumer goods and apparel industries. In: *A Systemic Transition to Circular Economy*. Springer, pp. 225–245. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55036-2\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55036-2_12).
9. Puglia, M., Parker, L., Clube, R.K.M., et al. (2024) The circular policy canvas: Mapping the European Union's policies for a sustainable fashion textiles industry. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2024.107459>.
10. Reike, D., Hekkert, M.P. and Negro, S.O. (2023) Understanding circular economy transitions: The case of circular textiles. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 32(3), pp. 1032-1058. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3114>.

11. ThredUp (2024). *2024 Resale Report*. [online] Available at: [https://cf-assets-tup.thredup.com/resale\\_report/2024/ThredUp\\_2024\\_Resale%20Report.pdf](https://cf-assets-tup.thredup.com/resale_report/2024/ThredUp_2024_Resale%20Report.pdf) [Accessed 28 March 2025].
12. Vladimirova, K., Samie, Y., Maldini, I. *et al.* (2024) Urban transitions toward sufficiency-oriented circular post-consumer textile economies. *Nature Cities* 1, pp. 769–779 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44284-024-00140-7>

Accepted version