

# GUILT-FREE SHOPPING? SECOND-HAND FASHION AND THE SUSTAINABILITY PARADOX

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**Abstract:** *Secondhand fashion is widely promoted as a sustainable solution to fashion goods overproduction and waste by extending product lifespans and supporting circular resource flows. However, limited attention has been given to how consumers experience and rationalise secondhand fashion consumption in everyday life. This study explores the meanings and behavioural patterns associated with secondhand fashion consumption among young adult Muslim consumers in Malaysia, with particular attention to its implications for sustainable consumption. Adopting a phenomenological research design, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that secondhand fashion consumption is frequently framed as a guilt-free and morally acceptable practice, enabling consumers to justify increased acquisition, emotional shopping, and wardrobe expansion. Rather than reducing overall consumption, secondhand markets can function as a psychological buffer that alleviates guilt while sustaining high consumption intensity. This paradox highlights how sustainability-oriented practices may unintentionally enable overconsumption through moral justification and cognitive rationalisation. By revealing the lived tensions between sustainability ideals and consumption behaviour, this study contributes to sustainability science by critically examining demand-side dynamics within circular fashion systems. The findings offer important implications for policymakers, sustainability advocates,*

*and platform designers seeking to promote responsible consumption beyond recycling and resale, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable resource utilisation under SDG 12.*

**Keywords:** *Secondhand Fashion; Sustainable Consumption; Circular Fashion; Cognitive Dissonance; Young Adult Consumers*

## Introduction

Fashion and textile sector has gained substantial economic traction, contributing billions in investments and revenue to national growth, however this industry responsible for 10% of global carbon emission, 20% of global wastewater and for vast amounts of ocean based plastic pollution (United Nations, 2019). The unsustainable nature of fast fashion consumption is now recognised as one of the critical challenges in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (Ashraf et al., 2023). Nevertheless, not only the production of fast fashion raising serious environmental, social and economic problem but also the disposal or post-consumption of fashion goods, contribute to the environmental consequences due to the excessive usage of energy and water consumption. Although fast fashion industry continuously being criticised on their irresponsible action on the environmental destruction, the fast fashion market continuously response to the consumers demand as it is cheap, offering new and up-to-date styles, become a disposable item at the expense of the environment.

In response to growing concerns over textile waste, carbon emissions, and resource depletion, second-hand and preloved fashion markets have emerged as widely endorsed sustainability solutions (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). By extending product lifecycles and reducing reliance on new production, these practices are often positioned as central to circular economy strategies and responsible consumption initiatives. In recent years, second-hand fashion has gained substantial popularity among young adult consumers, particularly through digital resale platforms, thrift markets, and peer-to-peer exchanges. These channels promote affordability, accessibility, and environmental responsibility, reshaping how consumers engage with clothing beyond first ownership (Hassan et al., 2022). While such practices are assumed to contribute to waste reduction and resource efficiency, emerging evidence suggests that increased access to low-cost fashion alternatives may also encourage higher acquisition rates and frequent wardrobe turnover. Prior studies defined secondhand goods as items no longer needed or being used by the user (Moon, 2024), however, the life cycle of the goods could be extended and deliver value to others (Evans et al., 2022; Jain & Rathi, 2023). Hence, through secondhand fashion market, circular economy could be practiced through the concept of reused which is expected to prolong its service life (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020; Ubaidillah & Zulkarnain, 2025), reduce the environmental destruction associated with the production and disposal stages in the life cycle of new products (Brydges, 2021; Khairul Akter et al., 2022). As a result, secondhand fashion market has been recognised as an alternative towards sustainable consumption and reduce over production, particularly in fashion industry.

From a sustainability science perspective, this raises critical questions about whether second-hand fashion consumption genuinely reduces overall resource use or merely redistributes consumption patterns. If reuse lowers psychological or financial barriers to purchasing, it may inadvertently reinforce overconsumption rather than mitigate it. Understanding this tension is essential for achieving the goals of sustainable resource utilisation and responsible consumption under SDG.

Contrary to fast fashion business model that reinforce short utilisation periods and high disposal rates, circular economy on fashion consumption encompasses reusing, recycling and recovering materials in production or distribution and consumption process. Indeed, fashion consumption commonly driven by hedonic needs, emotional gratification and impulse purchase (Mashilo et al., 2025; Syaferi & Narimawati, 2024), often results in regret, underutilisation, and disposal unused fashion items (Avci & Hacikelesoglu, 2021; Kalbasi & Amani, 2022). This explains why Malaysia generated more than 430,000 metric tonnes of textile waste in 2021, with the majority originating from household consumption, underscoring a critical need to examine consumer behaviour patterns as drivers of environmental impact (Waste Management Association of Malaysia, 2025). The convenience and allure of fast fashion foster impulsive buying and constant wardrobe turnover, exacerbating environmental degradation and unsustainable consumption (Hassan & Ara, 2022; Mcneill & Moore, 2015; Papadopoulou et al., 2022).

Despite the rapid growth of secondhand fashion markets, existing research has largely focused on adoption drivers, environmental attitudes, or market potential, with limited attention to how consumers make sense of their consumption behaviour within these systems. In particular, qualitative insights into how second-hand fashion intersects with emotional needs, moral reasoning, and disposal practices remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining young adult consumers lived experiences with secondhand fashion consumption and its implications for sustainability.

## Literature Review

### Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Sustainable consumption literature increasingly acknowledges the presence of rebound effects, where efficiency-oriented practices lead to higher overall consumption. In the context of fashion, affordability and accessibility of second-hand goods may reduce perceived consumption costs, encouraging consumers to acquire more items than they otherwise would. This phenomenon complicates the assumption that reuse automatically aligns with reduced environmental impact.

In contrast, sustainable fashion consumption that promoting mindful consumption behaviour (Mohammad et al., 2021), consumers need to think on the “cause and effect” of their consumption practice as any purchase decision will give implication to the society, nature, and other living creatures. Hence, the concept of sustainable consumption encourages consumers to avoid wasteful and splurge consumption as well as impulse buying behaviour which leading to the over consumption practice (Brydges et al., 2021; Ertekin & Atik, 2020). As sustainable consumption practice promoting modest consumption and encourage slow fashion consumption which has high longevity (Hassan et al., 2022), contradict to fast fashion that promoting irresponsible consumption. Prior study found that consumers that engage in sustainable fashion consumption incline to satisfying their utilitarian needs instead of hedonic values (Razzaq et al., 2018).

Prior literature discovered secondhand or preloved clothing market become one of the popular choices among youngster (Valaei et al., 2025), enable to reduce clothing underutilisation, which promote sustainable fashion consumption among the society. Although, secondhand item always being associated by ‘used’ and hygiene or contamination issue, a study found that

consumers tend to fulfil their needs through the act of consuming together with people that usually they did not know before and trigger social innovation (Ritch, 2020). Prior studies found that among the factors that motivate fashion consumers to practice fashion renting is environment concerns (Westerberg & Martinez, 2023), denotes that consumers are aware on their responsibilities towards the nature and environment.

Over the past decade, prior literature found environmental concern, biospheric values, economic benefit, personal and social norms, and perceived behavioural control, as well as barriers related to perceived sacrifice and quality concerns (Puspita-Sari et al., 2025; Sepe et al., 2025) as a factor that motivate consumers involvement in circular fashion. Additionally, the existence of online platforms shows that perceived usefulness, ease of use, attitudes and social pressure, including endorsements from social media celebrities significantly increase the adoption of circular fashion services like clothing rental (Shrivastava et al., 2021). In a same vein, existing study on circular and sustainable fashion adoption in Malaysia, found attitude, environmental concern, moral norms, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms as a predictor (Ubaidillah & Zulkarnain, 2025) indicate young consumer involve in sustainable practices due to the personal and social obligation, specifically in secondhand clothing (Kemi & Zilahy, 2025; Puspita-Sari et al., 2025; Wagner & Heinzl, 2020). This study examines how young adult Muslim consumers make sense of secondhand fashion consumption and how these practices shape broader consumption patterns.

### **Secondhand Fashion and Circular Economy**

Study on secondhand fashion consumption has expanded rapidly alongside the growth of resale markets, reflecting both economic and sustainability interests. Secondhand fashion markets have emerged as a response to the environmental and social challenges posed by fast fashion, including overproduction, resource depletion, and waste accumulation (Clemm et al., 2025; Hellström & Olsson, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). The circular economy framework promotes strategies such as reuse, resale, and recycling to minimise waste and extend product lifecycles. In fact, secondhand and preloved fashion markets have been recognised as mechanisms to slow material flows and reduce overproduction through circulation, aim to contribute to environmental protection and sustainable resource management (Rahaman & Khan, 2025). Notably, studies show that secondhand fashion consumption motivated by environmental consciousness, economic affordability, and social influence, although consumers perceived quality and hygiene concerns has been found as barriers in promoting secondhand fashion consumption (Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020; Jain & Rathi, 2023; Ki et al., 2024; Negash & Akhbar, 2024; Taylor et al., 2023). Studies on consumer perception indicate social responsibility and environmental values shape willingness to engage in secondhand fashion goods, though the magnitude of this influence varies with cultural and contextual factor (Hassan et al., 2022; Puspita-Sari et al., 2025).

Secondhand clothing consumers are motivated by economic, self-expressive, hedonic, environmental, and social contribution values, not solely economic motivation (Frahm et al., 2025). Secondhand and preloved fashion markets are widely promoted as a solution to fashion overproduction and textile waste. By extending product lifespans and reducing reliance on new production, these practices are often framed as inherently sustainable. By extending product lifecycles and reducing reliance on new production, resale and reuse markets are widely promoted as solutions aligned with circular economy principles and sustainable consumption goals. However, growing participation in second-hand markets raises critical questions about whether such practices meaningfully reduce overall consumption or merely redistribute it.

Despite the perceived sustainability of second-hand clothes, consumers involvement in secondhand fashion consumption often result in large volumes of clothing purchases, against the concept of sustainability. Consumers who prefer secondhand products opt for engaging in practical consumption, taking advantage of lower costs compared to new items, particularly fashion items with a relatively short life-cycle and trend-orientation (Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020; Taylor et al., 2023). Although, second-hand and preloved fashion consumption has gained increasing attention as a key strategy in addressing the environmental impacts of the fashion industry. factors such as easy access, cheaper, and positive emotional experiences, consumers may engage in frequent purchasing that mirrors the intensity frequent purchase. Therefore, the emergence of secondhand fashion market raises critical questions about whether second-hand fashion reduces overall consumption or merely shifts its form of fast fashion consumption.

Study found that philanthropic and economic motives influence consumers involvement in sustainable consumption and clothing disposal behaviour (Hassan et al., 2022; Shamsuzzaman et al., 2025; Wai Yee et al., 2016), illustrate Malaysian consumers internalise sustainability norms and perceive social support, which align with circular principle, call upon further exploration on this issue. Hence, circular economy transitions depend not only on technological innovation or recycling infrastructure, but also on consumer meaning-making from the lens of how individuals interpret consumption, value, ownership, and disposal of fashion goods as waste or re-enter circulation as resources. This study aims to explore a lived experiences and personal narratives surrounding secondhand fashion consumption among young adult Muslim Malaysian. By identifying patterns of meaning-making from impulsive purchase, emotional compensation, wardrobe turnover, sharing and donation, and collaborative consumption; the study offers a finding that reflects varying degrees of sustainability consciousness and practices.

## Methodology

This phenomenology study strives to explore the insights of young adult Muslim consumers fashion disposal behaviour from the lens of secondhand fashion goods consumers lived-experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with twelve informants to uncover their motivation on secondhand fashion consumption. The purposive and snowball sampling strategy was employed by including Malaysian young adult Muslim consumers aged 20–43 years old with at least two years of experience in purchasing and consuming secondhand fashion goods. Turning to this present study, the informants were comprised of Malaysian young adult consumers from two generations - Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), are operationalised as young adult consumers. Both generations share similar characteristics in consumption patterns; financial savviness, value and brand consciousness, as well as a positive belief that fashion goods can project their self-concept, personality, and lifestyle. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for about 45 to 60 minutes. To begin the process of selection, potential informants were identified from the researcher's list of friends, family members, and acquaintances who have been involved in the purchase and consumption of fashion goods. Subsequently, the informants were identified via social media platforms and screened through a series of questions to identify those who match the requirements (inclusion criteria). Then, they were invited for a face-to-face or virtual interview.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The data were analysed into thematic analysis as it offers a way of recognising and tapping the underlying themes in a given dataset, flexible enough to be modified for the needs of many studies, besides providing rich and elaborate data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Vaismoradi &

Snelgrove, 2019). Unlike content analysis, which is a process that describes qualitative data to represent clusters of responses by establishing categories and identifying the frequency by which they occur (Crowe et al., 2015), thematic analysis refers to the process of interpreting data to find patterns of meaning across the data; this suitable for in this study. The researchers recorded all interview sessions and wrote them to generate interpretations via a hermeneutic circle during the data collection process. The step intended to comprehend and interpret the phenomenon based on the consumers' shared knowledge and experience. The essence was the final output derived from the interpretation of lived experience. Gist from descriptive stories reflects the experiences of the informants in a specific phenomenon that comprises of "what" they experienced and "how" they encountered it (Flood, 2010).

The researchers acquired the 'familiarity' with the object or subject while discussing the phenomenon to identify the essential meaning to obtain the essence. For instance, our experience in purchasing secondhand fashion goods allowed us to be familiar with the phenomenon of secondhand fashion consumption. It enabled us to discuss its fundamental meaning. Consumers' thoughts on the benefits gained, feelings, and the researchers captured emotions from their involvement in fashion consumption activity signified experiences in the consumption process. The researchers interpreted such experiences into stories and texts, which were then thoroughly examined to understand the motivation to involve in secondhand fashion meaning structure as part of the lifeworld that arrived at the essence. Hence, essential meaning may be concluded as something that we are familiar with, such as life practices, wherein this familiarity has to be expressed through living, action, stories, and reflection (Creswell, 2013). The researchers used the interpretive process, and this required shifting from one part of an experience to the whole experience, as well as back and forth continuously to increase the depth of understanding the experience (Laverty, 2003).

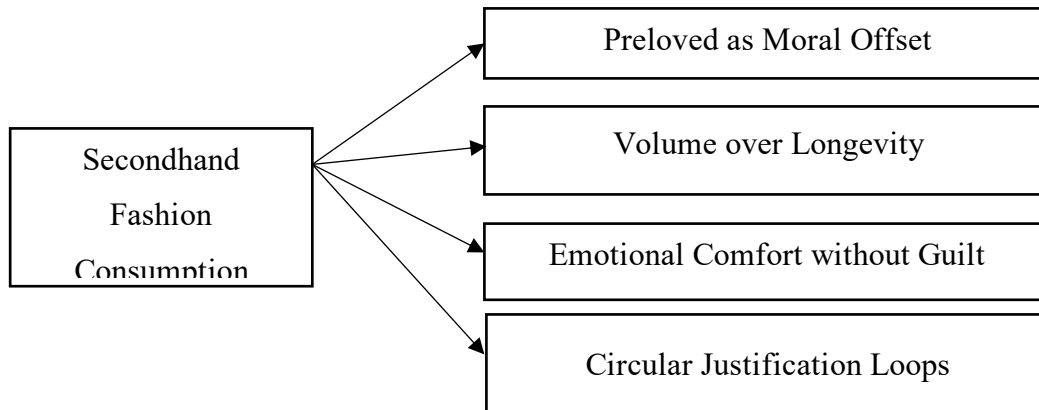
The researchers extracted the 'significant statement' from the transcription, potentially relevant and essential to answering the research questions. Then, the researchers articulated meanings for each significant statement extracted, and this process included questioning the data patterns and assigning the coded information to the RQs (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researchers transformed the identified initial themes into concise phrases to capture the essential quality found in the text (Osborn & Smith, 2008). Then, the researchers looked for connections among the subthemes to cluster them in a more meaningful way. In this process, similar themes were cross-checked with each informant transcript to ensure that the emerging themes reflected the informant's actual words and meaning. During this process, the researchers clustered or merged some subthemes into a master list of concepts derived from both data sets that reflected the recurring patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This regular pattern turned into the main themes that illustrated abstraction derived from the data, representing the general inductive approach.

In an attempt to empower a holistic perspective, researcher triangulation was attended to validate the data analysis and findings. The interchange and discussion of interpretations help the researchers to define and redefine the direction of analysis. The researchers examined data categorisation and comparisons between the informant's reports to identify the primary themes.

## Findings and Discussion

Four subthemes emerged in relation to young adult Muslim consumer secondhand fashion purchase behaviour with regard to consumers rationalisation on their involvement in secondhand fashion consumption. The four subthemes related to young adult Muslim consumers involvement in secondhand fashion consumption are sustaining value beyond,

strategic minimisers, sunk cost rationalisation and self-compensation. The emerging themes are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Emerging Themes of Secondhand Fashion Consumption**

### **Theme 1: Preloved as Moral Offset**

The subtheme of preloved as moral offset illustrates preloved and second-hand fashion consumption as a morally preferable alternative, rationalise their purchase as an environmentally responsible. This informant views purchasing preloved items aligned with sustainability values through the reuse, waste reduction and cost efficiency, although their material possession levels were high. Hence, the informants justify, preloved fashion consumption as cost-saving and avoid from wasteful, offset the feeling of guilt on the unused and excessive spending.

*"It's fun. I have a lot of new clothes. Thrift shops are different. Their prices are way cheaper, yet we get clothes that... that sometimes look like the ones we'd wear for a day out—like when we go to H&M or Uniqlo, which are quite pricey. Brands Outlet is a bit cheaper, but still pricey. At thrift shops, sometimes—wow—you can get even better stuff for much cheaper. So, you end up getting a lot. That's how I get a lot of OOTD (Outfit of the Day) clothes." (Informant 8)*

*"Before this, I never went to thrift shops. Then, one of my friends invited me, said 'Let's go.' And from then on, I started enjoying it. It turns out it's really fun. The stuff is cheap, I buy something, wear it once, that's it... Once or twice, then, I give it away to people... Sometimes at thrift shops, it's the same... you can find Uniqlo and all that, right? And the price is much cheaper, I guess. Also, it's not like these clothes will be worn often... Before this, I had never gone to thrift shops. I used to think buying clothes was costly. But after going to thrift shops, the prices are so cheap. So, it's like, okay... just buy, buy, buy..." (Informant 10)*

### **Theme 2: Volume Over Longevity (lower price enable volume buying)**

The theme of volume over longevity describes how informants emphasise on quantity of purchase instead of durability. Consumers believed that the purchase of preloved and secondhand fashion deliver value-for-money and financially accessible, instead of necessity. The pricing strategy itself encouraged volume purchasing, motivate consumers to rationalise their purchase as a rational and economically sound decision led to excessive and

overconsumption. As described by the informants, the low prices urge them to rationalise their purchase is worth, even when purchases accumulated into large quantities.

*“No, not really—because it’s cheap. Even when it’s priced at two pieces for RM15, if you buy more than thirty, you get an additional discount. Sometimes, especially before Hari Raya, I would go there and come back with one big plastic bag—those big red ones—for only RM19. I feel like, “Is this for real? Oh my God, is it really this cheap?” It felt unbelievably cheap. At first, I became addicted to shop. I just kept buying and buying... “Oh my God”, where did all my money go?” I just buy and it felt exciting and fun...” (Informant 10)*

### **Theme 3: Emotional Comfort without Guilt**

The theme of emotional comfort without guilt illustrates the purchase of second-hand fashion as a mechanism for self-gratification through emotional experiences. The informant described a feeling of excitement, enjoyment and sense of reward when acquiring a high volume of fashion items at low prices. The purchase of secondhand fashion is often impulsive and accompanied by the thrill of discovery, branded finds and perceived “wins” created a context-dependent, with items frequently purchased for specific occasions and later underused or forgotten. The informants’ excerpts articulated that consumers are losing a sense of control, and their purchase behaviour was irrational as they were aware the fashion items they bought were unnecessary. The informants had no sense of guilt or regret during the shopping process, and over time, repeated exposure to this emotional gratification fostered habitual purchase, where shopping and purchase activity became a source of satisfaction.

*“... I feel satisfied because I get to spend my money. I’m able to buy things at the price I want, and I usually buy a lot in one go. So when I get home, I feel satisfied with lots of clothes, accessories, wallets. I buy clothes maybe once or twice a month at most. Shoes and handbags are less frequent. But every month, I will definitely spend money on something such as clothes, tops, trousers. At least once a month.... It feels good. It’s enjoyable because of the price and it was cheap. Sometimes you see expensive brands. Occasionally, there’s a feeling, “Why I end up buying the same thing again? There’s a brief moment of regret, but it passes quickly. Then I do it again.” (Informant 4)*

### **Theme 4: Circular Justification Loops**

The theme of circular justification loops illustrates how the activity of resale, preloved and secondhand which offer a lower price act as mechanisms that legitimised their overconsumption. The belief that fashion items could always be passed to others without feeling any regret due to the emergence of preloved market guided by cognitive alteration such as displaying a sense of gratitude, social responsibility and actively seek to extend the life of their fashion items. These individuals perceive secondhand fashion goods as a resource that retains value beyond personal use and are deeply influenced by the desire to share, give back, and contribute to others' lives. Their behaviour reflects a clear alignment with sustainability values and often incorporates spiritual or moral rationales for their practices.

*“If I buy something for RM150, I’ll sell it for RM170 or RM200. So later, if someone wants to negotiate a discount, at least I don’t lose my original investment. Usually, the most I look at is something like what I got from Afiq M that day. The clothes were nice, but... how do I say this... not very comfortable to wear. I bought it for*

*around RM180 and sold it for RM220... When they asked for a discount, I gave it to them for RM180. So even though I didn't really make a profit, I at least covered my costs. That's good enough for me." (Informant 1)*

*"Saving money? Yes! For me, it's one of the ways to prevent overconsumption. It's not like people are just buying and buying endlessly. At least when someone buys clothes but no longer wants them, they don't contribute to more waste. Instead, they resell them to others who can still use them. The main reason I choose preloved items is that they suit my style. That's the primary reason. The second reason is cost saving." (Informant 3)*

*"I usually tidy up and clear out my wardrobe about once every six months, and I will separate the clothes that I can no longer wear or don't want anymore. I'm usually the type who buys first without thinking about whether my wardrobe is already full or if there's enough space for new clothes. I've never really felt any regret, because I feel that bundled clothes are cheap, so it doesn't feel like a waste." (Informant 5)*

Exploring further on lived-experiences of fashion consumers, the findings reveal a sustainability paradox within secondhand fashion consumption. While participants perceived secondhand purchasing as environmentally responsible, their behaviours often reflected increased acquisition and frequent wardrobe turnover. Lower prices and easy accessibility encouraged consumers to purchase multiple items at once, framing excess and overconsumption as acceptable due to the secondhand nature of the goods. The emerging themes illustrates that consumer involvement in secondhand fashion consumption is not only shaped by sustainability motives but is deeply embedded in cognitive-emotional processes. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) explains the psychological discomfort that arises when an individual's behaviour conflicts with their beliefs, values, or attitudes. In the context of this subtheme, the participant demonstrates clear signs of inner conflict between their awareness of overconsumption and their actual shopping behaviour. Unfortunately, shopping activity delivers a sense of pleasure intensifies the dissonance when juxtaposed against possible personal values and morality, self-restraint or financial prudence. Secondhand fashion goods which offer at affordable price encourage consumers towards excessive spending and misaligned with the concept of circular fashion and sustainability that encourage responsible and mindful consumption. In fact, dissonance emerged when the consumers acknowledged the irrationality of their excessive purchase on large volume of secondhand fashion item, with value-consciousness attitude on saving money.

The emerging themes elucidates how secondhand fashion goods function as an emotional coping mechanism. Informants in this study revealed lower financial risks trigger for overconsumption instead of sustainability awareness. Secondhand fashion market which supposes promoted circular economy, has shifted the attitudes and behaviour from efficient resource utilisation toward immediate financial savings, enable consumers to justify their purchase quantity in a single transaction (Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020; Ki et al., 2024). The informants described feelings of pleasure, relief, and self-reward associated with thrift shopping, often detached from actual concept of circular and sustainability fashion.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory illustrate how consumers reconcile tensions between sustainability values and actual consumption behaviours; consumers hold two conflicting

cognitions; a belief to protect the environments, but frequently purchase secondhand clothing. Consequently, consumers experience psychological discomfort that motivates strategies to reduce dissonance and excusing their excessive purchase as rational behaviour. Consumers rationalise high volume of purchase by emphasising the sustainability credentials of their secondhand choices, although total consumption remains high. Additionally, this creates a form of moral offset, where the ethical framing of reused clothing is used to alleviate guilt on their continuous involvement in secondhand consumption. The finding elucidated that Malaysian consumers reframe their excessive spending on secondhand fashion goods as beneficial to others, thereby mitigating feelings of guilt and wastefulness.

Indeed, exploring further on this secondhand fashion consumption is essential for promoting circular and sustainable fashion consumption, reveal consumers motives contradict to the concept of circular fashion which support sustainability. Consumers purchase behaviour mostly guided by emotion, hedonic and impulsive, conflicts with longer-term values such as financial prudence or sustainable living. The existence of secondhand fashion market serves as an emotional outlet, enable consumers to manage stress, reward oneself, or prepare for specific social events. This finding aligns with the prior literature that found secondhand fashion goods, satisfy economic motivation due to the low price and recreational motivations which describe the satisfaction of emotional experiences while hunting the best deals (Taylor et al., 2023). Although few literatures found consumers motivated to involved in secondhand fashion consumption due to the responsible and ethics, environmental and ecological concern (Hellström & Olsson, 2024; Ubaidillah & Zulkarnain, 2025), the existence of secondhand and preloved fashion consumption, undermine the goal of resource efficiency due to the consumers excessive spending (Yerushalmi & Saha, 2025).

This study contributes to the theoretical stance by comprehending how consumers justified their involvement in secondhand fashion consumption and the significance of this consumption activity to their daily lives from the lens of CDT (Festinger, 1957). The findings contribute to the understanding of consumers' cognitive process by providing empirical evidence of the distinct meanings underlying excessive fashion consumption through the existence of secondhand fashion market, thus enriching the emerging sustainable fashion literature. The findings of this study reveal that young adult consumers engage in secondhand fashion consumption are deeply influenced by economic and emotional motivations, and cognitive justifications. Collectively, consumers motivation on secondhand fashion consumption illustrate how circular fashion are not purely functional as a mean to cultivate sustainable and responsible consumption but encourage consumers towards excessive and waste consumption practice through several rationalisation strategy by the consumers. Understanding this motivation is essential for practicing circular fashion and sustainability, thus, develop tailored interventions that align with the psychological and behavioural tendencies of different consumer groups.

### **Contribution of the Study and Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that secondhand fashion consumption, while framed as sustainable, can paradoxically enable overconsumption through moral justification, emotional satisfaction, and affordable excess. By examining young adult Muslim consumers lived experiences, the research reveals that reuse alone does not guarantee reduced resource use or responsible consumption. Instead, sustainability outcomes depend on how circular practices interact with consumer motivations and behavioural patterns. These findings highlight the need for sustainability strategies that move beyond promoting reuse toward addressing consumption

intensity, psychological drivers, and demand-side restraint. Understanding secondhand fashion as a socially and emotionally embedded practice is essential for aligning circular economy initiatives with the broader goals of sustainable resource management and SDG 12.

While this study provides rich insights into the psychological and emotional complexities of secondhand fashion among young adult consumers in Malaysia, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the research is based on a qualitative design with a relatively small and purposively selected sample which limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader population. The subjective interpretations of the participants lived experiences, while valuable, may not reflect the full diversity of young adult secondhand fashion consumption behaviours across different age groups, income levels, or cultural backgrounds. Future research that adopts a mixed-method approach, incorporates broader demographics, and explores digital and global contexts will help to build a more comprehensive and actionable body of knowledge in this important area.

In conclusion, the study offers nuanced insights into the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of secondhand fashion consumption among young adult Muslim consumers. It advocates for a shift towards circular economy and sustainable consumption through fashion goods market, as a pathway to personal coherence and long-term sustainability.

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