Examining Gen Z consumer sustainable clothing consumption preferences through the lens of perceived value

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Research Rationale. In the fashion industry, one of the largest contributors to pollution and waste is fast fashion, which promotes over-consumption through the rapid production of trendy clothing (Joy et al., 2012). In response to the significant environmental issues caused by fast fashion, sustainable practice approaches have been suggested by both industry and fashion scholars. With more consumers, especially young consumers, being aware of environmental issues caused by the fashion industry, the fashion industry has been pushed and pulled to switch to pursuing a circular economy. One of the essential components of the circular economy in fashion is resale, which significantly contributes to sustainability by extending the lifespan of products and reducing fashion waste. Fashion resale not only reduces waste and supports a sustainable circular economy, but also mitigates consumers' concerns about environmental issues and provides them with unique and affordable fashion options (Lai, 2022). Furthermore, research shows that consumers who embrace resale are more likely to engage in other sustainable consumption practices, such as repurposing or repairing clothing (Bhatt et al., 2019). Zhang et al. (2021) found that consumers who were aware of the negative impact of unsustainable fashion practices were less likely to engage in fast fashion. Additionally, those same consumers were equally likely to participate in sustainable circular practices such as buying and selling pre-owned clothing, or fashion clothing resale (e.g. vintage or secondhand) (Joy et al., 2012).

Although the impact of the fashion industry on the environment has become increasingly notorious, older generations remain less likely to engage in sustainable fashion practices. Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2019) found that Millennials were more likely to be interested in sustainability in fashion consumption compared to Boomers and Gen Xers. As Gen Z becomes the fastest-growing consumer segment, understanding their clothing consumption practices is crucial for promoting sustainability in the fashion industry. To this end, this research intends to 1) examine Gen Z consumers' preferences in clothing consumption and their sustainable clothing consumption patterns, and 2) examine how this consumer cohort's value perceptions shape their participation in the fashion research market as a pre-owned product seller or buyer.

The concept of consumer value explains why consumers choose to participate in sustainable fashion consumption such as resale practices. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) present a four-dimensional model that illustrates how consumers perceive the values and benefits of products and services from emotional, social, quality/performance, and price/value aspects. In terms of fashion resale, for example, consumers may find emotional benefits through the uniqueness of interesting clothing finds, or in the social context of participating in sustainable practices. Equally, consumers may find benefit in the quality/performance of well-maintained items with vintage appeal or price/value benefits in affordable clothing options. In the context of young consumers, it appears that the Gen Z

cohort has emerged as a generation with a paradigm toward sustainable practice due to the benefits of affordability of designer brands, and the desire to make a positive impact on the environment (Lavuri et al., 2021). Holbrook (1986) classified consumer value into self- vs. other-oriented. Self-oriented fashion consumers primarily focus on their desires without caring much about the social value of a product or service. Consequently, these consumers may not care about environmental issues caused by fashion consumption, or not actively practice sustainable fashion consumption. Based on the above discussion and a review of the literature, we proposed the following hypotheses: *H1*: Consumer Pro-Environmental Beliefs (PEBs), and Perceived Resale Benefits (PRBs) of Clothing Resale Participation (CRP) (both buying and selling pre-owned products) affect individuals' attitude (ATT) toward, and acceptance (ACP) of; and *H2*: Consumers' value orientation (CV) shapes their PEBs, PRBs, ATT, and ACP of CRP and the extent of influences among these variables.

Methods. An online survey was developed and administered. Multi-item scales were adopted or adapted from previous research to measure included constructs of PEBs (Moon et al., 2015), PRBs (Berg et al., 2022), and CV (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Items assessing sustainable clothing consumption and CRP were created by researchers. A convenience sample with 323 complete responses was collected from a U.S.-based major university. SPSS and Amos were utilized for data analysis. The reliability and validity of constructs were assessed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and Cronbach's alpha testing. Indicators were created by averaging all the measure items respectively.

Findings and Results. Descriptive findings show that 93% of the participants have pre-owned items in their wardrobe (up to 60% of their whole wardrobe). However, still, around 30% of participants have 40-60% fast fashion in their wardrobe. The most frequently mentioned attributes of pre-owned fashion clothing are *value for money*, *high quality*, *authenticity*, *uniqueness*, and *worth keeping*. The most frequently mentioned attributes of fast fashion are *low price, easy access, trendy,* and *many choices*. Approximately, 75% of participants have acquired pre-owned items from local thrift or vintage stores, and 50% of participants have purchased pre-owned items from resale platforms. Poshmark is the most frequently used resale platform followed by Depop. Factor analysis revealed three dimensions of PRBs, great deal, many choices, and access to limited editions. Regress analysis results showed that only the PRB of a great deal (β =.15; p < .02), and PEBs (β =..33; p <.001) affect ATT (R^2 = .21), while ATT (β =.53; p < .001), PEBs (β =.13; p < .03), and the PRB of access to limited editions (β =.21; p < .001) affect ACP (R^2 = .42). Therefore, H1 was partially supported. Cluster analysis with the four dimensions of consumer perceived value as input variables revealed three groups: maximum value fashion pursuers (MV), self-oriented fashion lovers (SO), and indifferent fashion shoppers (ID). Only 5% of the participants are classified in the ID group. The majority (72%) of the participants belong to the MV group, and 23 % of the participants were classified as MV members. The SO group members show high scores in the dimension of emotional, performance, and price value, except for significantly low scores in social value compared with the MV group. Due to the low number of ID group, the rest of the analysis only focused on the other two groups. MANOVA tests showed that the two groups hold the same attitudes and perceive the benefits of resale participation to the same degree. However, group SO was low in pro-environmental beliefs, and intention to continue participating in fashion resale. Multi-group regression comparison showed

the different factor saliences across the two groups. For the SO group, only PEBs marginally affect ATT, which affects continued participation in fashion resale. None of the dimensions of the PRBs was found significant in terms of affecting ATT or ACP. Therefore, H2 was supported.

Overall, the majority of Gen Z consumers care about environmental issues and are willing to embrace sustainable consumption, indicating that environmentally conscious clothing consumption has become mainstream among this consumer cohort. The participation of Gen Z consumers in the fashion resale market reflects their commitment to sustainability, affordability, and individuality. As the fashion industry continues to grapple with environmental and ethical concerns, the popularity of resale among younger generations may be a sign of a broader shift in consumer value and consumption toward more conscious modes. From a practical perspective, fashion brands need to increase the accessibility of circular consumption options.

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