

Aligning perspectives: retailers and Generation Z consumers in the second-hand fashion market

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the relationship between second-hand fashion retailers' marketing tactics and the purchasing drivers of Generation Z (GenZ) consumers, defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, in the Netherlands. This study aims to identify areas of alignment and misalignment between retailer marketing tactics and GenZ motivations.

Design/methodology/approach – An exploratory qualitative approach was used, involving interviews with nine second-hand fashion retailers and 25 GenZ consumers. The GenZ sample included both experienced consumers (those who have purchased second-hand fashion at least once) and inexperienced consumers (those who have never purchased second-hand fashion). Data were analyzed using the SHIFT framework, which conceptualizes behavioral change toward sustainability.

Findings – The study identifies five key gaps between retailers' perspectives and those of GenZ consumers: (1) a misalignment of focus on rational and emotional drivers, (2) a convenience – expectations gap for offline retailers, (3) a trust gap for inexperienced consumers, (4) a digital disconnect for thrift stores and (5) a market segmentation perception gap.

Originality/value – By offering a nuanced understanding of retailers' marketing tactics and GenZ's drivers to purchase second-hand fashion, this study offers a unique perspective while applying the SHIFT framework to the second-hand fashion context. The findings provide actionable insights for retailers aiming to better align



their marketing tactics with GenZ's preferences and contribute to the broader literature on sustainable fashion consumption.

Keywords Sustainable fashion, Resale, Secondhand, Retailers, Gen Z, Consumer behavior change, Intention-behavior gap, SDG12

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of ultra-fast fashion has flooded the market with cheaply produced clothing, much of which is quickly discarded (Dzhengiz *et al.*, 2023), resulting in vast amounts of synthetic garments accumulating in landfills and causing serious environmental harm (Coscieme *et al.*, 2022). In response, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #12, part of the 2030 Agenda, promotes more sustainable production and consumption practices in the fashion industry (UNEP, 2023). Increasing second-hand fashion consumption offers a promising part of the solution by reducing demand for new clothing. Purchasing second-hand instead of new garments can extend garment lifespans and reduce textile waste, potentially lowering climate change impacts by up to 42% (Klooster *et al.*, 2024). Thus, second-hand fashion not only promotes sustainability but also provides a compelling alternative to the rapid consumption cycle driven by ultra-fast fashion (Wei *et al.*, 2023; Ritch and Siddiqui, 2023).

The second-hand fashion retail sector faces distinct challenges compared to traditional fashion retail. Unlike traditional retailers, who use predictable supply chains with manufacturers and wholesalers to maintain stock, second-hand fashion retailers depend on donations or consignment, making inventory inconsistent in terms of style, size, and quantity (Puspita and Chae, 2021). Further complicating the landscape, ultra-fast fashion brands such as SHEIN and TEMU utilize hyper-responsive supply chains, enabling them to produce and release new styles rapidly daily. Their aggressive digital marketing tactics dominate social media, capturing consumer attention and driving impulse purchasing behavior (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024), while second-hand fashion retailers, operating on limited marketing budgets, struggle to compete in this fast-paced market (Todeschini *et al.*, 2017).

Generation Z (GenZ), born between 1995 and 2010, has emerged as a powerful force in fashion purchasing, significantly influencing the fashion industry (Djafarova and Foots, 2022). Although GenZ is environmentally aware and finds second-hand fashion appealing for its affordability (Djafarova and Foots, 2022; Kim-Vick and Cho, 2024), their preference for fast, convenient online shopping frequently drives them toward ultra-fast fashion brands instead (Li and Leonas, 2022; Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024). The challenge for second-hand fashion retailers lies in crafting effective marketing tactics to attract GenZ's attention while competing with ultra-fast fashion's appeal.

Second-hand fashion retailers face unique difficulties related to style, inventory, and budget that prevent them from simply replicating the marketing tactics of traditional or ultra-fast fashion brands. To succeed, they must strategically tailor their tactics to these difficulties (Toebast-Wensink *et al.*, 2025). Effective marketing for second-hand fashion requires a nuanced understanding of the drivers influencing purchasing behavior within their market segment (Dabas and Whang, 2022). To attract GenZ consumers, retailers must align their marketing tactics with the unique drivers of this cohort (Aycok *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, there is a pressing need to understand the drivers of second-hand fashion purchasing among GenZ consumers and how these align with the marketing tactics employed by these retailers.

Existing studies into second-hand fashion retailing primarily discuss operational challenges and growth strategies (Gopalakrishnan, 2018; Wei *et al.*, 2023), yet fail to examine how second-hand fashion marketing tactics resonate with the drivers of GenZ consumers. Existing studies on GenZ's fashion purchasing often focus on the influence of social media on fashion purchasing (e.g. Siregar *et al.*, 2023) or the psychological benefits of green apparel (e.g. Rüteliöné and Bhutto, 2024), but do not specifically address the drivers for

second-hand fashion purchasing for this cohort. Most insights into GenZ's second-hand fashion purchasing behavior come from industry reports rather than scholarly studies (e.g. ThredUP, 2021).

This study aims to answer the question: *How do second-hand fashion retailers attract GenZ consumers to engage in second-hand fashion purchasing, and how do these approaches align with GenZ's drivers?* To address this, it employs an exploratory approach that examines perspectives from both second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers in The Netherlands. Responding to calls for more qualitative research on second-hand fashion consumption (e.g. Liu *et al.*, 2023), the study utilizes interviews. This study contributes to the literature on second-hand fashion marketing, second-hand fashion consumption, and consumer behavior change by analyzing the alignment and misalignment between second-hand fashion retailers' marketing tactics and GenZ consumer drivers to purchase second-hand fashion. It proposes future research directions to bridge existing gaps and provide a foundation for second-hand fashion retailers to develop targeted tactics that effectively attract this influential cohort and offer them an alternative to ultra-fast fashion consumption.

2. Literature review

One of the most pressing challenges in fashion consumption today is motivating GenZ to embrace sustainable practices. Second-hand fashion has emerged as a compelling alternative to ultra-fast fashion, offering notable environmental and economic benefits (Wei *et al.*, 2023). In the Netherlands, the second-hand market has grown significantly in the past few years, reaching €574.3 million in 2025 with 4,326 active businesses (IBISWorld, 2025). Notably, this expansion and diversification has occurred even as traditional second-hand store revenues declined 3.9% over the five years through 2024 (IBISWorld, 2025). The second-hand fashion sector is highly fragmented, spanning vintage boutiques, consignment shops, and online C2C platforms, all fueled by changing consumer attitudes and pandemic-era wardrobe clear-outs. To effectively attract GenZ consumers, second-hand retailers must adopt marketing tactics that align with their unique purchasing drivers (Aycocock *et al.*, 2023). Accordingly, this section examines the evolving second-hand fashion retail landscape, explores GenZ's fashion consumption behaviors, and evaluates marketing tactics employed by second-hand retailers. Finally, it introduces an analytical framework to compare the perspectives of second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers on second-hand purchasing drivers.

2.1 Second-hand fashion retail landscape

To understand the dynamics of second-hand fashion consumption, it is essential to examine the various business models that enable the exchange of pre-owned clothing, footwear, and accessories (Zaman *et al.*, 2019). These models have evolved significantly in recent years, influenced by factors such as increased awareness of sustainable consumption (Dabas and Whang, 2022), technological advancements, and shifting consumer preferences (Djafarova and Fouts, 2022). From vintage treasures to nearly new items, second-hand fashion encompasses a broad spectrum of products that cater to varied consumer needs and values (Armstrong and Park, 2020). The current second-hand fashion retail landscape can be categorized into four distinct business models: marketplaces, consignment stores, branded resale initiatives, and thrift stores (Zaman *et al.*, 2019; Evans *et al.*, 2022; Lam and Watkins, 2022; Wei *et al.*, 2023) (see summary in Table 1). Each model reflects unique approaches to facilitating second-hand fashion consumption while addressing specific consumer drivers.

Marketplaces represent platforms for consumer-to-consumer (C2C) resale, operating offline or online (Iran and Schrader, 2017). Offline marketplaces refer to organized physical gatherings of individual stallholders, such as street markets or flea markets, that create unique social shopping experiences (Evans *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, online marketplaces, like Vinted (Abbes *et al.*, 2020) and social media platforms like Facebook (Siregar *et al.*, 2023), streamline

Table 1. Typology of current second-hand fashion landscape, built on characteristics of second-hand business models by Yrjölä *et al.* (2021)

	Marketplaces	Consignment	Branded resale	Thrift stores
Type of offering (product)	Wide range of used goods available, allowing buyers to connect and interact with sellers	Curated selection of used goods presented similarly to a regular shop	Second-hand fashion products of specific brand, sold via the brand's channels	Wide range of cheap products in museum-like shops
Nature of exchange	Transfer of ownership from seller to buyer	Transfer of ownership via consignment partner to buyer	Transfer of ownership from seller to brand and then to buyer	Transfer of ownership from donations to sorter to thrift store and then to buyer
Nature of interaction	C2C	B2C	B2C	B2C
Channels (place)	Offline: physical markets Online: digital platforms, e-commerce websites	Retail stores, digital platforms, e-commerce websites	Retail stores, e-commerce websites	Thrift stores
Marketing of offering (promotion)	Performed by the seller and/or the market or platform	Performed by the retailer	Performed by the retailer	Performed by the retailer

Source(s): Authors' own work

transactions through technological innovations. Sellers can easily upload items, and buyers benefit from features like reputation checks that mitigate transactional risks (Abbes *et al.*, 2020). Despite their popularity - 64% of GenZ has shopped on online marketplaces at least once in their lifetime (ThredUP, 2021) - questions remain about what drives this cohort to use online platforms compared to traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

Consignment stores offer a curated approach to second-hand fashion retail, distinguishing themselves through selective inventory management and seller partnerships (Zaman *et al.*, 2019; Evans *et al.*, 2022). These for-profit businesses handle marketing and logistics on behalf of sellers, who receive a percentage of the sale price for their items (Iran and Schrader, 2017). Unsold items are typically returned to the original seller or donated to a charity resale outlet. With 385 consignment stores in the Netherlands (Kringloopwinkels, 2024), for example Episode (www.episode.eu), this model exemplifies a structured yet selective approach to second-hand fashion.

Branded resale initiatives incorporate second-hand sales into established retail ecosystems, enabling brands to monetize pre-owned items while promoting circularity (Wei *et al.*, 2023). Brands accept used items from consumers in exchange for discounts on new or "reloved" products. These items are then sold via dedicated e-commerce platforms or physical stores (Wei *et al.*, 2023). Due to logistical complexities, many brands collaborate with third-party resale specialists rather than managing operations internally (ThredUP, 2021). By offering lower prices, these initiatives attract both existing customers and new ones drawn by affordability (Puspita and Chae, 2021; Wei *et al.*, 2023). Fabienne Chapot Relove serves as a notable example in the Netherlands, offering vouchers worth 25–40% of the original price for sellers to purchase new or reloved items (www.relove.fabiennechapot.com).

Thrift stores operate as non-profit organizations that rely on donations to sell a wide range of goods while supporting charitable causes (Zaman *et al.*, 2019; Evans *et al.*, 2022). Although they face economic challenges due to competition from other business models where consumers can buy and sell rather than solely donate (Park and Joyner Armstrong, 2019), thrift

stores remain vital to the second-hand ecosystem due to their social mission and accessibility. With 1,167 thrift stores operating in the Netherlands (Kringloopwinkels, 2024), they continue to play a significant role despite rising operational costs.

2.2 GenZ's fashion consumption

GenZ constitutes a substantial and increasingly influential segment of the Dutch population. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands (CBS), individuals aged 13 to 28 - corresponding to GenZ - comprised approximately 19.6% of the total Dutch population. This cohort included about 1.805 million males and 1.736 million females (CBS, 2025). GenZ is characterized by distinct attitudes and behaviors towards fashion consumption (Siregar *et al.*, 2023). Members of this generation have grown up in a digital-first environment, where technology and social media are integral to daily life. Influencers on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok play a pivotal role in shaping their fashion preferences and purchasing decisions (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Rütelionè and Bhutto, 2024). This dynamic shapes societal norms related to appearance, identity, and social status (Ritch and Siddiqui, 2023). The affordability and trend-driven nature of ultra-fast fashion resonate with GenZ's budget constraints and the pressures of youth culture (Sorensen and Jorgensen, 2019). Its marketing tactics, such as limited-time offers, exploit impulsive purchasing behaviors, often overshadowing sustainable alternatives like second-hand fashion (Ritch and Siddiqui, 2023). While economic factors, such as affordability, may lead some GenZ consumers to second-hand options (Park and Joyner Armstrong, 2019; Hur, 2020), there is limited understanding of how their purchasing drivers align with second-hand fashion business models and how retailers can effectively leverage marketing tactics to persuade them to prefer sustainable alternatives over ultra-fast fashion's immediacy and social cachet.

2.3 Second-hand fashion marketing tactics

Second-hand fashion businesses face unique challenges promoting their products due to their reliance on donated or consigned inventory, limiting direct control over curation and trend responsiveness (Appelgren, 2019). To overcome this, they can employ marketing tactics - leveraging the marketing elements of product, price, place, and promotion - to capture attention, influence purchase decisions, and retain customers. Lacking direct control over trends due to their dependence on donated or consigned inventory, retailers monitor media to identify styles resonating with GenZ's preferences, while mitigating inventory unpredictability (Appelgren, 2019). Additionally, they may employ social media channels to enhance visibility and engagement. For instance, social media campaigns showcasing rare vintage "finds" or influencer collaborations emphasizing the circular economy narrative help position second-hand fashion as both stylish and ethical. Retention strategies such as loyalty programs and community-building initiatives help forge stronger connections with their target audience, ultimately increasing their overall impact in the marketplace (Ritch and Siddiqui, 2023). These efforts are critical when competing with ultra-fast fashion brands that dominate GenZ's attention with impulsive shopping tactics. While these marketing tactics provide a foundational understanding of potential approaches, a more structured analysis is needed to determine how effectively retailers are aligning their tactics with GenZ's specific motivations for purchasing second-hand fashion. Therefore, the next section introduces an analytical lens to facilitate a comparative analysis of current second-hand fashion retailers' marketing tactics and GenZ's purchasing drivers along similar axes, ultimately informing effective tactics for engaging this cohort.

2.4 Analytical lens for retailers' marketing tactics and GenZ drivers to purchase second-hand fashion

Building upon the foundational understanding of potential marketing approaches, the multi-theoretical SHIFT framework (White *et al.*, 2019) was selected as an analytical lens to

facilitate a comparative analysis of retailers' tactics and GenZ's purchasing drivers along similar axes. The SHIFT framework conceptualizes behavioral change toward sustainability and is grounded in the extensive literature on marketing and behavioral science. It identifies five broad psychological routes that capture the key drivers of consumer behavior towards sustainability: Social Influence, Habit Formation, Individual Self, Feelings and Cognition, and Tangibility. Each of these routes further encompasses specific marketing tactics designed to encourage sustainable behavior. In the following paragraphs, a review of the literature contextualizes these routes and tactics for second-hand fashion. Additional references related to this contextualization can be found in [Table 2](#).

The *Social influence* route describes how the impact of relevant others can drive consumers to purchase second-hand fashion. Fashion is often related to making a positive impression on others ([McNeill and Venter, 2019](#)), and the behaviors and opinions of peers can strongly drive the intention to purchase second-hand fashion ([Kim-Vick and Cho, 2024](#)). On this route, retailers can leverage social norms, social identity, and social desirability within their marketing tactics to attract consumers to purchase second-hand fashion.

The *Habit Formation* route highlights how facilitating the transition from purchasing first-hand fashion to second-hand fashion can attract consumers. This is evident in the positive shift observed among experienced consumers who become more willing to purchase second-hand fashion after a first experience ([Styvén and Mariani, 2020](#); [Silva et al., 2024](#)). Retailers can encourage habit transformation by applying tactics that create a sense of disruption to existing habits, make second-hand fashion shopping easy, assist consumers in setting implementation intentions, and employ penalties, incentives, prompts, or feedback to reinforce the desired purchasing behavior.

The *Individual Self* route emphasizes that consumers are driven to purchase second-hand fashion for personal benefits, such as expressing their identity and lifestyle ([Ferraro et al., 2016](#)). Leveraging identity is a potent strategy for driving behavior change ([Sörum and Gianneschi, 2023](#)), as some people seek to reinforce a positive self-image by purchasing second-hand fashion ([Hur, 2020](#)). Second-hand retailers can capitalize on this by focusing on aspects such as personal norms, self-concept, self-consistency, self-interest, self-efficacy, and individual differences.

Table 2. Literature references to second-hand fashion on SHIFT routes and tactics

SHIFT route	Tactics that second-hand fashion retailers may address in their marketing according to SHIFT	Literature references
Social influence	Social norms, Social identity, or Social desirability	Machado et al. (2019) , McNeill and Venter (2019) , Hur (2020) , Silva et al. (2021) , Siregar et al. (2023) , Kim-Vick and Cho (2024)
Habit formation	Discontinuity to change habits, Penalties, Making it easy, Implementation intentions, Incentives, Prompts, Feedback	Machado et al. (2019) , Styvén and Mariani (2020) , Silva et al. (2021)
Individual self	Personal norms, Self-concept, Self-consistency, Self-interest, Self-efficacy, Individual differences	Machado et al. (2019) , McNeill and Venter (2019) , Hur (2020) , Aycock et al. (2023) , Kim-Vick and Cho (2024)
Feelings and Cognition	Negative emotions, Positive emotions, Providing information and learning, Eco-labels, Framing	McNeill and Venter (2019) , Silva et al. (2021) , Koay et al. (2023) , Halicki et al. (2024) , Kim-Vick and Cho (2024) , Tymoshchuk et al. (2024)
Tangibility	Matching temporal focus, Communicate local and proximal impacts, Concrete communications, Encourage the desire for intangibles	Styvén and Mariani (2020) , Siregar et al. (2023)

Source(s): Authors' own work

According to [White et al. \(2019\)](#), *Feelings and Cognition* encompass two pathways to behavioral change. The first pathway elicits triggering emotional responses, such as the joy of treasure hunting ([Halicki et al., 2024](#)) or the alleviation of perceived risks ([Koay et al., 2023](#)). The second pathway focuses on cognitive factors, including the sharing and processing of information and knowledge ([Tymoshchuk et al., 2024](#)). To attract consumers to purchase second-hand fashion, retailers can mitigate negative emotions, foster positive feelings, provide informative content, utilize eco-labels, and reframe the perception of second-hand fashion.

The *Tangibility* route focuses on how consumers' understanding of the impacts of their purchases can attract them to purchase second-hand fashion. For many people, sustainability remains an abstract concept ([Puspita and Chae, 2021](#)), and providing tailored, specific information can enhance comprehension and promote more significant behavioral changes ([Abrahamse, 2019](#)). To attract consumers to purchase second-hand fashion through this route, retailers can emphasize temporal focus, communicate local and immediate impacts, convey messages in a concrete manner, and foster a desire for intangible benefits.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample characteristics

To provide a comprehensive view of the second-hand fashion retail landscape in the Netherlands, we used maximum variation sampling ([Flyvbjerg, 2011](#)) to ensure representation across all second-hand fashion business models. To compile a sample of second-hand fashion retailers for this study, we used references provided by sustainable fashion organizations in The Netherlands (e.g. MVO Nederland), along with the professional networks of the research team. Fifteen retailers were invited to participate in the study, of whom nine agreed, resulting in a 60% response rate. Retailers were categorized as marketplaces, consignment stores, branded resale, and thrift stores. For the marketplaces category, we included only online marketplaces and excluded offline marketplaces. This decision was made for two reasons: first, offline marketplaces in the Netherlands exhibit considerable heterogeneity in size, format, and customer base, which would complicate meaningful comparison within the study's scope. Second, the rapid growth and relevance of online platforms - particularly among GenZ consumers - made them the most pertinent focus for this research. [Table 3](#) summarizes the characteristics of the second-hand fashion retailer sample.

To understand GenZ's drivers for purchasing second-hand fashion, purposeful sampling was applied to gather a sample with detailed knowledge of all four second-hand fashion business models ([Shaheen et al., 2019](#)). Participants were recruited around the campus of a Dutch University of Applied Sciences, all born after 1995 and before 2010. The sample was composed based on two criteria: (1) it must include both experienced consumers (those who have purchased second-hand fashion at least once) and inexperienced consumers (those who have never purchased second-hand fashion) consumers, and (2) within the group of experienced consumers, a reasonably balanced distribution across the four business models to avoid overrepresentation of any single model. After conducting the interviews, some participants were reclassified upon discovering they had more second-hand fashion experience than initially reported. As a result, the final sample included more experienced than inexperienced consumers, with 24 GenZ participants averaging 21 years old. Most participants reported purchasing both fast fashion and second-hand fashion. Notably, among those categorized as inexperienced (i.e. those who had never purchased second-hand fashion), the majority had experience selling their own used clothing online but had not themselves bought second-hand fashion. The participants were not asked to reflect on their perceptions of second-hand fashion business models, as the focus was on their drivers to purchase second-hand fashion rather than comparisons among business models. However, they primarily referred to three business models of second-hand fashion retail instead of the four theoretically distinguished, namely online second-hand fashion, offline second-hand fashion, and thrifting. [Table 4](#) summarizes the characteristics of the GenZ consumer sample.

Table 3. Characteristics of the second-hand fashion retailer sample

	Respondents	Sales channel	Products	Buyers and sellers	Total interview time
Marketplaces	Two online platforms interviewed: one international, the other focused on the Netherlands	Online	Fashion and non-fashion	Both are young women who also purchase fast fashion	97 min
Consignment	Two shops interviewed: one sells second-hand fashion online and offline, the other mixes second-hand fashion with new items	Online and offline	Also new fashion (in addition to second-hand fashion)	Buyers and sellers are often distinct	65 min
Branded resale	Two brands interviewed, both offering their brands' second-hand fashion on separate websites, alongside their primary retail channels	Online	Fashion only	The brand's second-hand fashion offerings attract consumers to its first-hand products too	83 min
Thrift stores	Three chains of charity shops interviewed, all selling donated clothing	Offline only	Also non-fashion	Catering to a diverse demographic with distinct buyers and sellers	130 min

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4. Characteristics of the GenZ consumer sample

	Respondents	Gender	Fashion purchases in past 6 months	Total interview time
Experienced second-hand fashion consumers	17	14 females 3 males	13	381 min
Inexperienced second-hand fashion consumers	7	2 females 5 males	15	210 min

Source(s): Authors' own work

3.2 Interview procedure

Through semi-structured interviews, which is an excellent method for exploring a wide range of perceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2013), respondents were encouraged to share their views and experiences with second-hand fashion. Before the start of the interview, respondents provided written informed consent. In accordance with ethical guidelines and to protect participant privacy, all interviewee names were anonymized immediately following data collection, as advised by the institutional ethics board (reference number: 2021–13). Each interview began with an introduction to the research aim.

We interviewed second-hand fashion retailers to understand how they seek to influence GenZ consumers to purchase second-hand fashion. A checklist was used to ensure that all respondents were asked a similar set of questions while they were also invited to elaborate and provide examples. Retailers were asked questions such as: “Who is your target audience?”; “How do you attract new customers?” and “How do you influence purchasing behavior?”

The second-hand fashion retailers were not prompted with marketing tactics or examples to ensure their responses were authentic and expressed in their own words.

GenZ consumers were interviewed to understand what drives them to purchase second-hand fashion. Again, a checklist ensured all respondents were asked a similar set of questions. However, this time, questions were intentionally asked about all five categories of the analytical lens to ensure obtaining insights on all types of drivers and to compare these with the retailer insights. Refer to [Appendix 1](#) for the checklist of questions. The interviews were transcribed using Amberscript software.

3.3 Data analysis

All transcripts were coded using Atlas-Ti. The coding process employed a deductive approach, which involved categorizing the data according to the five SHIFT routes. Relevant literature on second-hand fashion was consulted to ensure that the definitions of the SHIFT routes were consistent with second-hand fashion concepts (see [Appendix 2](#)). An iterative process was employed to review the transcripts and the definitions informing the codes. New apparent codes were discussed to decide if they were needed or captured an aspect that was already covered but insufficiently captured in the definition. For example, the *availability of clothes in the right size* was initially labeled as a new code, however as *having the right size available* is also a feature of making purchasing second-hand fashion easier (i.e. *making it an easy tactic* on the Habit formation route), it was decided to include it in that category. Next, to evaluate the reliability of the coding procedure, two consumer interviews and two retailer interviews were randomly selected and coded separately by both, and the findings were compared. This process was repeated several times until differences were sufficiently addressed. Finally, codes were analyzed thematically and structured around the five SHIFT routes as thematic categories. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the aim was not to quantify the extent of evidence regarding the impact of each route.

4. Results

[Table 5](#) summarizes the key results, which are then elaborated upon. Following the SHIFT framework, we first discuss findings from retailer interviews, followed by those from GenZ consumers. Lastly, we analyze the most significant alignments or misalignments between retailers and GenZ consumers for each route.

4.1 Social influence

All second-hand fashion retailer respondents acknowledge the importance of social influence, for example, the influence of relevant others and trends as an expression of a (new) social norm. However, they differ in their approaches to addressing such social norms. All retailer respondents except thrift retailers aim to attract consumers to their platform via social media, either through their own social media channel or through collaborations with influencers. By contrast, thrift retailers emphasize connecting with local communities physically, e.g. through in-house coffee shops, as exemplified by TS1: “*Every shop is a community on its own. We have loyal customers, who come by a few times per week, sometimes just for a talk*”.

For GenZ consumer respondents, the social influence of others is of considerable importance when purchasing second-hand fashion. According to most, friends and influencers play a significant role in shaping their fashion choices, while parental influence is seen as minimal. Both positive and negative attitudes of these relevant others impact their attitude towards purchasing or not purchasing second-hand fashion. For example, B2 stated: “*When friends buy second-hand, I might try it out, no matter if it’s online or offline*”. Social media is widely regarded as a source of inspiration for consumer respondents, with experienced second-hand fashion consumers particularly favoring features such as the “like” or “favorites” button on some online marketplaces as an indication of the popularity of an item. Although consumer

Table 5. Summary of key results from interviews with second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers

	Second-hand fashion retailers	GenZ consumers
Social influence	Thrift retailers focus on offline communities, while other second-hand fashion retailers reach out to target audience via social media	Friends and influencers play an important role in fashion choices, and social media is a source of inspiration and indication of popularity of items
Habits	Second-hand fashion retailers aim to make second-hand fashion shopping easy, e.g. through filtering options (online marketplaces) or organizing on color and size (physical second-hand fashion stores)	Perceive difficulty in finding the right size or brand in physical second-hand fashion stores. Experience with second-hand fashion may lead to more sustainable shopping practices (e.g. swapping clothes with friends)
Individual self	Mostly promote general aspects, such as affordability of second-hand fashion	Appreciate branded items at affordable prices
Feelings and cognition	All second-hand fashion retailers aim to offer second-hand fashion in an appealing, enjoyable manner. Additionally, some aim to raise awareness for sustainable fashion	Enjoy treasure hunting. Inexperienced consumers are concerned about authenticity, while experienced consumers check reviews to mitigate risks
Tangibility	Communicate about sustainability in a non-specific yet simple manner	Do not shop with sustainability in mind, however, do believe concrete communications may drive shopping second-hand fashion

Source(s): Authors' own work

respondents generally perceive second-hand fashion as trendy, most view thrifting as a separate category that is not considered trendy.

Retailers and GenZ consumers alike recognize the power of social influence in second-hand fashion marketing. Most retailers, with the notable exception of thrift stores, prioritize social media over offline marketing. This approach aligns with GenZ's digital-first mindset and indicates that thrift stores occupy a distinct segment within the second-hand fashion market in the eyes of GenZ.

4.2 Habits

Second-hand fashion retailer respondents consider the ease of purchasing second-hand fashion to be important for consumers. Online marketplace retailers aim to enhance the ease of purchasing second-hand fashion by providing filtering options, offering consumers a shopping experience similar to that of marketplaces such as Zalando. Thrift retailers strive to make purchasing second-hand fashion easier by selecting easily accessible locations, such as shopping centers or locations with parking facilities. Offline second-hand fashion retailers aim to enhance the ease of purchasing by organizing the store based on color and size. Many second-hand fashion stores do not resemble typical second-hand stores, leading to unplanned purchases as consumers often discover these stores by chance while shopping along their regular routes. For example, TS2 stated: "*The new store will be in the city center. I think it will attract a lot of people who only realize it's second-hand when they are inside*".

GenZ consumer respondents clearly prefer to shop second-hand fashion as conveniently as possible. Several consumer respondents perceive difficulty in finding the right size or brand they like in physical second-hand fashion stores, leading to a preference for online marketplaces. Experienced second-hand fashion consumers find that online marketplaces resemble regular shopping and appreciate the ease of applying filters and searching online, exemplified by respondent VTU3: "*Looking for specific items on Vinted is handy and useful, for example, if I don't want to spend more than 5 euros, I can also search for that*". Additionally, they indicate that purchasing second-hand fashion drives other sustainable fashion practices, such as swapping clothes with friends. Consumer respondents note that

purchasing and selling second-hand fashion may also stem from their upbringing when they were taught not to discard clothes but to pass them on to relatives or donate them to charity.

Retailers and GenZ consumers align in prioritizing convenience, but approaches differ. Online marketplaces have successfully catered to GenZ preferences by offering familiar e-commerce features, while physical stores' efforts to enhance ease of shopping have not fully addressed GenZ's specific needs.

4.3 Individual self

Second-hand fashion retailers believe that consumer benefits of second-hand fashion are related to style and price. For example: *"We're playing up the fact that we're cheaper. We consciously include this in our communication messages"* (TS3). However, they experience challenges in highlighting characteristics such as brand or style in their marketing tactics due to their reliance on donated stock. They find promoting more general aspects, such as price and affordability, easier.

GenZ consumer respondents primarily emphasize personal benefits of second-hand fashion, such as access to branded items at more affordable prices, for example: *"I bought a Lacoste sweater on Vinted, and I would normally not walk into a Lacoste store, but when I saw it on Vinted, and it looked nice and cheaper, I bought it. But I would never buy it for the full price"* (B17). Even inexperienced second-hand fashion consumers are willing to purchase second-hand fashion if their preferred brands are available second-hand. GenZ consumers experience higher prices in consignment stores, while thrift stores are known for offering lower prices. They mention that such price differences present opportunities to earn money through purchasing and selling at different second-hand retailers. Furthermore, consumer respondents do not necessarily associate second-hand fashion with quality, however, they do associate it with uniqueness.

Retailers and GenZ consumers align on style and price as benefits of second-hand fashion. However, a significant challenge emerges in retailers' ability to consistently showcase specific brands due to the unpredictable nature of donated stock.

4.4 Feelings and cognition

Second-hand fashion retailer respondents frame shopping for second-hand fashion as enjoyable, trendy, and pleasurable. Online, this is achieved by enhancing the online customer experience, while offline, it involves presenting items in an appealing manner. Additionally, significant attention is given to the cleanliness of the clothes offered. Furthermore, retailers emphasize the importance of raising awareness and providing information along with this positive experience to prevent rebound effects (i.e. increased shopping). For example, consignment retailers share knowledge about second-hand fashion through documentaries and events, sometimes in collaboration with sustainable fashion retailers or experts. In line with this, thrifting retailers suggest forming a collective movement to shift consumer mindsets, indicating that they do not view other thrift stores as competitors. Branded resellers explain the importance of personal communication about sustainable benefits in the store, exemplified by respondent BR2: *"The store teams can explain Resale best, they make the difference"*.

GenZ consumer respondents report positive emotions stemming from recreational shopping for cheap clothes. They find it rewarding to discover quality items for lower prices (i.e. treasure hunting), which may additionally lead to purchasing more items than initially planned, for example: *"Also because I need it, but sometimes I just scroll and find cute tops, so I buy like 10 items"* (B9). However, consumer respondents also express negative emotions related to second-hand fashion, including trust issues and concerns about the authenticity of designer items. Experienced second-hand fashion consumers indicate that they mitigate these risks by checking reviews. They also view the characteristic smell of second-hand fashion stores as part of the overall experience, while inexperienced consumers associate second-hand fashion with uncleanliness and prefer to shop for second-hand fashion online.

Although consumer respondents acknowledge the importance of sustainability, only a few report sustainability knowledge or environmental benefits as reasons to purchase second-hand fashion.

Retailers and GenZ consumers agree that second-hand shopping is a joy but diverge on the importance of sustainability messaging. While retailers aim to educate consumers about sustainability, GenZ rarely cites sustainability as a primary driver for their second-hand purchases.

4.5 Tangibility

Second-hand fashion retailer respondents do not convey specific or concrete sustainable aspects of second-hand fashion in their marketing tactics. When they do, they intend to keep it simple: “*We want to communicate about sustainability in the most understandable and easy way*” (CS1). Thrift retailers primarily highlight the local impact of their operations, usually at the point of sale or at checkout, for example: “*We have posters of how damaging the production of new clothes is on the environment*” (TS3).

For GenZ consumer respondents, the act of shopping for second-hand fashion is rarely associated with considerations about the broader impact of fashion. For example: “*When I go to a store, I don’t think about the influence of shopping on the climate and global warming. I do think it could be advertised somewhere, because now I really don’t think about it*” (B10). When prompted, they indicate that infographics, graphs, and images could increase awareness of these issues and potentially drive them to shop for second-hand fashion.

Retailers face challenges in providing specific sustainability information for second-hand fashion, while GenZ consumers express interest in such data when prompted. This presents both an opportunity and a hurdle in the second-hand fashion market.

5. Discussion and future research directions

This study sought to answer the question: *How do second-hand fashion retailers attract GenZ consumers to engage in second-hand fashion purchasing, and how do these approaches align with GenZ’s drivers?* To explore this question, interviews were conducted with second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers, and the data was analyzed using the SHIFT framework (White *et al.*, 2019). The results reveal a complex interplay between second-hand fashion retailers’ strategies and GenZ consumers’ preferences, with alignment in recognizing social influence but divergences in sustainability information, convenience, and communication channels. These findings highlight opportunities and challenges for retailers engaging GenZ consumers in the second-hand fashion market. Five key gaps between retailers’ marketing tactics and GenZ’s drivers were identified. The following sections discuss these gaps and propose corresponding future research directions.

Misalignment of focus on rational and emotional drivers: A misalignment appears to exist between the marketing tactics employed by second-hand fashion retailers and the intuitive purchasing behavior of GenZ. This observation aligns with earlier research (Toebast-Wensink *et al.*, 2025) and suggests that retailers may not be employing optimal strategies (Puspita and Chae, 2021). While sustainability information may not be a primary driver for GenZ’s second-hand fashion purchases, many respondents indicated that tailored messaging about sustainability could influence their choices when prompted. However, retailers face challenges in providing such tailored information due to the complexity of fashion production chains (Riemens *et al.*, 2024). This is particularly challenging for second-hand fashion retailers as they lack control over production processes. A lens for interpreting the misalignment between rational and emotional drivers is Dual Processing Theory (Kahneman, 2011). Retailers often emphasize rational appeals about sustainability which engage the slow, deliberate reasoning of System 2. In contrast, GenZ’s purchasing decisions are frequently shaped by emotional, intuitive influences like social media trends, reflecting System 1

thinking. Future research should explore both System 1 and System 2 drivers concurrently, building on existing studies (Faraoni and Ranfagni, 2024), to provide comprehensive analyses across various second-hand fashion contexts and generational cohorts. If System 1 drivers prove more influential, further investigation could explore which emotional and social factors second-hand fashion retailers can best leverage in their marketing tactics. Conversely, if System 2 drivers are found to dominate, research could explore how “high-level” information - rather than tailored information - can enhance purchase intent among GenZ consumers.

Convenience expectation gap for offline second-hand fashion retailers: There is a misalignment between the organization of offline second-hand fashion stores and the ease-driven expectations of GenZ consumers. Second-hand fashion stores are typically organized by size and color, which does not align with GenZ’s preference for easily finding specific brands or trends. GenZ’s purchasing decisions are heavily driven by convenience, a finding consistent with previous research (Djafarova and Foots, 2022; Liu et al., 2023). This disconnect between store layout and GenZ preferences presents a significant opportunity for improvement in the offline second-hand shopping experience. Future research could explore ways to enhance offline second-hand fashion shopping experiences for GenZ by investigating their customer journey in these stores. This aligns with earlier recommendations emphasizing the importance of understanding and optimizing customer journeys (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Mapping these could help identify critical touchpoints, uncover pain points that GenZ encounters, and suggest specific tactics to streamline the shopping process, ultimately creating a more convenient and satisfying experience.

The trust gap for inexperienced consumers: There is a misalignment between offline second-hand fashion retailers and inexperienced GenZ consumers regarding risk perception and trust establishment. The findings indicate that experienced and inexperienced second-hand fashion consumers perceive purchase risks differently. Inexperienced consumers often avoid second-hand fashion due to concerns about trust, hygiene, and unfamiliarity, while experienced consumers mitigate these risks by relying on peer reviews and accepting potential purchase imperfections. This aligns with prior findings (Silva et al., 2024) and highlights trust as a progressive, experience-based driver, suggesting that it develops through positive experiences. Thus, experiential learning emerges as a driver of trust-building in second-hand fashion markets. Furthermore, while GenZ consumers place importance on peer opinions when making purchasing decisions, offline second-hand fashion retailers face a considerable challenge, as they often lack the infrastructure to provide peer reviews. This limits their ability to build trust with inexperienced GenZ consumers compared to online platforms that can integrate peer reviews. Future research should investigate trust dynamics among GenZ consumers in second-hand fashion contexts. Specifically, studies could explore methods to enhance trust through social proof for inexperienced consumers.

The digital disconnect for thrift stores: There is a misalignment between thrift retailers and the shopping preferences of GenZ consumers. Thrift retailers typically prioritize in-store experience and community engagement over online sales. Financial and technological restraints make it challenging to maintain an accurate online catalog of their diverse, low budget inventory. GenZ exhibits a strong preference for online shopping channels. They favor purchasing second-hand fashion on digital platforms that offer seamless and convenient shopping experiences, often perceiving these platforms as comparable to traditional e-commerce sites. This finding aligns with prior research (Armstrong and Park, 2020; Rütelioné and Bhattu, 2024). Future research could explore tactics to enhance the appeal of thrift stores that wish to attract GenZ. This could include investigating technological enhancements, social media presence, and the integration of digital tools. For example, focus groups with GenZ participants could provide insights into how to make thrift stores more attractive for this cohort.

Market segmentation perception gap: The market segmentation perception gap underscores the dynamic nature of the resale market, where actual segments can fluctuate and differ between retailers’ intent and GenZ’s perception. While theoretical models may

recognize four distinct categories, GenZ's consolidates these into three overlapping segments, particularly evident in their view of online second-hand fashion business models as a single, unified category. A possible explanation is that this generational cohort exhibits distinct market perceptions and shopping preferences. Future research could explore GenZ's online customer journey within the second-hand fashion market to better understand how they navigate overlaps and boundaries among various business models, potentially informing effective marketing tactics for specific business models.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

This study contributes to the literature by offering a nuanced understanding of second-hand fashion marketing tactics and GenZ consumers' drivers. Unlike prior research that focused on single theoretical lenses, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Djafarova and Foots, 2022), or examined fashion consumption exclusively from the consumer's viewpoint, this study applied a multi-theoretical lens to compare retailer and consumer perspectives. This comparison revealed five gaps between the two perspectives, setting the stage for future research that can enhance both academic theory and practical marketing tactics in the evolving second-hand fashion landscape. The study's findings promote further investigation into the most effective ways to appeal to System 1 and System 2 drivers by utilizing Dual Processing Theory. It also highlights the potential of investigating the second-hand fashion customer journey to better understand GenZ's convenience-driven purchasing behaviors. This extends applications of these theories to second-hand fashion contexts, offering new insights for attracting GenZ to more sustainable consumption behavior.

The successful application of the SHIFT framework in the domain of second-hand fashion is a methodological contribution of this study. All statements related to the research questions from both second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers were coded according to the framework routes. This indicates that SHIFT contains sufficient theoretical concepts to compare second-hand fashion retailers' marketing tactics and GenZ consumer drivers on similar axes. Furthermore, this suggests that SHIFT may be utilized to analyze and address consumer and retailer interactions in different fashion contexts.

5.2 Practical contribution

Based on the five key gaps between second-hand fashion retailer tactics and GenZ's drivers, practical implications for second-hand fashion retailers are identified: (1) Second-hand fashion retailers can better align their marketing tactics with GenZ's emotional and social drivers. For instance, a campaign could showcase stories of GenZ consumers who transformed their style through second-hand fashion. This approach highlights personal expression and fosters a sense of belonging among GenZ consumers; (2) Offline second-hand fashion stores should streamline the shopping process for GenZ by adopting more bespoke store layouts. For example, to attract GenZ, products could be organized by brand or trends rather than by color or size, making it easier for them to navigate the store; (3) Second-hand fashion retailers should integrate social proof through product reviews and peer feedback, particularly for inexperienced GenZ consumers. In physical stores, for instance, QR codes could be added to items, allowing customers to scan for reviews or rate products themselves. This use of peer feedback, both online and offline, can help build trust by showcasing real user experiences and encouraging greater engagement; (4) Thrift retailers can explore an online presence to cater to GenZ's preference for digital shopping. For example, a cost-effective approach could involve using social media platforms like Instagram or Facebook to host live auctions or sales of unique second-hand fashion items, offering an interactive and engaging shopping experience; (5) Second-hand fashion retailers should recognize that GenZ perceives resale markets as overlapping categories and adapt their market segmentation strategies accordingly. For instance, a retailer could create a niche around second-hand streetwear and sell through several online channels.

5.3 Limitations

This study provides valuable insights but has limitations. Firstly, while drivers on all five SHIFT routes have been explored within the context of second-hand fashion (refer to Table 2), it is important to acknowledge that not all marketing tactics associated with these routes have been thoroughly studied in the second-hand fashion domain. The analysis focused on the five main SHIFT routes rather than specific tactics on these routes, allowing for clear comparisons between the perspectives of second-hand fashion retailers and GenZ consumers without overwhelming the analysis. Future research can build on the findings by investigating and comparing specific tactics within the second-hand fashion context. This could involve qualitative quantitative analyses measuring the effectiveness of marketing tactics on specific routes.

Secondly, insights into the current market landscape were sought by interviewing a selection of second-hand fashion retailers. However, this approach may introduce selection bias if the included retailers do not accurately reflect the current second-hand fashion market, potentially skewing the results. To mitigate this bias, maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure the representation of the four theoretical second-hand fashion business models in the Netherlands. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research could employ random sampling, incorporate physical marketplaces, or use stratified sampling based on characteristics such as geographic location. These methodological refinements would provide a more comprehensive understanding of second-hand fashion retailers' marketing tactics across varied retail contexts.

Thirdly, this study primarily focused on purchasing second-hand fashion, but it was observed that even inexperienced buyers often have experience selling second-hand fashion. The relationship between selling and buying was not explored, potentially limiting insights. The small sample of inexperienced second-hand fashion consumers ($n = 7$) restricts the ability to capture the diverse drivers and behaviors within this group. To mitigate this limitation, differences between experienced and inexperienced consumers were not emphasized, except when noted by nearly all inexperienced consumers. Future research should target a larger number of inexperienced consumers to enhance the understanding of engaging and converting this cohort.

5.4 Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the alignment, or lack thereof, between the marketing tactics of second-hand fashion retailers and the purchasing drivers of GenZ consumers. Through in-depth interviews and a comparative analysis of the two perspectives, five key gaps were identified: (1) misalignment of focus on rational and emotional drivers, (2) a convenience expectations gap for offline second-hand fashion retailers, (3) a trust gap for inexperienced consumers, (4) a digital disconnect for thrift stores, and (5) a market segmentation perception gap. The findings underscore the necessity for second-hand fashion retailers to reconsider their marketing tactics if they aim to attract GenZ consumers. To resonate more effectively with this cohort, several practical implications emerge: (1) align marketing with GenZ's emotional and social drivers, for example by highlighting personal style stories; (2) streamline in-store experiences with layouts organized by brand or trend; (3) incorporate social proof through product reviews and QR codes in physical stores; (4) strengthen digital presence via social media and interactive online sales; and (5) tailor market segmentation to GenZ's view of overlapping resale categories, such as offering niche collections across multiple channels. This study contributes to the academic discourse by identifying critical areas for future exploration, particularly Dual processing theory and the customer journey. Despite certain limitations, such as a focus on experienced consumers, this study lays the groundwork for aligning second-hand fashion marketing tactics with GenZ's drivers. These insights can contribute to increased adoption of second-hand fashion as an alternative to ultra-fast fashion, supporting the achievement of SDG 12 in the fashion industry.

Table A1. Checklist for interviews with GenZ consumers

Route	Interview questions
Social influence	Regarding second-hand fashion, what according to your friends (or family) are the do's and don'ts? How do these do's and don'ts influence your choices? What kind of image do you (want to) portray to others?
Habit formation	How would you describe your clothing purchasing habits? What habits would you like to change? What would help you to change those habits? What would help you to choose second-hand fashion?
The individual self	How do you like to see yourself? How have your ideas about fashion evolved over time? What are your ideas regarding the impact of fashion consumption?
Feelings and cognition	How would you like to feel regarding purchasing second-hand fashion?
Tangibility	What kind of information would help you to choose second-hand fashion? Can you give examples?

Source(s): Authors' own work

Appendix 2

Table A2. Coding framework

Route	Code definition
Social influence	Referring to second-hand fashion as socially appropriate; the positive impression it can make on others; or a sense of identity someone wishes to convey on others
Habit formation	Referring to a disruption in the context in which automated fashion purchases arise to facilitate habit change; penalties to discourage fashion purchasing; anything to make it easier to choose second-hand; (how) the purchase is a step towards more second-hand fashion purchases; messages before purchasing occurs to promote second-hand purchasing; specific information about the effect of someone's second-hand fashion purchase; or incentives
Individual self	Referring to the moral responsibility to purchase sustainably; how second-hand fashion contributes to a favorable view of the self; how sustainable behavior in other fields translates to second-hand fashion purchasing; benefits for the consumer (e.g. aesthetic, affordability); the belief that choosing second-hand will have sustainable impact; or individual values that support second-hand purchases
Feelings and cognition	Referring to stories or experiences that evoke guilt or sadness; stories or experiences that provide hedonistic pleasure/positive affect; information regarding the origins of fashion/ its impact; eco-labeling; or describing second-hand fashion alternatively to change the reference point
Tangibility	Referring to match the time focus of future impact of second-hand fashion to the presence; aligning consequences of fashion to the context of the consumer; communication in a precise manner about the impact of second-hand fashion; or promoting dematerialization in general

Source(s): Authors' own work

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