



Fashion Resale in China: An Investigation from a Seller's Perspective

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Research Background and Rationale. The fashion industry has gained notoriety as one of the most polluting industries globally, accounting for up to 10% of global pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Criticism of the industry's practices has led to a search for more sustainable solutions (Jia et al., 2020). Circular fashion has gained acceptance globally. As an essential component of circular fashion, resale significantly contributes to sustainability goals by extending the lifespan of products and reducing fashion waste (ThredUp, 2022). China's leading fashion manufacturing makes its market essential for the fashion industry to achieve its sustainable goal (Ma, 2022). Still, it lags behind the western markets with shortcomings such as limited consumer acceptance (Liang & Xu, 2018) and rampant counterfeits (Zheng et al., 2019). Yet China's fashion resale market has great potential to grow. However, despite the importance, the existing literature on the resale market in China is limited and mainly conducted from buyers' perspectives. Therefore, more in-depth studies from sellers' perspectives are needed to gain a clear picture because this market relies greatly on individual sellers to fuel the circularity. To this end, this study aims to (1) explore individual consumers resell practices; (2) investigate motives and challenges for individual consumers to sell their pre-owned fashion clothing and accessories via resale platforms; and (3) examine meanings and values associated with the selling experiences.

Methodology. The semi-structured interview was conducted to fulfill research purposes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The participants were recruited via Idle Fish, the largest resale platform in China, launched by Taobao Marketplace in 2014 (Booker, 2021). The interview invitations were sent to eighteen sellers through Idle Fish's chat function. Five agreed to participate in our study. The research instrument was developed following the practice theory. According to the practice theory, an individual's behavior is motivated by everyday concerns in life (Røpke, 2009). The interview questions cover (1) demographic information; (2) practices with fashion resale platforms; (3) motives and challenges to resell; and (4) selling experiences with any meanings or values obtained.

The interviews were conducted from February to March 2023 through the voice talk of WeChat, China's biggest social media communication app. Participants were female and aged 20 to 40. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, ranging from 30 to 65 minutes. The data (interview transcripts) were processed and coded using Microsoft word following the interview questions and notes, which were hand-taken during interviews to locate the key information. After completing the coding process, the kept data was translated into English.

Findings. The findings revealed two major factors for fashion resale practices: **resell price** and **descriptive information**. A reasonable resell price and adequate descriptive information are critical for successful sell-outs on resale platforms. The *original retail price* and *product condition* are essential for the resell price determination. The information about the listed

second-hand item could include **basic information** (e.g., brand, conditions, and size) and **extended information** (e.g., flaws and purchase channels).

Motives and challenges co-exist for individual consumers to sell on resale platforms. **Motives** include economic and environmental protection drives. The **economic** drive is the most salient reason for the interviewed participants to sell on resale platforms. For instance, one participant said, *“After I bought a lot of thing from Idle Fish, especially vintage earrings, I found my money only went out but did not come in....., so I started selling things on second-hand platforms as well... I admit that the economy is the biggest reason that motivates me to sell things...”*. Followed by economic drive, **environmental protection** is another primary reason. As one participant mentioned, *“many of my clothes are only worn a few times... it feels wasteful to throw them away. It is an excellent solution to resell them on second-hand platforms and let the resources be reused”*.

Challenges exist despite the generally positive experience of individual sellers with the resale platform. Challenges with second-hand **buyers** include **price bargaining** and **dishonest behaviors** (e.g., unethical returns). For example, some buyers will ask for a not reasonable price-off. One stated, *“...they think second-hand items should be sold very cheaply... I generally ignore this kind of buyer”*. Furthermore, Idle Fish does not review users' background information; thus, the user qualities can be inconsistent. One informant mentioned, *“I sold a pair of vintage earrings once on Idle Fish. The item was fine before shipping... The buyer claimed that the earrings were damaged when she received them. I asked the buyer to send them back... She returned them a week later, but the earrings had already been worn”*. Additionally, the primary challenges with the resale **platforms** are **customer service** (e.g., AI customer services) and **quality control** (e.g., counterfeits) issues. For instance, the resale platforms' AI customer services (e.g., sensitive word detection) are not intelligent enough to deal with complex questions. The rampant counterfeits could lead to untrust between sellers and buyers. As one stated, *“It is very easy to encounter fake products on Idle Fish... It will lead to untrust from buyers to all the sellers on the platform...”*.

Social and **hedonic** values are the primary gaining associated with the individual consumers' selling experiences. Fashion resale platforms with social media features provide space for cultivating a **social network** and **friendships** between sellers and buyers, particularly among young users. For instance, one stated, *“A girl from Shanghai has the same foot size as me... she often buys second-hand items I listed on my page... I always put a small gift in the package when I ship the products to her, and she always expresses her thankfulness after receiving them. We somehow become friends”*. **Hedonic** value could include **treasure-hunting fun**. For instance, one mentioned, *“I am keen on collecting Lolita dresses... some rare styles are out-of-production and hard to find. I am glad there is a platform for us Lolita dress lovers to exchange collections...”*.

Conclusion and Discussion. Chinese young consumers generally have a positive attitude towards the fashion resale market and second-hand platforms. On resale platforms, second-hand

sellers have the opportunity to reap numerous benefits. Despite some unpleasant experiences of sellers with the fashion resale platform and second-hand buyers, young consumers believe that the fashion resale market in China has vast potential to grow and it is also an ongoing global trend. This study adds to the existing literature with empirical findings from second-hand sellers' perspectives regarding the motives and challenges of participating in fashion resale, as well as meanings and values obtained from such sustainable consumption mode (Joyner Armstrong & Park, 2020). In addition, this exploratory study provides evidence that young consumers feel empowered economically and socially via their participation in the resale market (e.g., Turunen et al., 2020). Our findings also indicate that China's fashion resale platforms need to improve the authentication service and better regulate to avoid counterfeit items for healthy development.

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