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Gen Z and the second-hand paradox:

Understanding overconsumption in the digital age of fashion

International Business
Master's thesis

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Second-hand fashion has become an increasingly central part of contemporary fashion consumption, often framed as an alternative response to the unsustainable and overconsumptive nature of fast fashion. At the same time, recent public discourse suggests that the contemporary forms of second-hand consumption may also enable and normalise overconsumption, particularly among younger consumers. The aim of this thesis is to examine how overconsumption is constructed, maintained, and perceived in the context of online second-hand fashion consumption among Generation Z.

The thesis addresses this aim by examining how overconsumptive behaviour is constructed and maintained in contemporary online second-hand fashion, with a particular focus on Generation Z consumers and how they navigate competing values in excessive second-hand consumption. Together, these perspectives form the basis for answering the main research question of how Generation Z consumers perceive overconsumption in the context of online second-hand fashion.

The study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in netnographic methods. The empirical material consists of publicly available TikTok haul videos related to excessive online second-hand fashion and their associated comment sections. This approach enables the examination of consumption practices and the views associated with them as they naturally appear in digital environments. The data is analysed using qualitative thematic analysis which, together with the theoretical framework, enables the formation of a comprehensive understanding of overconsumption in second-hand fashion among this generation.

The findings indicate that overconsumptive behaviour in the context of second-hand clothing is not only acknowledged but also openly displayed and socially accepted. Platform affordances such as ease of purchasing and a wide product selection, combined with the central role of social media in the everyday lives of Generation Z together reinforce frequent and high levels of consumption. In addition, central values of Generation Z, as well as psychological mechanisms typically associated with fast fashion, such as cognitive dissonance and moral compensation, were clearly present in the context of second-hand clothing. Sustainability is notably absent from the analysed content, suggesting that second-hand consumption is often treated as morally acceptable by default rather than actively reflected upon.

Overall, the thesis contributes to research on sustainable fashion consumption and contemporary consumer behaviour by offering an emerging perspective on overconsumption within online second-hand markets. By focusing on Generation Z and naturally occurring social media data, the study highlights the need to critically reassess sustainability assumptions surrounding online second-hand fashion and the platforms that enable and shape second-hand consumption.

Keywords: overconsumption, Gen Z, consumer behaviour, second-hand, online retail, TikTok, fashion consumption, retail industry, sustainable consumption, circular economy

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Käytettyjen vaatteiden (second hand) suosio muodissa on kasvanut merkittäväksi osaksi nykyaikaista muodin kulutusta, ja sitä pidetään usein vaihtoehtona pikamuodin kestävämmälle ja ylikulutusta ruokkivalle luonteelle. Viimeaikainen julkinen keskustelu on kuitenkin tuonut esiin huolen siitä, että käytettyjen vaatteiden kulutuksen nykyiset, erityisesti digitaaliset muodot saattavat myös mahdollistaa ja normalisoida ylikulutusta etenkin nuorten kuluttajien keskuudessa. Tämä kehitys on ristiriidassa käytettyjen vaatteiden ympäristöllisesti vastuullisena pidetyn luonteen kanssa.

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee, miten käytetyn muodin ylikulutus rakentuu, miten sitä ylläpidetään digitaalisilla alustoilla ja miten se koetaan Z-sukupolven keskuudessa. Tutkimus keskittyy Z-sukupolven ostovoimaltaan kasvavana kuluttajajoukkona sekä siihen, miten he tasapainoilevat keskenään ristiriitaisten arvojen välillä käytettyjen vaatteiden kulutuksessa. Näiden pohjalta tutkimus pyrkii vastaamaan päättökysymykseen: miten Z-sukupolven edustajat kokevat ylikulutuksen käytetyn muodin kontekstissa?

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, joka perustui netnografisiin menetelmiin. Empiirinen aineisto koostui julkisesti saatavilla olevista TikTokissa julkaistuista käytettyjen vaatteiden ostosten esittelyvideoista sekä niihin liittyvistä kommenttikentistä. Tämä lähestymistapa mahdollisti kulutuskäytäntöjen ja niihin liittyvien näkemysten tarkastelun sellaisina kuin ne luonnollisesti digitaalisissa ympäristöissä ilmenevät. Aineisto analysoitiin laadullisen temaattisen analyysin avulla, muodostaen yhdessä teoreettisen viitekehyksen kanssa kattavan kokonaiskuvan käytetyn muodin ylikulutuksesta sukupolven keskuudessa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että ylikulutuksellinen käyttäytyminen käytettyjen vaatteiden kontekstissa on paitsi tiedostettua myös avointa ja sosiaalisesti hyväksyttyä. Alustojen tarjoamat mahdollisuudet, kuten ostamisen helppous ja laaja valikoima, yhdistyvät sosiaalisen median keskeiseen rooliin Z-sukupolven arjessa ja vahvistavat yhdessä tiheää ja runsasta kulutusta. Lisäksi Z-sukupolvelle keskeiset arvot sekä tyypillisesti pikamuotiin liitetyt psykologiset mekanismit, kuten kognitiivinen dissonanssi ja moraalinen kompensointi, olivat selkeästi havaittavissa myös käytettyjen vaatteiden kontekstissa. Kestävyysnäkökulma oli analysoidussa sisällössä huomattavan vähäisessä roolissa, mikä viittaa siihen, että käytettyjen vaatteiden kulutusta pidetään usein lähtökohtaisesti moraalisesti hyväksyttävänä ilman aktiivista pohdintaa.

Tutkielma täydentää kestävästä muodin kulutuksesta ja nykyaikaista kuluttajakäyttäytymistä koskevaa tutkimusta tarjoamalla uuden, ylikulutukseen liittyvän näkökulman käytettyjen vaatteiden myyntialustoihin. Tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat tarvetta arvioida kriittisesti käytettyyn muotiin liitettyjä kestävyysoletuksia sekä niitä digitaalisia alustoja, jotka mahdollistavat ja muovaavat nykyaikaista käytettyjen vaatteiden kulutusta ja sen suuntaa.

Avainsanat: ylikulutus, Z-sukupolvi, kuluttajakäyttäytyminen, second hand, second-hand, verkkokauppa, TikTok, kirppari, käytetty muoti, kestävä kulutus, kiertotalous

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1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background and motivation of the thesis and situates the study within the broader discussion of contemporary fashion consumption. It outlines the growing concern surrounding fashion overconsumption and turns attention to the emergence of second-hand fashion as a seemingly sustainable alternative. By presenting the research gap, research questions, and structure of the thesis, the chapter establishes the foundation for examining the tension between second-hand fashion consumption and overconsumption, and the evolving relationship between the two.

Background and motivation for the thesis

The fashion industry is ranked the second largest polluting industry in the world (Balińska et al. 2024, Peleg Mizrachi & Sharon 2025). Characterised by rapid production cycles, low-cost garments, as well as creation of excessive amounts of textile waste, fast fashion has resulted in a dramatic increase in apparel consumption, with global consumption rising by 400% compared to two decades ago (Suen et al. 2023). Approximately 92 million tonnes of textile waste are produced every year, a number that is only rising each year (Prisco et al. 2025). This surge is driven by consumer demand for trendy, affordable clothing, which has fostered a culture of disposability where garments are often worn only a few times before being discarded (Juanga-Labayen et al. 2022; Peña et al. 2023). This is also known as overconsumption – behaviour that involves the frequent purchase of more clothing than is needed and the replacement of garments while they are still completely functional, driven by factors such as the desire to stay fashionable, social integration, status communication, and impulsive buying (de Koning et al. 2024).

In general opinion, the consumption of fast fashion, in especially its most intense and recent form of online-driven ultra-fast fashion, also known to rely on customer data to predict trends right when or even before they fully emerge (Camargo et al. 2020, 543), is seen as the main driving force to be blamed in the global overconsumption crisis (de Koning et al. 2024). The phenomenon is fuelled by the fast fashion business model, which emphasises low-priced, quickly produced garments aligned with fleeting trends (D'Itria & Colombi 2024; Singh 2023). This excessive purchasing behaviour, especially among young consumers, is accelerated by the constant emergence of new styles and, more recently, by short-lived microtrends and aesthetics popularised on social media (de Koning et al. 2024). Additionally, the normalisation of disposability, where garments are used for short-term purposes rather than valued for their longevity, speeds up the consumption cycle, and contributes to environmental harm (Marques & Ferreira 2020).

Now, as an opposing way of consuming, second-hand fashion, is generally considered to be the more environmentally friendly alternative to fast fashion consumption, and a way to resist overconsumption of apparel (Klooster 2024; Li 2024). Second-hand fashion refers to, as the name suggests, apparel that have previously been owned and used by other consumers (Sihvonen & Turunen 2016, ThredUp 2025). The reputation of second-hand fashion consumption has fluctuated over the years, but as of today, it has reached a historically high popularity (ThreadUp 2025). Popularity is on the rise especially among Generation Z, which stands for, according to most sources, people born between 1997 and 2012 (Stahl & Literat 2023; World Economic Forum 2021). According to research, this generation is especially conscious of environmental sustainability, naming it as a central value in consuming year after year (Deloitte 2020; 2022; 2024), which seemingly explains second-hand's rise in popularity among the generation. Accordingly, second-hand is seen as the sustainable alternative to fast fashion among Generation Z, with buying second-hand being one of the top actions to protect the environment (Deloitte 2022, 22).

When it comes to the evolution of second-hand fashion, it too has moved into the digital era. As a result, customer-to-customer (C2C) platforms have become an increasingly popular way to buy and sell clothing (Sihvonen & Turunen 2016). These platforms have boomed in popularity especially among Generation Z – studies show that a notable amount of Gen Z consumers prefers these online second-hand platforms to physical ones, some purchasing up to weekly from them (Grieco et al. 2023). Data also suggests that this is the start of something rather revolutionary to the fashion industry – at its current growth rate, the second-hand market is globally expanding 11 times faster than the overall retail sector and is projected to account for 17 percent of traditional retail by 2029 (Bae et al. 2022). According to a report conducted by one of these online second-hand platforms, ThredUp (2025), the second-hand market might become twice the size of fast fashion market by the year 2030, and the global second-hand fashion market is expected to reach 367 billion dollars by 2029.

At first, second-hand fashion gradually gaining more ground in the apparel industry seems like a forward-looking shift, and these platforms like a purely positive evolution of fashion consumption. Some could even go as far as calling it the long-awaited solution to the global overconsumption problem – affordable, online, and most of all, sustainable, all while being highly appealing to the young, sustainably conscious generation (Bae et al. 2022). However, here is when it comes to an interesting crossroads. Both, ultra-fast fashion companies as well as online second-hand platforms, have risen in popularity and gained immense stamina especially among Generation Z in the recent years (de Koning et al. 2024). However, from the general outlook on overconsumption, these two behaviours seem to stand in stark contrast: in public discourse, fast and ultra-fast fashion are

consistently associated with fuelling overconsumption, whereas buying second-hand fashion is rather seen as something opposing to it. This is where the issue becomes complex: among Generation Z, second-hand fashion consumption appears to have taken an unprecedented turn, with its characteristics beginning to mirror those of fast fashion –increasing purchase volumes and a faster consumption cycle, particularly fuelled by online second-hand platforms, now reflect the trend-driven, disposable, and often careless nature of fast and ultra-fast fashion. This shift and phenomenon have also become a recurring topic in media and public debate. (Vogue Business 2022, Eetti 2024, The Mancunion 2024, Havusto 2025; Aikkila 2025; Kaura 2025)

A concrete environment where this phenomenon of second-hand overconsumption is visible, is social media. Social media, the other natural environment and way of existing for Gen Z (Singh 2024; Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Schapsis et al. 2025), is overflowing with hundreds of thousands of videos of young people showing off massive “hauls”, meaning videos presenting their recent purchases (Sharma et al. 2025). While similar videos showcasing ultra-fast fashion purchases seem to be quickly condemned in the comments as unsustainable and irresponsible, the tone shifts when the clothes come from thrift stores or resale apps. In those cases, the conversation around overconsumption seems to become much more ambiguous, or even positive – even when the amount of clothing is just as large, fitting under the definition of overconsumption.

Now, it could be argued that second-hand fashion cannot contribute to overconsumption, as it does not involve the production of new clothing. However, unsustainable consumption habits may not be so black and white, and recent academic research has begun to unpack the complex phenomenon of overconsumption of clothing (de Koning et al. 2024). While second-hand fashion appears sustainable on the surface, the underlying mindsets driving overconsumption might not have changed from that of fast fashion. In other words, the mentality of overconsumption may not have disappeared but rather been recontextualised within the second-hand market, potentially contributing to the same broader issue of fashion overconsumption – an assumption this thesis seeks to explore.

1.1 Research gap

Academic studies on fashion consumption and shopping in general have gained ground in the academic world mainly only during this millennium, little by little becoming a central topic in academic analysis. (Edwards 2000, 106–107) The phenomenon this thesis is grounded on, the evolution of consumption to contemporary second-hand fashion, is a highly topical but relatively unexplored phenomenon in research on fashion consumption, compared to that of fast fashion. (Sihvonen & Turunen 2016) More specifically, the issue of overconsumption in contemporary

second-hand consumption has only recently begun to emerge in public discourse (Vogue Business 2022, Eetti 2024, The Mancunion 2024, Havusto 2025; Aikkila 2025; Kaura 2025). As the topic is still relatively new in published discussions – emerging mainly in non-academic articles and on social media – it remains even more underexplored in academic research. Academic research has only recently begun to address the impacts of overconsumption in clothing (de Koning et al. 2024), even more marginally within the context of online second-hand (Dekhili et al. 2025) but among Generation Z, where the phenomenon appears to be especially prominent, notably in social media, research is very limited. In other words, the unfolding “darker side” of contemporary second-hand consumption among younger generations, and how it is perceived by the very generation itself, calls for closer academic scrutiny.

This thesis focuses on Generation Z, as they are the primary consumer group driving the rise of contemporary, particularly online, second-hand fashion consumption (Bae et al. 2022). They are also a generation strongly associated with sustainability and responsible consumption values (Deloitte 2020; Deloitte 2024; Prisco et al. 2025), purchase and prefer second-hand more than previous generations (Prisco et al. 2025; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025) and differ notably from older generations in their attitudes and values regarding fashion consumption in general (Wang 2021). These factors make them an especially relevant group to examine.

Most importantly, Generation Z constitutes approximately 30% of the global population and is expected to represent about 27% of the global workforce by 2025 (World Economic Forum 2021). As such, they are undeniably becoming a key force in global purchasing power, especially online (Schapsis et al. 2025), simultaneously shaping the future of sustainable fashion by influencing both consumer values and market trends (Balińska et al. 2024). Gaining insight into this generation’s relationship with contemporary second-hand consumption is therefore highly valuable for understanding the future of fashion, the trajectory of sustainable consumption, and the broader evolution of consumer culture among a rising generation with significant, and growing, purchasing power.

The research gap is significant because it reflects the growing complexity of modern fashion consumption, particularly among young consumers who are navigating conflicting market forces. The purpose of this thesis is not to blame, but to understand consumer behaviour within the whirlwind of contemporary fashion consumption. It aims to contribute to existing literature by offering an emerging perspective on a complex and evolving phenomenon. More specifically, the thesis addresses a gap by closely examining second-hand overconsumption, a concept that initially seems

counterintuitive but is increasingly relevant to the broader discussion of overconsumption, as increasing public discourse indicates as well (Vogue Business 2022, Eetti 2024, The Mancunion 2024, Havusto 2025; Aikkila 2025; Kaura 2025). While the global rise of second-hand fashion can and has the means to be a positive shift, it is essential to critically evaluate its implications and consider whether it genuinely supports sustainable practices or merely reshapes harmful purchasing behaviours under the guise of doing better (Turunen et al. 2018).

Finally, the relevance of this topic lies not only in its connection to overconsumption but also in the fact that second-hand consumption has reached unprecedented levels and is projected to grow substantially in the coming years (Baruönü 2025; Turunen et al. 2018; ThredUp 2025). As new actors enter the market, innovations emerge, and consumers increasingly adopt second-hand in its various forms, now is the moment to critically assess the phenomenon from all essential perspectives. A thorough understanding of both the practice and the consumers driving it will support more informed decision-making and enable the development of systems and business models that are as sustainable and forward-looking as possible.

1.2 Research questions and structure of the thesis

The background introduced above highlights that contemporary second-hand fashion consumption, while widely perceived as a sustainable alternative, may simultaneously mirror patterns of overconsumption, particularly among Generation Z. As the phenomenon is both emerging and underexplored in academic research, a more focused examination is required to understand how these young consumers themselves make sense of it. Given this context, the thesis addresses the following main research question: ***How does Generation Z perceive overconsuming in the context of online second-hand fashion?*** To answer this question, the analysis is supported by two sub-questions that establish the foundations of the phenomenon:

- *SQ1: How is overconsumption constructed and maintained in contemporary online second-hand fashion?*
- *SQ2: How do Generation Z consumers negotiate competing values in excessive online second-hand fashion consumption?*

The first sub-question (SQ1) establishes the foundation of the study by clarifying how overconsumption is conceptualised and how it manifests within contemporary online second-hand fashion. By focusing on the structural, moral, and cognitive mechanisms shaping second-hand consumption in digital environments, this sub-question provides the analytical context necessary for

addressing the main research question. The second sub-question (SQ2) motivates the focus on Generation Z by situating the phenomenon within the values, identities, and consumption logics of a generation central to the growth of online second-hand platforms. Examining how Generation Z consumers negotiate competing values in this context provides essential insight into how overconsumption is perceived and normalised, thereby directly supporting the main research question.

As the phenomenon at hand is relatively new and therefore still underexplored academically, there is no established or straightforward theoretical framework for analysing second-hand consumption in this context, which makes clear conceptualisation challenging (Turunen et al. 2018). To address this, the theoretical foundation of this thesis draws together insights from consumer behaviour and marketing research, fashion studies, social psychology, and sociological research, each contributing complementary perspectives to second-hand overconsumption and its manifestation among Generation Z. This multidisciplinary approach enables the construction of a cohesive and contextually relevant understanding of the phenomenon under examination.

The literature review develops this foundation using a top-down structure. It begins by outlining the broader issue of fashion overconsumption and the mechanisms behind it, then situates this discussion within the context of second-hand consumption and contemporary online second-hand platforms, and finally narrows the focus to these dynamics among Generation Z. The aim is to bring light to the intersecting structural, moral, and cultural forces shaping this development and, ultimately, to conceptualise overconsumption within online second-hand fashion among Gen Z consumers.

Building on this theoretical framework, the empirical part of the thesis examines how these dynamics are reflected in practice. The methodology section outlines the research design, data collection, and data analysis, all of which centre on social media content related to online second-hand fashion. By analysing this material, the thesis explores how overconsumption is discussed, framed, and negotiated by Generation Z in what can be considered the most natural arena for these practices. The findings are then discussed in relation to the theoretical framework developed in the literature review, before the thesis concludes with a summary of key insights, limitations, and directions for future research.

2 Overconsuming in the context of second-hand fashion

This chapter examines the evolution of overconsumption, moving from its general foundations toward the specific context of second-hand overconsumption. The roots of contemporary fashion overconsumption are closely tied to factors in consumer behaviour and digital transformation. By introducing and explaining these interconnected dimensions, the chapter aims to clarify the nature and underlying drivers of contemporary second-hand overconsumption and to provide a coherent understanding of this complex and central phenomenon within the scope of the thesis.

2.1 The key features and road to fashion overconsumption

2.1.1 Development of the fashion market

Fashion, in its current fast and ultra-fast forms, has resulted in the democratisation of style, allowing more and more people to follow emerging trends and express themselves through clothing without significant financial burden (Kothari & Sohoni 2024, 83). The fast fashion system itself is designed to lead to continuous purchases – built on quick production and constantly updated design, fast fashion creates cycle of rapidly changing trends and continuous consumption. Cachon and Swinney (2011) describe fast fashion as a model that shortens the time between design and retail while maximising purchasing activity. It focuses on rapidly identifying new trends and generating constant novelty and emotional appeal. By closely monitoring consumer behaviour, social media, and global fashion cues, brands produce trendy and desirable products at affordable prices that consumers perceive as new and exciting. This, in turn, encourages frequent purchases. When speed and novelty are combined, they create a strong psychological mechanism that keeps consumers in a continuous buying cycle – products lose their appeal quickly, but new ones immediately take their place.

The current online state of fashion consumption represents the most recent stage in a longer historical development in which the constraints on excessive purchasing have gradually lowered over time. Originally, the arrival of department stores shifted the way people shopped by introducing the concept of self-service. Previously, customers needed to know exactly what they intended to purchase and ask a shopkeeper behind the counter to retrieve it, making shopping into something carefully planned. The emergence of department stores allowed shoppers, for the first time, to freely roam among an abundance of products and pick up items spontaneously, this way leading to and encouraging more consumption. By removing the need to plan and articulate one's purchases, shopping became a more individual and unconstrained activity, turning customers into *consumers* and shopping into *consuming*. (Edwards 2000, 111–113)

With the rise of digitalisation, these constraints have again lowered, turning consumption into an even more accessible, flexible, and less socially visible activity. As retailing has expanded beyond the physical store and digital technologies have introduced personal devices as new shopping environments, consumers can now browse and purchase at any time and place, making shopping into something one can do just about anywhere (Ziółko et al. 2025). This development is visible both in the digitalisation of fast fashion and in the expansion of online second-hand markets. A study on the speed of contemporary second-hand platforms (Juge et al. 2021) found that consumers often spend substantial time on these online platforms while at work or engaged in other activities, frequently checking alerts throughout the day and integrating online shopping with their everyday routines, sometimes to the point of losing track of time. As buying second-hand online removes the physical nature of the shopping act, it also removes its visibility – others do not necessarily see where or how one shops. This anonymity may lower the threshold for some individuals, particularly those who would not purchase second-hand in physical settings, to do so (Cantista et al. 2022). Not only has online shopping made it possible to buy from anywhere, but with pick-up points, home delivery, and similar options, every stage of the shopping process can now occur without consumers having to visit a physical store at any point (Hagberg et al. 2016).

Additionally, online channels have enabled retailers to extend their offerings significantly, often presenting much wider assortments than those available in physical stores. (Hagberg et al. 2016) Research shows that with the growth of e-commerce, online shopping has become the third most common online activity, ranking just after emailing and general web browsing (Singh 2024). Digitalisation has therefore not only expanded access but also increased the speed, scale, and discretion of fashion consumption. While this accessibility has opened fashion to broader audiences and democratised it, it has simultaneously intensified the cycle and volume of purchasing, ultimately making the market more unsustainable (Olson 2022). Representing all the above-mentioned characteristics, online second-hand platforms – overflowing with choice, offering affordable prices, and enabling the entire shopping experience from anywhere – are the most recent, clear, and intensified manifestation of the digitalisation of shopping (Ziółko et al. 2025).

While these developments have expanded access and flexibility in fashion consumption to broader audiences, they have also created conditions that may facilitate excessive purchasing. Accordingly, a core issue in consumption as we know it today is overconsumption, fuelling a vicious cycle of demand and supply in an already saturated fashion market (D'Itria & Colombi 2024, 28). In this thesis, the emphasis is placed on the act of overconsuming rather than the broader phenomenon of overconsumption, while naturally, overconsumptive behaviour is what drives the phenomenon. The

behavioural act of overconsumption can be understood as the excessive and often impulsive use of goods and services, driven by the belief that material accumulation leads to positive outcomes like happiness, better social status, and success (Soares & Moniz 2023, 1). Gaining a deeper understanding of overconsumption and behavioural patterns driving it is essential for achieving meaningful change in both the production and consumption of fashion (D'Itria & Colombi 2024, 28).

2.1.2 Behavioural mechanisms of fashion overconsumption

As discussed above, the fast fashion system is prone to encouraging overconsuming, as it is designed to keep consumers engaged in continuous purchasing. To explain how this dynamic manifests in practice, several behavioural and psychological mechanisms have been identified in previous research as contributing to excessive consumption. The following section introduces key concepts that help explain why consumers may engage in purchasing patterns that exceed functional need.

Impulse buying refers to a form of consumption where desire overrides rational consideration, leading to a purchase decision made spontaneously, without prior planning. (Fennis & Stroebe 2016, Dittmar 2000). Although impulse buying can occur across various product categories, research shows a particularly strong correlation with fashion and clothing items, largely due to their symbolic connection to identity, their role in amplifying self-expression, and their ability to bring the consumer closer to an ideal version of themselves. (Dittmar 2008, 54) Impulse purchases are done “in the heat of the moment” – and as online shopping has made purchasing possible in just a few clicks, whenever and wherever, that moment of impulse has become even shorter.

One reason behind impulse purchases in contemporary shopping may lie in *consumer hyperchoice*, which is directly linked to excessive purchasing. This phenomenon refers to situations in which consumers are confronted with an overwhelming number of options, leading to decision fatigue and less rational decision-making (Solomon et al. 2016, 325). In practice, rather than discouraging purchasing altogether, the abundance of choice on contemporary shopping platforms, combined with extremely low prices, can have the opposite effect – when items are inexpensive, it can result in buying several items at once, as the cost of selecting all preferred options remains low (Solomon et al. 2016, 325). Moreover, because items on, for example, second-hand platforms are already highly affordable, the perceived risk of a “mistake purchase” is reduced, as unwanted items can simply be resold again (Dekhili et al. 2025).

One step further from impulse buying is compulsive buying, often defined as an uncontrollable urge to buy, a loss of control over purchasing behaviour, and the continuation of shopping despite negative

consequences, such as financial strain or time-related challenges. Like impulse buying, compulsive buying is commonly linked to the purchase of clothing items. A central feature of compulsive buying is the temporary satisfaction it brings, which is often quickly replaced by feelings of guilt or regret after the purchase. In both impulse buying and compulsive buying, the use of consumer goods is a way to move closer to an ideal identity. (Dittmar 2008, 97–99)

However, she further argues that between the two extremes – compulsive buying as an actual, diagnosed disorder and so-called “ordinary” consumption – there exists a significant group of individuals who also engage in excessive and difficult-to-control buying behaviour without it being classified as a disorder. According to her study on the topic (Dittmar 2005), this behaviour may be linked to identity-seeking: the greater the contrast between one’s actual self and one’s “possible selves,” meaning ideas of who they would like to be, the stronger the likelihood of engaging in compulsive buying of clothing as a way of reducing that identity-related tension. The study also showed that adolescents and young adults tend to display a stronger endorsement of materialistic values overall, which in turn heightens their tendency toward compulsive purchasing of clothing. In other words, when high materialistic values intersect with gaps between one’s current self and ideal or possible selves, the likelihood of compulsive buying increases as a way to cope with that conflict. (Dittmar 2008)

Moreover, as shopping is nowadays happening increasingly online, the role of applications, personal devices, and internet as a central place to make purchases have further intensified these characteristics of compulsive buying. Dittmar already made the pioneering observation in the early 2000’s that individuals’ motives related to identity-seeking are connected to their compulsive buying online, as well (Dittmar 2008, 119). As this thesis later introduces Generation Z’s views on identity and online second-hand platforms with more detail, this early finding will be connected to online consumption how it is today.

Another key concept in impulsive, compulsive, and ultimately excessive consumption is *moral licensing*. Moral licensing refers to, as Merritt et al. (2010) define it, a psychological phenomenon in which individuals permit themselves to engage in behaviour that may be unethical or otherwise morally questionable after having previously performed a morally positive act. In the context of this thesis, consumers who have acted in ways perceived as responsible or ethical – for example, by purchasing sustainable products, donating to charity, or otherwise aligning with moral values – may subsequently feel justified in making unethical choices, such as unnecessary or excessive purchases.

Essentially, past virtuous behaviour provides a kind of moral “credit” that reduces feelings of guilt associated with less responsible choice, like overconsuming. This process, also referred to as *self-licensing*, stems from an internal need to maintain a positive moral self-image: when individuals feel secure in their moral standing, they become more likely to engage in actions that might otherwise threaten it. (Merritt et al. 2010) According to research on the topic, consumers are aware of moral self-licensing in their shopping habits. For instance, they recognise fast fashion brands’ sustainability efforts, such as using recycled fibres or offering “conscious” collections, yet they are equally aware of the controversy surrounding these initiatives (Olson 2022; Page & Hur 2023). Olson’s findings demonstrate that consumers are aware that these sustainability-oriented marketing strategies can actually intensify moral self-licensing by reducing feelings of guilt, thereby enabling consumers to purchase more clothing overall.

In the context of this thesis, it can be argued that the same is happening in second-hand as well: the perceived moral positivity of buying used items may reduce consumers’ guilt and, in doing so, provide psychological permission to purchase more frequently or in greater quantity than they otherwise would. Recent research supports this – the moral value associated with second-hand shopping can paradoxically enable overconsumption under the guise of sustainability. Recent research supports this notion by showing that by engaging in a seemingly virtuous act such as buying second-hand, consumers may feel permitted to behave less sustainably, for instance by over-purchasing, as the act itself is framed as ethically positive (Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). In other words, consumers may feel justified in purchasing excessive quantities of clothing because the mode of consumption itself is perceived as inherently good, as after all, no new garments are being produced.

A third concept closely linked to the discussion above is the *rebound effect*. Originally used in the field of energy production, the term describes a paradox in which improvements intended to reduce resource use end up increasing overall consumption instead. Put simply: when an activity becomes easier, cheaper, or more efficient, people tend to do more of it, which cancels out the intended environmental benefit. (Sorrell & Dimitropoulos 2007) In the context of this thesis, this means that the positive impact of sustainable choices can be weakened, or even reversed, when consumers respond by increasing their overall level of consumption.

A study by Dekhili et al. (2025) indeed shows that the ease, speed, and affordability built into digital second-hand platforms can amplify this rebound effect, encouraging users to buy more rather than less. This dynamic is supported by other studies on the sustainability of contemporary second-hand

fashion (Turunen et al. 2018; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025), which reveal that instead of reducing overall demand, engagement with second-hand fashion can reinforce patterns of overconsumptive behaviour. Consumers who spend more on new clothing also tend to spend more on second-hand, and those who buy used clothing frequently also tend to purchase in large quantities. In other words, high purchasing levels and continuous circulation of garments mirror fast-fashion-like behaviour, even when the items themselves are pre-owned. Importantly for this thesis, these consumption patterns are especially visible among younger consumers who simultaneously report strong concern for sustainability (Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025).

Fourth, but an equally central concept connecting to the previous ones is the fact that individuals seek to find harmony between their beliefs and actions (Fennis & Stroebe 2016), yet consumption may bring competing values into conflict. This internal tension, called cognitive dissonance, emerges when incompatible beliefs, desires, or moral expectations collide (Festinger 1957). In fashion, such conflicts frequently arise between emotional and rational motives, hedonic desires and utilitarian needs (Pauluzzo & Mason 2022, 193), or self-enhancement and self-transcendent values (Jacobs et al. 2018, 1157). Purchasing decisions therefore often become negotiations between what one *wants* and what one believes one *should* do.

When dissonance occurs, consumers consciously, or unconsciously try to minimise the discomfort by selectively focusing on information that supports the desired choice, while downplaying or ignoring contradictory aspects (Yap & Gaur 2014, 117–122). These justifications may be biased or inaccurate, but they help preserve a coherent and morally acceptable self-image (Festinger 1957; Fennis & Stroebe 2016). Impulse purchases can amplify these tensions. Although one might expect such decisions to increase dissonance, highly impulsive consumers often experience *less* of it, as by continuous and excessive consuming, they avoid the reflective process that would otherwise trigger conflict (George & Yaoyuneyong 2010, 302). Altogether, these mechanisms illustrate how contemporary fashion consumption is shaped both by structural changes in the market and by behavioural and psychological dynamics that can reinforce excessive purchasing, including within second-hand fashion markets (Turunen et al. 2018; Dekhili et al. 2025; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025).

2.2 Digital second-hand platforms and the sustainability transition of fashion

The fashion industry is ranked the second largest polluting industry in the world (Balińska et al. 2024, Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). As environmental sustainability has become a central concern in the fashion retail industry, growing awareness of environmental issues and their direct link to wasteful

consumption has triggered a fundamental shift within the industry towards a more sustainable approach (Verma et al. 2025; Ziółko et al. 2025). Rather than being seen as a burden, sustainability is now viewed as a competitive advantage, or even a necessary part of the strategy of companies in the field. Previous research on fast fashion shows that customers are happy to see new innovations arriving to the market to freshen up the field of fashion (Olson 2022) – the same is happening in the context of second-hand, as a wave of alternative solutions, each more creative than the last, emerge to appeal to young consumers and stakeholders alike. (Bae et al. 2022; Balińska et al. 2024). Environmental sustainability has thus emerged as a dominant framework in the fashion industry, extending its reach far beyond responsible brands and eco-friendly products alone (Colombi & D'Itria 2024, 27).

One manifestation of this sustainable shift in the clothing retail industry is the second-hand market. Second-hand consumption has been around for decades, but its rise in the recent years has been significantly fast and popularity has reached an all-time high and is projected to only keep growing (Cantista et al. 2022; Turunen et al. 2018). For example, in 2019, 40% of European consumers told they have purchased at least one second-hand item in a year, while in 2023 the percentage had already risen to 57% (Statista 2023). Attitudes towards second-hand have also shifted. Over the past decade, the association between buying used clothing and low income or social status has weakened (Ziółko et al. 2025; Baruönü 2025) and buying and wearing used clothing has become increasingly common among all kinds of consumers, even considered a trend and as something fashionable (Cantista et al. 2022; Prisco et al. 2025; Ziółko et al. 2025). The narrative of second-hand fashion as a sustainable, as well as a trendy alternative to fast fashion has supported the rapid expansion of the global second-hand market, which reached an estimated value of \$177 billion in 2022 and is projected to double by 2027. (Peleg Mizrachi & Sharon 2025). According to another report, global second-hand is expected to reach 365 billion dollars by 2029, which means a 2.7 times quicker growth compared to the apparel industry in general. (ThredUp 2025, 2)

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the latest shift in the field of second-hand fashion has been its emergence in the digital world, creating companies focused solely on second-hand goods, also known as re-commerce platforms (Cachon & Swinney, 2011; Ziółko et al. 2025). In the context of clothing, online second-hand platforms are currently a thriving industry due to their ability to cater to all the most crucial contemporary consuming needs – economic, environmental, personal, and recreational – especially among young consumers (Bae et al. 2022). To further tie the notion of their popularity to the context of this thesis, research consistently supports their strong appeal among Generation Z. A recent study shows that young consumers prefer buying second-hand through online

platforms rather than traditional brick-and-mortar stores (Ziółko et al. 2025). This aligns with findings by Grieco et al. (2023), who report that Gen Z users shop on these platforms frequently, some even weekly, reflecting how seamlessly these services fit into their daily digital routines and habituation of using devices throughout the day (Ferreira 2018). Moreover, when compared to older generations, Gen Z demonstrates a stronger tendency and preference toward second-hand clothing purchasing (Prisco et al. 2025; Peleg Mizrachi & Sharon 2025), reinforcing their central role in driving the growth of resale culture. Accordingly, data suggests continued growth in the upcoming years: in the U.S., for instance, online second-hand alternatives are expected to double by 2029, corresponding to a 13% annual growth and reaching a total value of 40 billion dollars (ThredUp 2025, 4).

There is an increasing number of these thriving online second-hand platforms in the market. Some examples that have reached high popularity include Vinted, Depop and ThreadUp. These three are introduced to give concrete examples of both the popularity, and concrete environments of contemporary second-hand consumption. Out of these platforms, Vinted is the most used, currently available in 21 countries, and downloads mounting up to 50 million (Ziółko et al. 2025). Vinted is a Lithuanian company, which started as a start-up in 2008. Nowadays, the application employs more than 2000 people across its offices around Europe. (Vinted 2025) Vinted's popularity is a concrete example of online second-hand's exponential growth in popularity in the recent years – in 2017, the application was downloaded 2,7 million times, three years later, in 2020, 11,5 million times, and again three years later, in 2023, a staggering 32.8 million times. From registered users' point of view, the number in 2017 was 30 million, rising to 105 million by 2023. (Business of Apps 2025) In April 2025, Vinted announced an increase of 36 % in revenue for 2024 and that its profit more than quadrupled (Reuters 2025).

Vinted is a customer-to-customer (C2C) platform, where people can both sell their own items and buy from others. The platform enhances the user experience through personalised recommendations, as its algorithm learns users' preferences and suggests similar items accordingly (Ziółko et al. 2025). Additionally, the platform encourages its users to enable push notifications about lowering prices or new items added to enhance the probability to buy an item (Dekhili et al. 2025). The platform's slogan summarising their mission reads: *“We want to show you just how great second-hand can be. Sell the clothes that have more to give. Shop for items you won't find in stores. Vinted is open to everyone who believes that good clothes should live long.”* (Vinted 2025). The slogan nods for both environmental consciousness by emphasising longevity of clothing but also emphasises uniqueness by suggesting customers can find clothing they won't find elsewhere. In Finland, Vinted has become the most popular second-hand platform, which is also reflected in its frequent presence in national

media – often from a critical perspective. Recent news coverage has highlighted the platform’s “dark side,” particularly its role in accelerating consumption and the extremely low prices at which clothing is sold (Havusto 2025; Kaura 2025; Aikkila 2025).

Depop is a UK based circular fashion marketplace where “*anyone can buy, sell and discover desirable, affordable second-hand fashion*”. (Depop 2025) Depop is known to offer a community-driven marketplace filled with unique second-hand clothing, which appeals to for examples to Gen Z’s individuality and sustainability values (Prisco et al. 2025). They also talk about their platform as a community, of which the goal is to popularise second-hand fashion and resale culture globally. (Depop 2025) In 2025, the number of registered users has risen to near 45 million, and the presence of the company is strong especially in English-speaking countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Depop describes their mission with the words “*Whatever your style, whatever the mood or moment - you’ll find the fashion you love. A place where anyone can clear out their wardrobe and explore their style.*” In comparison to Vinted’s, Depop’s mission is not highlighting sustainability in the slightest, but chooses to centre the shifting moods, styles and mindsets of its users. Figure 1 illustrates Depop’s and ThreadUp’s advertisements and mission statements from 2025, highlighting attributes related to uniqueness and trendiness in second-hand fashion, while sustainability-related attributes remain absent.

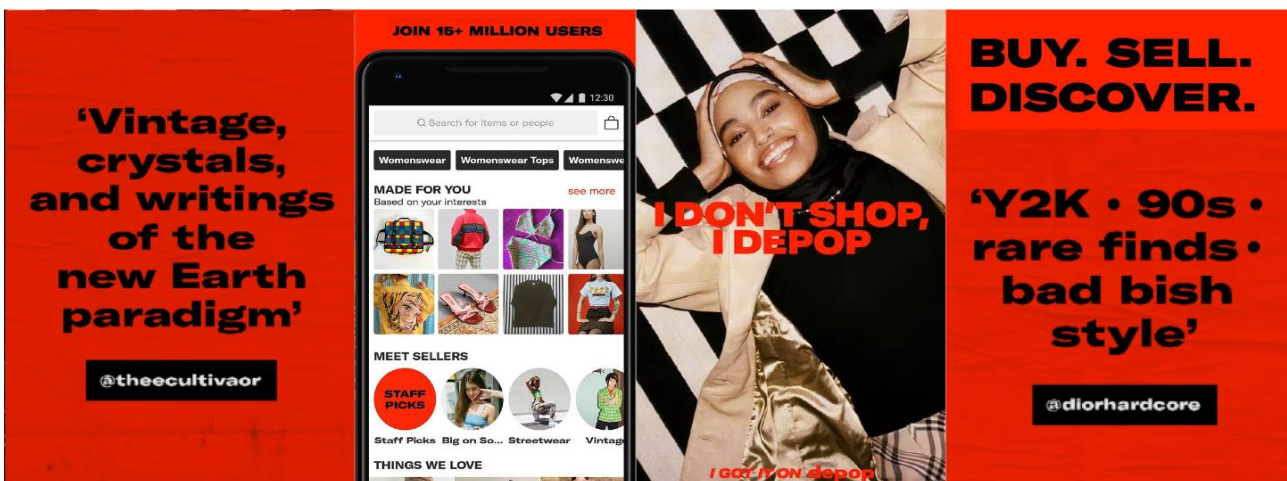


Figure 1 Depop branding campaign visuals (Further 2019)

A third example is ThreadUp, a United States based online second-hand platform. Its operations differ a bit from the previously mentioned, as customers send their clothing to ThreadUp, who then handle the selling instead of the customers themselves, making selling your clothes even easier. Their mission reads “*There are millions of items for millions of ways to be you. When you’re done with that version of you, send us your clothes and we’ll handle the rest.*” (ThreadUp 2025) Similarly to Depop,

ThreadUp emphasises individuality and the pursuit of one's own style but goes even further in normalising the idea that individuals can change their style whenever they wish. According to ThreadUp themselves, over four million clothing items are on sale on the platform, over 50 000 new arrivals added every single day, and differing from the other examples, many items are on sale, many up to 90 % off. Accordingly, their page reads that ThreadUp “*feels like a never-ending sale.*” (ThreadUp 2025) So, on top of uniqueness and self-expression, the platform emphasises extreme affordability, even if second-hand is generally considered affordable to start with.

All these platforms have built their appeal with the previously discussed attributes linking contemporary shopping to overconsumption. They offer extreme efficiency by making buying and selling significantly faster than in physical stores, provide instant availability, a constantly changing and extensive range of choices, the possibility to find and buy unique pieces and maintain levels of affordability that lower the threshold for purchasing in many aspects (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Ultimately, they create great conditions for a rebound effect – instead of reducing demand for new clothing, the ease of reselling and rapid transaction processes can stimulate more frequent wardrobe turnover: consumers may buy more because they know they can easily sell items again, and increased second-hand activity may so even encourage purchases of new clothing (Dekhili et al. 2025), or encourage buying with the possibility of reselling the item with a higher price later (Baruönü 2025). Not surprisingly, second-hand C2C platforms have become the most popular way to buy and get rid of clothing (Sihvonen & Turunen 2016), surpassing other options like donating to charity. At the same time, these very characteristics seem to keep attracting consumers who may previously have avoided second-hand shopping. As contemporary resale platforms directly address barriers such as the lack of local stores, limited product variety, and disorganised shopping environments – factors identified by Hur (2020) as key reasons for not buying second-hand – new consumers keep finding their way to the platforms.

2.3 Motivations behind second-hand consumption

But what other factors and motivations keep customers returning to these platforms from their own perspective? To understand their popularity, it is necessary to look not only at the platforms' features but also at the motivations of the users themselves. Research has examined the drivers behind second-hand consumption – mostly within physical but increasingly also within its contemporary online formats – and this section aims to highlight those insights before connecting them to one of the largest user segments: Generation Z.

Research has identified a wide range of motivations driving consumers to purchase second-hand fashion. Of these, environmental awareness and economic benefits are among the most frequently cited reasons in the literature. Interestingly, however, studies also highlight subjective, hedonic, and recreational motives as equally central, if not more influential. These include the joy of bargain hunting, the thrill of discovering unique pieces, and the pursuit of individual style through second-hand fashion. (Guiot & Roux 2010; Cervellon et al. 2012; Machado et al. 2019; Prisco et al. 2025). Notably, these motivations also seem to reflect second-hand's historical roots: According to Cantista et al. (2022) buying second-hand was originally associated with creativity, individuality, and personal storytelling, distinguishing it from mass-produced fashion. Later, second-hand gained negative associations linked to low income or social status. Over time, however, this perception has shifted again from necessity to individuality, and from stigma to style and trendiness. Recent studies on second-hand consumption motivations support this development. (Cantista et al. 2022; Baruönü 2025; Prisco et al. 2025; Ziółko et al. 2025). The modern second-hand landscape therefore continues this trajectory, with consumers increasingly using resale fashion to cultivate personalised aesthetics and explore unique identity expressions.

According to studies, such as that of Cerio & Debenedetti (2021), the shift toward online second-hand consumption is driven by rising environmental awareness, reduced purchasing power, the rapid development of C2C platforms, and a growing detachment from traditional ownership. To get a sense of what these motivations look like from the point of view of the consumers of these platforms themselves, industry reports of the online second-hand offer valuable insights for the context of this thesis. The most extensive and recent report is conducted by ThredUp (2025). The results are based on a survey conducted between January and February 2025, involving a sample of 3,034 adults, and aimed at exploring consumer attitudes toward second-hand products and resale markets (ThredUp 2025). According to ThredUp's data, the top three reasons users cite to buy second-hand are: *“to get better deals”*, *“the thrill of the hunt”*, and *“to afford higher-end brands.”* Only the fourth most common reason, *“it's better for the planet,”* is environmentally motivated, followed by another more individualistic reason – *“to find one-of-a-kind looks.”*

Similarly, a study conducted in Poland on the environmental benefits of using the online second-hand platform Vinted (Balińska et al. 2024), 81.2% of respondents named finding bargains as their primary reason – mirroring a combination of ThredUp's results *“the thrill of the hunt”*, and *“to get better deals.”* The emphasis on uniqueness, *“to find one-of-a-kind looks”*, also aligns with findings by Ferraro et al. (2016) and Bae et al. (2022), both of which identified fashionability and the expression of identity as key drivers for second-hand consumption. Bae et al. (2022) further highlighted

recreational motivations, such as the enjoyment of treasure hunting, which corresponds closely to ThredUp's second most common reason: "*the thrill of the hunt.*" A study conducted in Lithuania, the home country of Vinted, about Vinted, similarly found that consumers primarily valued saving and making money, alongside usability-related attributes, when using the platform (Palomo et al. 2023), instead of environmental reasons. Another interesting insight is that according to ThreadUp (2025), 50% of younger generations who purchased second-hand apparel in the last 12 months did so to create content or share their purchases on social media, signalling that this emphasis on style and uniqueness has also taken a new, social media driven turn.

Another finding of ThredUp emphasises the importance of resale value. ThredUp's data shows that 27% of all respondents, and a notably higher 39% of younger generations, resold purchased second-hand clothing items in 2024. Moreover, 47% of all users, and a striking 64% of younger consumers, cited resale value as an important factor when deciding whether to purchase an item, suggesting clothes are not always purchased to be kept, but to be sold again. This connects seamlessly with the previously mentioned theory on the rebound effect and C2C platforms as the most popular way to get rid of clothing – instead of reducing demand for new clothing, the ease of reselling and rapid transaction processes can stimulate more frequent wardrobe turnover. (Dekhili et al. 2025; Baruönü 2025; Sihvonen & Turunen 2016)

In terms of environmental sustainability, the issue remains complex, even from the industry's point of view. According to ThredUp's report, while 78% of retailers acknowledge the importance of adopting innovative business models to promote circularity, 66% admit they are struggling to manage textile waste effectively. Reflecting on this, ThredUp CEO James Reinhart states, "*We are still in the earliest days of inventing how resale can reduce the ongoing production excess in the apparel industry.*" This acknowledgement from within the industry reinforces the idea that, despite the success and growth of second-hand platforms, no definitive solution to overproduction or overconsumption has yet been found.

So, across studies, environmental motivations do appear, but they do not necessarily rank among the top priorities. At the same time, it seems like similar subjective motivations, such as thrill of the hunt, fashionability, and bargain hunting, have persisted throughout time, even when the environment has changed from physical to online (Guiot & Roux 2010; Cervellon et al. 2012; Machado et al. 2019; Bae et al. 2022; Prisco et al. 2025; ThreadUp 2025). Material benefits such as affordability, uniqueness, and individuality are emphasised, suggesting that a clear and consistent connection between environmental consciousness and second-hand purchasing behaviour remains limited in

academic research (Ziółko et al. 2025; Turunen et al. 2018). Next, the thesis turns to examining the characteristics of Generation Z, beginning by linking this complexity of sustainability-related contradictions to the generation's core values.

3 The complex nature of Generation Z as consumers of second-hand fashion

To explain and understand the nature of Generation Z as the enabler and main consumer group behind online second-hand consumption, this chapter examines the key features of the generation, introducing their complex views on the environment and identity, as well as the central role of social media in shaping their way of being. All of this is discussed in the context of second-hand consumption, directly connecting their sense of self to their consumption behaviour.

3.1 Ambiguous values in environmental consciousness

Generation Z differs a lot from previous generations when it comes to opinions about the fashion industry, consumer attitudes and purchasing preferences (Wang 2021). As a young, but gradually maturing group of people, they represent a prominent and economically strengthening group of consumers globally, as the average customer is changing from a millennial to a Gen Z representative (Wang 2021). It is thus undeniable that Gen Z is also becoming a key driver in shaping the future of sustainable fashion, influencing both consumer values and sales trends (Balińska et al. 2024).

When examining the generation more broadly, outside the specific context of second-hand fashion, environmental consciousness and commitment to circularity stand out as defining characteristics of the generation (Prisco et al. 2025; Van den Bergh et al. 2024). Yearly generational surveys by Deloitte consistently show that Gen Z is determined to make environmentally sustainable choices, even in the face of financial challenges (Deloitte 2020, 9), with 64% of respondents expressing a willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Deloitte 2024, 16). This willingness is largely driven by a desire to minimise environmental harm and contribute to positive change (Tan & Trang 2023).

On the other hand, one of the most common explanations for not buying sustainably produced clothing, despite positive attitudes towards it, is the high price of such alternatives – in other words, economic limitations (Guo et al. 2020). However, when it comes to purchasing from these inherently affordable, sustainable alternatives such as second-hand platforms, other motives tend to come first in order over environmental or even pure economic concerns. Consumers prioritise finding bargains (Balińska et al. 2024) – suggesting that the thrill of the hunt and the enjoyment of shopping outweigh purely ecological or financially responsible considerations. Moreover, research repeatedly shows that Gen Z's stated environmental values are not always reflected in their actual purchasing behaviour, even though they are vocal about the importance of sustainability (Berthem & Marhs 2022; Palomo et al. 2023). Additionally, recent research suggests that Gen Z's engagement with sustainable options such as second-hand may often be driven more by symbolic motives than by internalised

environmental values. In other words, compared to older generations, Gen Z places greater emphasis on how their choices are perceived by others, and sustainability-related behaviours can function as a way to signal moral responsibility and gain social recognition (Verma et al. 2025). So, while Gen Z is widely recognised for its environmental awareness, and they are the biggest consumer group of online second-hand platforms, the actual connection between the two is controversial – according to research from the platforms themselves and academic research on the topic, this positive shift is often primarily driven by motives such as thrill of the hunt, individuality, and uniqueness rather than sustainability concerns. (Ziółko et al. 2025; Baruönü 2025)

To circle back to the idea of conflicting values, cognitive dissonance, and the rebound effect, they seem to connect with Gen Z in contemporary second-hand consumption. From a cognitive dissonance perspective, second-hand shopping offers an easy resolution to this conflict and contributes to a rebound effect: because second-hand is perceived as sustainable, it provides an instant moral justification for choices driven by other motivations. Recent research supports this, showing that second-hand purchasing can reduce cognitive dissonance and trigger rebound effects by allowing consumers to feel environmentally conscious while still engaging in frequent or excessive, and therefore non-sustainable, consumption (Dekhili et al. 2025). Low prices, constant novelty, and the privacy of online environments further ease this tension by enabling consumption without confronting the moral discomfort typically associated with buying new.

3.2 Fluctuating nature of identity as a driver of consumption

One's consumption choices in their sense of style choices naturally stem from how one perceives oneself – in other words, from one's sense of identity. Drawing on Modern Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), this thesis understands identity as an ongoing process of self-construction in which consumers continuously negotiate who they are through market-mediated practices, interactions, and representations (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 19-20; Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 80-83). From this perspective, identity is not stable or unified but fluid, multiple, and continuously reworked across contexts (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 22).

Contemporary consumer culture views material possessions, such as fashion and clothing items, as extensions of the self that help represent who a person is or wishes to become, visually mimicking desired identities (Dittmar 2008, 27). Studies have consistently shown that self-expression plays a central role in shaping consumers' shopping motives, often overriding purely utilitarian needs (Koo et al. 2007, 169–170; Pauluzzo & Mason 2022, 197). In terms of the connection between personal style and identity, the term *extended self* (Belk 1988) means consumers using physical possessions to

construct and communicate their identities. Numerous studies support this: when people are asked to describe their identities, references to possessions almost inevitably appear. The strength of this connection also depends on the nature of the possession – goods with clear symbolic or personal significance, such as clothing items, which can be seen as embodiments of self, hold a particularly significant role (Dittmar 2008, 30). Research further shows that individuals are increasingly defined by their consuming habits, making consumption itself an integral part of constructing identity (Edwards 2000, 118). In this sense, style and clothing items function as core building blocks of one's extended self; in contemporary consumption culture, fashion gives concrete meaning to the saying, *to have is to be*. (Dittmar 2008, 29)

Although identity could initially be thought of as something relatively stable, as mentioned before, CCT highlights that contemporary identity is instead characterised by continuous transformation. According to Belk (2014), “the idea of a core self is an illusion” that individuals sustain by continuously updating their self-narratives in order to maintain a sense of coherence amid constant change. Constructing the self involves actively selecting from and engaging in multiple ways of being and expressing oneself across everyday life – including through social media – in an ongoing pursuit of a “true” or authentic self. (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 19) In the modern world, constructing one's identity is no longer bound to a single, stable definition, and conflicts in building one's “true” self often emerge. Identity evolves and adapts as perceptions and circumstances shift, allowing or forcing the self to be redefined when previous versions no longer fit. Furthermore, in this ongoing process of self-construction, individuals often hold on to several versions of themselves at once, incorporating aspects of past, present, and imagined identities that together form a multifaceted sense of self (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 22). Thus, contemporary identity is fluid and dynamic, meaning people rely on various self-representations that may differ or even conflict with one another (Dittmar 2008, 8).

These dynamics are especially visible, even heightened, among Gen Z. As a generation, Gen Z is highly individualistic and emphasises uniqueness (Van den Bergh et al. 2024). On top of a general emphasis on individualism among the generation, Gen Z's identity is more fluid and undefined – expressing one's personal truth is often prioritised over conforming to norms or widely accepted views (Francis & Hoefel 2018, 4; Gillis et al. 2021, 3). When it comes to style, the rapid pace at which new trends emerge and override previous ones makes it difficult and undesirable for Gen Z to commit to a single style (Gupta et al. 2018). As a result of undefined identity in today's world, Gen Z's comfort in expressing themselves in changing ways, and a strong emphasis on self-expression, the generation is also less brand-loyal than previous generations, placing greater value on the uniqueness of a garment rather than its brand (Francis & Hoefel 2018; Fromm & Read 2018, 92; Thangavel et

al. 2022, 724). Connected to this, they also care less about the price of clothing and more about achieving a certain look or aesthetic, such as appearing high-quality or expensive (Van den Bergh et al. 2024). Furthermore, to fit into the various social groups they identify with, Gen Z individuals tend to adopt multiple style identities at once (Witt & Baird 2018, 60), connecting these findings of Gen Z to the broader view of CCT on identity in the modern world.

According to research on the generation, Gen Z's three defining consumption characteristics are uniqueness, limitlessness, and ethicality (Francis & Hoefel 2018, 3; Witt & Baird, 2018, 61). These characteristics act, thus, as the building blocks of these continuously changing identities and styles that represent them. Connecting this to the concepts of actual and ideal selves, recent findings show that second-hand fashion is particularly popular among Gen Z precisely because it allows them to pursue and express these ideal selves (Baruönü 2025). When it comes to this multifaceted idea of identity, Rokka and Ulver argue that consumption has become a way to navigate these tensions in the pursuit of coherence and stability amid fragmented identities. In other words, individuals continuously construct and reconstruct who they are through consuming. (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 20)

In summary, Gen Z's view of identity as a temporary way of being ultimately makes material identity a rather fragile – even disposable – concept, one that can be continuously reshaped through consumption. When the notion of disposability applies not only to material goods but also to how one understands their own identity, it intensifies the link between identity and consumption. This dynamic is central to understanding Gen Z's fashion behaviour, positioning second-hand fashion as a key arena in which these identity processes unfold. Next, the thesis connects these identity-related dynamics to another central aspect of the generation: social media.

3.3 The central role of social media in shaping Gen Z consumption

3.3.1 Digital environment as an arena for self-expression

As the first truly digital generation, Generation Z has grown up surrounded by technology and social networks, viewing digital environments as a natural extension of everyday life (Cheung et al. 2017, 2; Balińska et al. 2024; Singh 2024; Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Schapis et al. 2025), and due to digitality as an integrated part of their daily lives, do not necessarily distinguish the physical and digital worlds as separate spheres (Stahl & Literat 2023). They are comfortable learning and socialising online, often preferring digital spaces over traditional institutions (Francis & Hoefel 2018, 6). Globally, Gen Z internet users can spend up to 8 hours on their devices every day. (GlobalWebIndex 2020) Consequently, social media has become not just a communication channel but a fundamental context in which the ongoing quest for self-identity is shaped and expressed

(Sitompul et al. 2023), also by expressing oneself through one's own social media content. Accordingly, modern CCT states that in today's world, the digital environment and identity construction are deeply interconnected (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 23).

A central and ongoing debate in marketing concerns how much of identity construction stems from individual choices versus social influence (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 71). Modern CCT challenges traditional views of consumers as rational and isolated decision-makers. Instead, it portrays market societies as dynamic networks of shared meanings, emotions, and practices that influence behaviour. CCT identifies three main types of marketplace cultures: brand communities, brand publics, and consumer tribes. While the first two revolve around attachment to specific brands, consumer tribes are formed around a shared enthusiasm or lifestyle that unites individuals. (Cova, Shankar & Coffin 2024, 96–98) This concept resonates with Generation Z, who are generally less brand-loyal than earlier generations and place higher value on self-expression and individuality. For this reason, consumer tribes offer the most relevant perspective for understanding Gen Z consumption. In the context of this thesis, the tribe is a shared passion for second-hand fashion that manifests in online second-hand channels, such as Vinted, Depop, or ThredUp.

This is in accordance with research that shows Gen Z tends to favour second-hand platforms that incorporate social aspects into the experience (Bae et al. 2022). For the generation, online platforms built on shared values, where opinions and ideas can be freely exchanged and where everyone can feel understood, are appreciated (Witt & Braid, 2018, 174). Another study on online second-hand supports this, noting that mobile applications are an especially influential source of information and inspiration for the generation's consumption habits (Balińska et al. 2024). This aspect has not been missed by retailers themselves, either – according to ThredUp (2025), 76% of retail executives say their customers are seeking more social interaction to shopping on their platforms, and 70% names social commerce as a central factor in the overall success of their business in the next three years.

On Vinted, social interaction is facilitated through features like in-app messaging, which allows users to reach out to potential buyers, meaning users who have added their items to favourites. Depop even takes the social aspect a few steps further. Its user interface closely resembles that of Instagram, one of younger generations' most-used social media platforms (Page & Hur 2023). What makes this resemblance particularly notable is the potential for users to gain popularity within the app itself. Users can build their own “brands” by, for example, consistently selling a certain type of second-hand clothing, with the goal of becoming a “top seller.” In many cases, these users also promote their Depop shops through their personal social media accounts, turning second-hand selling into a content-

driven activity (Bae et al. 2022). In this way, second-hand platforms have started to function as another form of social media for Gen Z and the connection between social media and second-hand platforms has strengthened, which may also increase consumption. (Page & Hur 2023) This is hardly surprising – online second-hand platform that resembles a social media environment feels like a natural fit for a generation that views digitality as a natural extension of their way of being. It is also notable that on top of platforms solely focused on second-hand retail, popular social media platforms have adopted a possibility to sell and buy second-hand in their interface. The top five social commerce platforms, according to the recent report by ThredUp (2025) are Facebook marketplace, Instagram, TikTok Shop, YouTube, and Pinterest. So, not only are second-hand shops mirroring social media, but social media is mirroring second-hand platforms.

This all ties with CCT, arguing that consumption is used to build and express who people are by drawing on the resources and representations provided by marketplaces. Identity is closely tied to the market, which offers both the material and symbolic means for constructing and performing the self. Many consumers act as creative identity builders, using what is available to them and navigating the limits set by the marketplace. (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 80) In the context of Generation Z and second-hand fashion, online platforms make this process particularly accessible by lowering those limits: they offer an extensive range of clothing items that enable diverse forms of self-representation and aesthetic experimentation. Moreover, digital culture allows consumers to express taste and individuality with little to no financial investment (Arsel & Bean 2024, 115). In the context of online second-hand consumption, Gen Z's tendency to experiment with multiple styles and aesthetics is supported by the affordability and vast product offerings of second-hand fashion.

On top of the communal aspects, a defining feature of Gen Z's relationship with social media is speed. Although image-driven digital culture is familiar to Millennials and older generations as well, its intensity and immediacy reach an entirely different level among younger generations. The generation not only appreciates but demands rapidity, immediacy, and hassle-free experiences both in physical and digital environments. (Van den Bergh et al. 2024) According to research, Generation Z being accustomed to these fast-paced environments also means that they do not become overwhelmed by always having a wide range of choices available. (Thangavel et al. 2022, 724) Quite the opposite – growing up in an environment where everything is instantaneous has also shaped Gen Z's expectations for constant novelty and quick results. On the other hand, due to digital environments where new content is continuously expected, individuals are also driven to reinvent and re-present themselves, resulting in constant cycles of transformation (Stokes & Price 2017), connecting digitality to previously discussed views on identity. This immediacy also characterises their

purchasing behaviour: 44% of Gen Z consumers have discovered a new product through social media, over 85% report that platforms such as TikTok or Instagram influence their buying decisions (Tan & Trang 2023; ICSC 2023; Schapsis et al. 2025), and TikTok comes in as third most probable way to get Gen Z to purchase, right after family's and friends' recommendations (Gillis et. al 2021, 6).

Digital culture has not only accelerated the flow of information but also expanded consumption to include more intangible content, such as images and videos shared online (Arsel & Bean 2024, 115). On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, users continuously construct and maintain their online selves through curated images and videos, instead of text, and appreciate that content being rather authentic than "official or professional" (Van den Bergh et al. 2024). The rise of visual culture and the emphasis on self-presentation have made sight the central sense through which identity is communicated (Stokes & Price 2017). Research suggests that this visual-centricity is central to modern fashion consumption as well, connecting it to visual-centricity of social media: the symbolic and aesthetic meanings of items have overridden utility value or true necessity. Shopping has become a subjective process of image processing, driven by the desire to feel, and look, good (Edwards 2000, 118–119). All in all, the combination of Gen Z's views on identity, social media, visual culture, digital immediacy, and social connectivity has fundamentally transformed how identity and consumption intersect, and the outcome of this transformation will be further analysed in the next section.

3.3.2 Microtrends as manifestations of Gen Z identity and consumption

As fashion remains a central means to express identity, style-related content has become a dominant theme on social platforms, especially on TikTok. Accordingly, a recent study shows that TikTok plays an increasingly significant role in youth self-expression, serving as a platform where young users actively shape and perform their identities (Stahl & Literat 2023). TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms among Gen Z, with 60% of the app's users consisting of the generation (Stahl & Literat 2023). One striking manifestation of all the above discussed fast-paced dynamics is the rise of *microtrends*, also referred to as *aesthetics*. These trends are defined by their distinctive visual features, which rapidly gain popularity among young people only to fade just as quickly (Bimo & Bhandari 2023). They are often given quirky, descriptive names that signal a specific look or impression.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that academic research on microtrends remains limited, largely due to the relatively recent emergence of the phenomenon and its primary existence within social media environments. Nevertheless, the phenomenon itself can be understood as a direct outcome of the fluidity of identity, digital self-presentation, and postmodern consumption

characteristics discussed throughout this thesis. In this sense, microtrends constitute a concrete and observable manifestation of the theoretical dynamics previously discussed. To contextualise microtrends as a contemporary fashion phenomenon, this section therefore draws on sources such as fashion journalism and industry commentary. While non-academic, these sources provide valuable insight into the arena of microtrends, on how they emerge, circulate, and manifest in today's fashion consumption culture – both from an objective and critical perspective.

In the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*, Freestone and Dixon (2025) describe microtrends as follows: “*It's 2025, and everything you see (or buy) can likely be folded into a microtrend – and every microtrend has a distinct name, and perhaps a community, behind it – it's hard to keep up with this cacophony of microtrends, thanks to TikTok's echo chamber of information distribution.*” In the fashion magazine *Vogue*, Spellings (2023) highlights the repeating cycle of microtrends: “*Many of these (microtrends) follow a similar life cycle: A term pops off on TikTok, fashion commentators and journalists write about it, it becomes the buzzword of the moment, and then, invariably, mentioning the term in earnest becomes kind of cringe.*” Finally, writing for the non-profit organisation *Global Fashion Agenda*, Beswick (2024) highlights the pace and problematic nature of microtrends: “*Prevailing trend categories have always existed, but historically these notions defined decades as opposed to a singular week on social media. We are now in the era of micro trends. They trickle down and fuel fashion's fleeting trend cycle – with many brands latching on to every aesthetic that permeates our feeds, facilitating overconsumption in an entirely new way.*” In sum, microtrends are fast-moving, social-media-driven fashion phenomena characterised by rapid and specific naming, intense visibility, and short-lived relevance. Emerging and disappearing within brief timeframes, they reflect an era in which fashion trends are shaped less by long-term cycles and more by platform dynamics, media amplification, and continuous aesthetic turnover.

To illustrate both the quantity and speed of microtrends, Freestone and Dixon (2024), for instance, identify 77 distinct microtrends emerging during 2024. Throughout the year, aesthetics such as *Office Siren*, *Mob Wife*, *Cottagecore*, *Clean Girl*, and *Quiet Luxury*, dominated online fashion spaces for brief periods before being rapidly replaced by new styles (Beswick 2024; Freestone & Dixon 2024; Winkler 2024). Among these examples, the *Clean Girl* aesthetic centres on minimalist clothing and natural makeup, projecting an image of organisation, self-discipline, and personal care. In contrast, *Office Siren* emerged alongside Generation Z's increasing entry into office-based work, romanticising workplace environments through a highly stylised and often sexualised visual language involving tailored blazers, pencil skirts, glasses, and heels. Notably, this trend focuses less on the realities of office work and more on performing the *aesthetic* of a particular kind of employee. Similarly, *Quiet*

Luxury can be understood as a more refined iteration of the *Clean Girl* aesthetic, emphasising neutrality, timelessness, and high-quality – or *high-quality-looking* – garments intended to signal understated wealth and elegance (Freestone & Dixon 2024). Participation in this trend is not dependent on actual economic status, but rather on the ability to visually imitate affluence through carefully curated style choices. Taken together, these examples illustrate how microtrends function less as reflections of lived experience and more as temporary aesthetic frameworks through which desired identities are visually performed.

The symbolic meanings of material goods, such as clothing, continue to operate as reflections of identity and social status (Dittmar 2008, 18). However, as these examples demonstrate, such meanings are increasingly mediated through images detached from the wearer's everyday realities. For instance, the *Mob Wife* aesthetic draws on Italian American working-class femininity and dramatised representations of “tough glamour” in popular culture (Duong 2025). Yet, when adopted as a microtrend, the aesthetic bears little connection to the social or cultural contexts it references. This observation, which covers several microtrends, aligns with research indicating that Generation Z often seeks to present a style or identity that appears exclusive or expensive, even when it is not in reality (Van den Bergh et al. 2024).

In this sense, microtrends can be understood as highly performative, with identity displayed primarily as an “outer skin” rather than as something internally developed. This aligns with earlier research suggesting that individuals who experience uncertainty about their identities rely more heavily on material symbols to express them. For example, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) found that business students with fewer qualifications were more likely to display markers of success, while Braun and Wicklund (1989) observed that first-year university students wore more institutional merchandise than students later in their studies. This process, referred to as symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982), ties closely to the contemporary phenomenon of microtrends among Generation Z.

Further connecting this performative nature of microtrends to CCT, they exemplify what Crockett and Weinberger (2024, 83) describe as the Cultural Appropriation Model of representation, in which symbolic materials from specific subcultures are borrowed and repackaged for mainstream appeal. As aesthetic elements become detached from their original contexts, turned into short-lived trends, they create visual identities that appear diverse but lack any depth. At the same time, consuming certain types of clothing helps individuals move visually closer to their “ideal self,” by adopting symbols associated with those desired identities (Dittmar 2008, 29). This concern regarding aesthetic

extraction for commercialisation is also reflected in fashion journalism. Beswick (2024), for example, highlights how microtrends often strip subcultural styles of their original values and social significance, reframing them as interchangeable aesthetic cues designed for rapid circulation and consumption. In this sense, microtrends not only accelerate trend cycles but also reinforce forms of consumption in which cultural meaning is flattened in favour of surface-level aesthetic appeal.

The popularity of microtrends can also be understood as partly stemming from the evolving and still-forming nature of identity during youth. Research shows that the importance of certain possessions depends on a person's age, as age defines the central "goals" of that stage of life. In early childhood, for instance, the focus is on building a sense of security and competence, whereas the "goal" of adolescence and early adulthood – where a significant share of Gen Z currently is – is the development of an autonomous identity, where personal style is a central building block. (Kamptner 1991) Identity-seeking is also central to adolescence and young adulthood, and material goods often serve as tools for experiment with and establish these developmental needs for building identities. (Dittmar 2008, 106). The dynamics of microtrends also align with postmodern perspectives on identity, which conceptualise identity as increasingly dynamic and market-mediated, with traditional, long-term anchors such as family, place, or enduring social roles giving way to aesthetic, affective, and temporary forms of belonging (Firat & Venkatesh 1995, 239-242; Maffesoli 1986, 8-11). In the context of microtrends, this shift becomes visible in the way short-lived fashion aesthetics function as temporary frameworks for expressing belonging and distinction without long-term commitment.

Finally, to circle back to the concept of the extended self (Belk 1988), digitalisation has transformed how identity is constructed and performed. In contemporary settings, the self extends not only through physical possessions but also through digital expressions, such as social media profiles, curated images, and online interactions (Belk 2014). Paradoxically, their intangibility can intensify materialistic tendencies, as users seek to preserve or tangibilise their digital identities through consumption. This dual movement toward dematerialisation and rematerialisation reflects how online environments simultaneously disembody and re-embody the self, reshaping the dynamics of self-presentation. (Belk 2014) This is backed by a recent study on online second-hand platforms by Juge et al. (2021), which found that Gen Z consumers are indeed, in their own words, renewing their wardrobes at remarkable speed, buying items to remain aligned with fast-changing microtrends and often reselling them before they lose aesthetic or monetary value. Juge et al. (2021) also found out that some users purchase clothes they never wear, treating them as short-term "profit opportunities" rather than meaningful possessions.

All in all, the historically rapid pace of trend cycling, combined with notions of fluctuating identity and young people as consumers, contributes to increased buying and selling. As previously discussed, online second-hand platforms provide an ideal arena for this dynamic. Together, these factors create a cycle in which identity and style become increasingly temporary and disposable, reinforcing a transitory and interconnected relationship between fashion and identity among Generation Z.

3.4 Conceptual framework for second-hand overconsumption among Generation Z

Taken together, the literature reviewed in this thesis suggests that overconsumption of second-hand fashion is a historically evolved and structurally enabled consumption pattern that has intensified with the digitalisation of everyday life and shopping. This manifests most strongly among generations who have grown up fully immersed in digital environments. As constraints to purchasing have gradually lowered and shopping has evolved into always-available online marketplaces, consumption of second-hand has become faster, more effortless, more affordable, and less socially visible.

In this context, online second-hand platforms represent the most contemporary and intensified continuation of these developments: they combine constant, algorithmically renewing availability, vast selections, extreme affordability, and ease of purchase in ways that make second-hand consumption highly desirable. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework developed from the literature review, illustrating how structural conditions, consumer psychology, and generational characteristics interact and result in a self-reinforcing, vicious cycle of second-hand overconsumption among Generation Z.

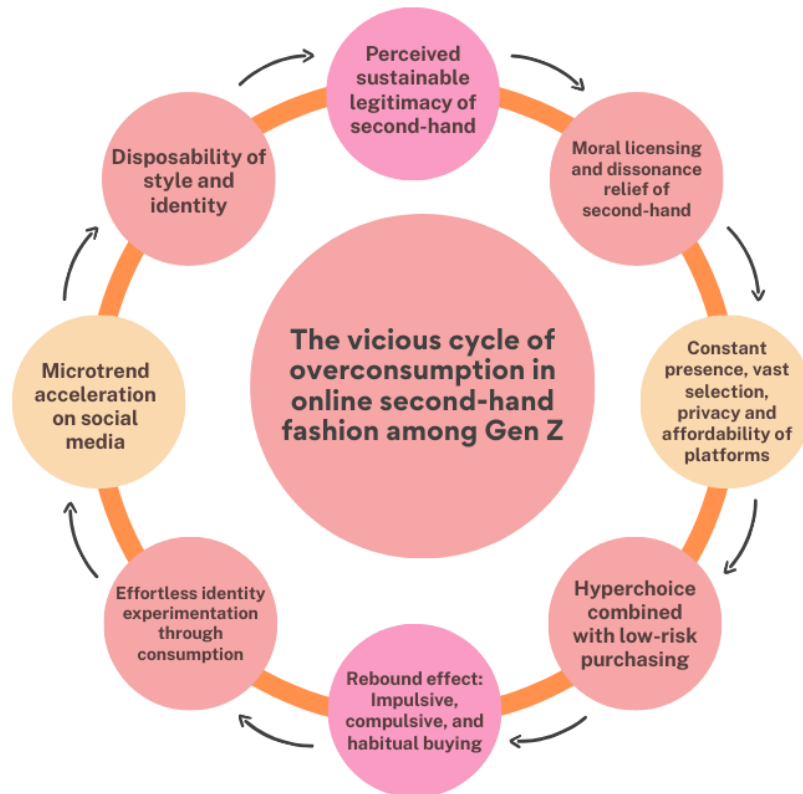


Figure 2. The vicious cycle of overconsumption in online second-hand fashion among Generation Z

As illustrated in Figure 2, several mechanisms contribute to this cycle of overconsumption in online second-hand fashion. First, second-hand is widely framed as a sustainability-positive choice of shopping by default, enabling overconsumption through *moral licensing*. Consumers may feel justified in purchasing more because the mode of consumption itself is perceived as inherently “good”. The *rebound effect*, in contrast, explains how even seemingly sustainable actions can increase overall consumption when they become easier, cheaper, and more efficient. In this context, second-hand platforms, through their record-high speed, affordability, and convenience, can weaken or even reverse the intended or supposed sustainable benefit by encouraging users to buy more rather than less.

These dynamics also make it easier to tackle *cognitive dissonance*. When consumers, at least when asked, hold sustainability-related beliefs while also prioritising values such as self-expression, the thrill of the hunt, and finding bargains, second-hand shopping seems to offer an accessible and acceptable way to realise these wants by positioning second-hand consumption as morally acceptable even when it is highly frequent or excessive. Finally, *hyperchoice*, meaning the abundance of choice on digital platforms increasing decision fatigue and reducing rational deliberation, may further intensify the volume of consumption – low prices and, once again, the seemingly inherent sustainable

nature of second-hand further add to this by lowering the possibility of “mistake purchases”. The possibility to simply resell unwanted items creates yet another way to legitimise frequent buying. As all these characteristics interconnect and manifest among consumers, they help explain why the contemporary second-hand market has started to mirror overconsumptive patterns previously associated primarily with fast-fashion consumption: rather than making consumers more conscious of their consumption, the characteristics of online second-hand both enable and encourage continuous wardrobe turnover and high levels of consumption.

Now, within this broader phenomenon of contemporary second-hand, Generation Z was taken into focus as a particularly relevant and interesting group of consumers because of their purchasing power in today’s economy, as well as their overlapping emphasis on sustainability-related and identity-, uniqueness-, and digitality-related values. Reports on the generation portray Gen Z as environmentally conscious and concerned about sustainability, while research also reveals inconsistencies between stated sustainability values and actual purchasing behaviour. In second-hand contexts, environmental motivations do appear, yet rarely as primary drivers. Instead, emphasis is placed on motivations such as bargain hunting, the thrill of the hunt, uniqueness, and the pursuit of personal style. Second-hand consumption therefore becomes an arena in which competing values are negotiated: stated sustainability-centred values coexist with individuality-, uniqueness-, and identity-related values, alongside lower brand loyalty and the generation’s comfort with adopting multiple style identities at once.

Second-hand platforms align closely with these characteristics of Gen Z by offering a broad range of styles and affordable access to unique items, enabling consumers to experiment with identity without significant financial burden. As mentioned earlier, the sustainable dimension also appears to be built into second-hand consumption by default, even when other motivations dominate or consumption becomes excessive. Taken together, these characteristics suggest that online second-hand platforms resonate strongly with Generation Z’s core consumption values, combining individuality and stylistic abundance with perceived sense of sustainability. Combined with the digitality-centred nature of contemporary second-hand fashion, and Generation Z’s tendency to view digital spaces as a natural extension of everyday life, these platforms may even function as safe spaces where peer validation and inspiration are easily and comfortably accessed.

Finally, these dynamics become particularly visible in the context of microtrends, which can be seen as the ultimate contemporary manifestation of all these concepts combined. *Microtrends*, a phenomenon that has emerged online as a result of the high speed of digital environments combined

with Gen Z's quest for individuality and uniqueness, function as short-lived aesthetic frameworks through which desired identities are performed, and their rapid circulation reinforces the idea of style as a temporary, replaceable, and continuously renewed concept. In this sense, not only clothing items but also the identities attached to them become increasingly disposable. To keep up with these microtrends, online second-hand platforms, with their efficient algorithms and large user bases, provide an environment for aligning with trends quickly, cheaply, and with social acceptance. Research further suggests that Gen Z consumers purchase second-hand items both frequently and often with an expectation of reselling them, mirroring the tendency to continuously shift styles and reinforcing a broader logic of disposability within fashion consumption and ways of being more generally.

All in all, contemporary online second-hand platforms seemingly operate as a modern solution to a modern problem, unsustainable consumption, while in reality maintaining the underlying overconsumptive logic of fashion culture in a new context – overconsumption has simply changed its form. While the form of consumption shifts from new to second-hand, the mentality toward fashion appears to remain largely unchanged among Gen Z: fashion continues to be approached as temporary, easily replaceable, and endlessly renewable. Second-hand purchasing offers consumers a way to navigate sustainability-related contradictions by reducing cognitive dissonance and providing moral liberation, while the same features that make it attractive – affordability, limitless choice, speed, and ease of resale – create conditions for rebound effects and intensified purchasing frequency. For Generation Z, the combination of ambiguous sustainability motivations, fluid identity construction, and social-media-shaped lifestyles and fast microtrend cycles positions online second-hand as a particularly enabling environment for continuous consumption.

Ultimately, this dynamic creates a cycle in which both identity and style become disposable, reinforcing a broader disposable relationship to fashion and self-expression. As a result, second-hand platforms can function as engines of renewed demand, making them a contemporary arena for overconsumption, especially among Generation Z. Next, the empirical part of this thesis turns to the very core of the phenomenon, online second-hand content on social media, to examine how these dynamics manifest in what can be considered their most natural habitat among the generation under the microscope.

4 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological framework used to conduct the empirical part of this thesis. It begins by outlining the research approach and philosophical positioning guiding the study. The chapter then explains the data collection process, including the selection of social media content as empirical material and the criteria used to construct the final dataset. Following this, the data analysis process used to interpret the empirical material is presented. Finally, the chapter evaluates the study by discussing its trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the use of generative artificial intelligence in the research process.

4.1 Research approach

The research approach defines the strategy through which the researcher gains access to the type of information needed to answer the study's objective. (Ghauri et al. 2020, 96) For this thesis, a qualitative research approach was selected as the most suitable way to examine how Generation Z discusses overconsuming in the context of second-hand fashion. Qualitative research is particularly well suited for studies that aim to understand the perspective of the individuals involved. Qualitative methods emphasise understanding people's viewpoints, actions, and the contexts in which these actions occur (Ghauri et al. 2020, 96–99). As this thesis' methodology explores how Gen Z perceives and discusses second-hand overconsumption, a qualitative lens allows these naturally occurring discussions to be examined on their own terms, without stripping away the nuances that give them meaning.

Qualitative research also offers the possibility for interpretation, enabling the researcher to analyse subtle patterns, contradictions, and underlying assumptions, phenomena that are not directly observable through numeric data but become visible through language and discourse. As Ghauri et al. (2020, 96-99) emphasise, qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate when the goal is to produce holistic explanations rather than generalisable statistical conclusions. This is especially important in this study, where the aim is to form a picture of *how* and *why* a phenomenon is interpreted in a particular way within a specific generational group.

Finally, a qualitative research design allows for flexibility in data interpretation, making it possible to follow emerging themes and understand the context-dependent nature of consumption practices. As Ghauri et al. (2020, 96-99) point out, qualitative studies are especially appropriate when the context itself holds significant analytical value. In this thesis, the online environments where discussion take place are not just sources of data but integral parts of the phenomenon: the platforms, their formats, and their cultures all shape how Gen Z talks about consumption.

Traditional methods such as surveys and interviews often face challenges in studies on sustainable consumption and consumer responsibility, as respondents tend to exaggerate or align their answers with socially desirable norms, concealing “less acceptable” opinions or behaviours. This well-documented issue in consumer ethics research stems from the sensitive nature of the topic: participants are aware of what is considered the “right” answer and are aware of the purpose and intention of the study, making them respond accordingly. (Auger & Devinney 2007; Carrington et al., 2010; Devinney et al. 2010, 56–57) For this reason, this study analyses publicly available data that exists regardless of this thesis, as these provide access to authentic, spontaneous, and presumably voluntarily published discussions that more closely reflect genuine attitudes and perceptions surrounding overconsumption in second-hand fashion.

The approach of this thesis is grounded in social constructionism, which posits that meanings are created, shared, and negotiated through language, interaction, and cultural discourse (Berger & Luckmann 1966). From this perspective, social media content offers a valuable lens for examining how social groups, in this case, Gen Z users discuss in digital environments, and collectively construct understandings of consumption practices. Accordingly, this study treats Generation Z’s social media content as expressions of broader cultural meanings that contribute to shaping and describing contemporary second-hand fashion consumption patterns.

4.2 Data collection

This study adopts a digital ethnographic approach, commonly referred to as netnography (Kozinets 2015) to collect naturally occurring, publicly available online comments related to second-hand fashion consumption. Netnography provides a framework for observing and capturing culturally embedded meanings within digital environments, where many contemporary consumption practices and identities are formed and negotiated.

In netnographic research, it is crucial to ensure the relevance of the data selected for closer examination (Kozinets 2015). In this thesis, the empirical material was collected from publicly available social media content on TikTok. This platform was selected due to its widespread use among Generation Z, with over 60% of its user base belonging to this cohort (Wallaroo Media 2021; Stahl & Literat 2023), and due to most prominent material under this phenomenon being found on this platform. Existing research further highlights TikTok’s relevance as a site where young users actively perform, negotiate, and communicate identity through visual and narrative practices (Stahl & Literat 2023), making it a particularly suitable environment for examining meaning-making processes related to consumption. Within TikTok, the focus was placed on user-generated haul videos, a content genre

in which creators showcase and comment on recently purchased clothing items, usually existing in high quantity. Haul videos are especially prevalent among Generation Z and have been identified as a popular and recognisable format through which consumption practices are publicly performed and shared (Sharma et al. 2025). As a form of user-generated content, haul videos are typically characterised by relatively low levels of professionalism and polished production, aligning closely with contemporary peer-to-peer digital culture, in which relatable content is often valued over high production quality (Shutsko, 2020; Van den Bergh et al., 2024).

In the context of second-hand clothing, these user-generated videos function not only as displays of consumption but also as narrative spaces in which haul video creators articulate, often implicitly, their motivations, justifications, and preferences related to their purchases. These aspects correspond closely with the central themes discussed throughout the theoretical framework of this thesis. Importantly, the sheer volume of such content, amounting to hundreds of thousands of videos, indicates that second-hand haul videos represent a widely popular practice rather than a niche interest or hobby. Consequently, this approach provides insight into how second-hand overconsumption is enacted and normalised by ordinary members of Generation Z. Moreover, second-hand haul videos frequently attract substantial audience engagement in the form of views and comments, further underscoring their relevance as empirical material for examining shared meanings and collective responses surrounding contemporary second-hand consumption practices.

Hashtags function as organisational tools on social media platforms, clustering thematically related content and enabling both users of the platform and researchers alike to locate relevant discourses in an efficient and systematic manner (Zappavigna 2015; Stahl & Literat, 2023). Previous studies have successfully employed hashtag-based sampling to examine, for example, Generation Z's digital practices on TikTok (Stahl & Literat 2023), hashtag-driven discourses around topical societal issues on TikTok (Saha 2026), and the visibility and framing of specific topics on the platform (Neumann et al. 2026). As such, hashtags offer a platform-native method for identifying user-generated content that is both thematically coherent and analytically relevant.

When exploring second-hand haul content on TikTok, the scale of the phenomenon becomes immediately apparent. A search for the hashtag *#thrifthaul*, which encompasses a broader range of videos related to second-hand purchases, yields close to one million videos. By contrast, a more platform-specific hashtag such as *#vintedhaul* returns approximately 200,000 videos. This disparity illustrates not only the widespread popularity of second-hand haul content in general, but also the substantial presence of platform-based second-hand purchasing practices within this broader

category. Consequently, these figures underscore the necessity of establishing clear and relevant criteria for selecting videos to serve as the empirical data for this thesis, in order to construct a manageable and analytically coherent dataset.

As discussed throughout this thesis and illustrated by the hashtag #thrifthaul on TikTok, second-hand shopping has gained popularity among Generation Z across both physical retail spaces and online environments. However, to remain consistent with the theoretical focus of this thesis, the data collection concentrates on the most contemporary and platform-mediated manifestation of this phenomenon: online resale platforms. Accordingly, the scope was narrowed from the broader #thrifthaul hashtag to the more specific #vintedhaul and #depophaul, which represent purchases made through two of the most popular online resale platforms previously introduced in this thesis –the former being particularly prevalent in Europe and the latter in the North American context. In total, 30 videos were selected as empirical data. To ensure balance, 15 videos were sampled using the hashtag #vintedhaul and 15 using #depophaul. Nevertheless, as even this more narrowly defined hashtag strategy yields hundreds of thousands of videos, a set of inclusion criteria was applied to guide the selection of videos, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Inclusion criteria for the selection of videos

1. The video appeared under the hashtags #vintedhaul or #depophaul on TikTok to ensure that the content explicitly features second-hand purchases via online resale platforms.
2. The video displayed a substantial number of purchased items, aligning with haul-style content and the study's focus on overconsumption.
3. The creator appeared to belong to Gen Z, based on self-presentation and contextual cues, corresponding to individuals born between 1996 and 2012.
4. The video was published within the last six months (June–December 2025) to ensure contemporary relevance, using TikTok's internal search filtering system.
5. The videos were created in English to minimise potential misinterpretations arising from language barriers.
6. The video's comment section was open and active, enabling comment-based analysis alongside the video's other attributes.
7. Each video was produced by a different creator to avoid overrepresentation of individual users.

In qualitative research, saturation refers to the point at which the data begin to repeat themselves and no substantially new observations or insights emerge, indicating that the collected material is sufficient to describe the phenomenon under study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 89–90; Saunders et al. 2018). However, the amount of data required to reach saturation is highly dependent on the specific research context, and no exact number can be determined (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 89–90). In this thesis, although saturation began to emerge after only a few videos, data collection was continued in order to strengthen and confirm the identified thematic patterns and to ensure that emerging themes were well established and sufficiently supported by the empirical material (Saunders et al. 2018). Altogether, a balanced sample of 30 videos was collected according to their order of appearance within the selected hashtags, provided that they fulfilled all established inclusion criteria. This sample size was considered sufficient to reach analytical saturation, as recurring content patterns, engagement dynamics, and thematic features became evident across the dataset and the inclusion of additional videos did not generate new analytically significant insights.

The 30 selected videos comprised 60 captions (two per video: one written caption displayed below the video and one on-screen textual caption), 2,468 comments, and approximately 150 hashtags. In line with netnographic research, which allows multiple forms of online communication to be treated as relevant data depending on the nature of the phenomenon under study (Kozinets 2015), captions, comments, and hashtags were all included in the empirical material. From the comments, around 100 of the most liked “top comments” were selected for closer analysis, approximately three per video, as these played a key role in shaping the overall tone and affective orientation of each video’s comment section. Regarding hashtags, those extending beyond general tags used across most videos, such as #vinted or #thrifthaul, were included as data in order to capture their contribution to the thematic patterns identified in the analysis. This is consistent with research suggesting that hashtags function as discursive resources that organise and frame communication within social media environments (Zappavigna 2015) and therefore help indicate how individual videos position themselves within broader second-hand fashion discourse and which themes are emphasised within this content. Although the empirical dataset consists of 30 videos, these videos collectively accumulated approximately 2,200,000 views at the time of data collection, demonstrating the considerable audience reach and circulation of the analysed content on the platform. The full empirical dataset is documented in Appendix 1, which provides an overview of the analysed videos and their key attributes. The analysis of this dataset is elaborated in more detail in the following chapter.

4.3 Data analysis

After collecting the netnographic data, the empirical material was analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, organising, and interpreting meanings and patterns across a dataset (Braun & Clarke 2006; Thompson 2022). The analysis followed an abductive logic, in which empirical observations and existing theoretical perspectives were considered in dialogue throughout the analytical process. Rather than treating themes as passively emerging from the data, the approach emphasises the active role of the researcher in interpreting empirical patterns in light of the theoretical concepts introduced in the literature review. Abduction is particularly suited to research contexts in which theory neither fully explains the phenomenon nor is entirely absent but instead serves as a heuristic resource for interpreting emerging findings (Thompson 2022). In this study, theoretical insights from the literature on overconsumption, second-hand fashion, and consumer culture informed the interpretation of recurring patterns in the dataset and the formation of themes. The analysis was conducted by the author of the thesis, whose interpretive role was acknowledged as central to the abductive process, particularly in the identification, grouping, and conceptual refinement of themes.

The analysis followed an iterative and recursive process, moving back and forth between the data, coding, and interpretation in order to refine emerging codes and themes throughout the analytical process (Miles et al. 2014). Both during and after data collection, the dataset was examined in detail to identify recurring expressions and patterns of wording across the various attributes of the TikTok videos, including written captions, on-screen text, hashtags, and comment sections (see Appendix 1). These recurring elements formed the basis for initial coding (Miles et al. 2014; Braun & Clarke 2006). Data collection and analysis proceeded until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that additional videos no longer generated substantially new first-order concepts or altered the emerging thematic structure (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002; Saunders et al. 2018). At this point, further data were considered to reinforce existing themes without introducing new conceptual insights, indicating that the key patterns relevant to this research had been adequately captured within the dataset. The resulting data structure is presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Data structure of excessive second-hand consumption practices on TikTok, adapted from Gioia (2012)

After familiarisation with the data, the study adopted a Gioia-inspired approach to data structuring (Gioia et al., 2012), a framework developed in response to critiques that qualitative research can appear impressionistic or insufficiently systematic, particularly when the connection between empirical material and theory is not explicit. The approach is especially suitable for making sense of a large volume of qualitative material by organising it into a clear and progressively refined data structure. In this study, rather than functioning as a method in itself, the Gioia approach provides a structured way of presenting the abductive thematic analysis of the videos.

Central to the Gioia approach is the visual representation of how abstract analysis progresses from raw empirical material to higher-order concepts (Gioia et al. 2012). In this study, first-order concepts consist of recurring phrases, expressions, and words drawn directly from the empirical material, including captions, hashtags, and comments, as well as repeated mentions of reselling, brands, and prices. These first-order concepts intentionally remain close to the language used within the platform context in order to preserve the generation's own meaning-making practices through which meanings are constructed in the data. The first-order concepts were then grouped into second-order themes

reflecting researcher-led interpretations of broader patterns structuring the dataset. In line with abductive thematic analysis, the development and naming of themes occurred in dialogue with themes previously discussed in the theoretical framework, allowing the analysis to remain grounded in the empirical material while also contributing to conceptual understanding.

Finally, the second-order themes were further refined into four broader dimensions capturing higher-level organising logics underlying practices of excessive second-hand consumption. The resulting data structure presented in Figure 3 visually demonstrates the analytical progression from individual empirical observations to dimensions that connect patterns across the dataset. Overall, the data structure serves two purposes. First, it functions as an analytical tool supporting the transition from descriptive coding to theoretical interpretation. Second, it acts as a transparency device, allowing readers to assess how the study's conceptual claims are grounded in the empirical material. The final data structure not only helps to visualise the phenomenon clearly but also demonstrates how patterns initially perceived as something that “seems to be happening” are transformed into analytically and methodologically grounded insights.

4.4 Evaluation of the study

4.4.1 Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies rarely aim to produce universally generalisable findings or objective measurements. Instead, the aim is to provide a well-grounded and plausible interpretation of a phenomenon based on empirical material and the researcher's analytical reasoning (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 131–133; Aaltio & Puusa 2011, 153–163). Accordingly, this study seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of the meanings and interpretations surrounding the phenomenon under study. From this perspective, evaluating research quality focuses on ensuring that interpretations are credible, transparent, and logically connected to the empirical material, allowing readers to follow and critically assess the researcher's reasoning (Aaltio & Puusa 2011, 153–163).

In line with established qualitative research practice, the trustworthiness of this study was assessed using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 294–327): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are widely used in qualitative research and are particularly suited to studies conducted in naturalistic research settings. Naturalistic inquiry refers to research that examines phenomena in their natural context without manipulation by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 134). In this thesis, the phenomenon under study, second-hand fashion consumption as presented through social media videos and their comment sections, was examined within the platform environment exactly how it naturally occurs. As Lincoln

and Guba (1985) emphasise, establishing credibility does not require applying every available technique, but rather selecting and applying methods that appropriately fit the research context and enable a credible reconstruction of the phenomenon under study.

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings provide a convincing and plausible interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In qualitative business research, credibility can be strengthened by ensuring consistency between the research questions, theoretical framework, data collection, and analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 305). In this study, credibility is supported by grounding the analysis in the theoretical framework introduced earlier in the thesis and by systematically linking the empirical material to the concepts discussed in the literature review. As Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 136) note, credibility increases when readers are able to understand how the researcher has progressed from observations to interpretations and conclusions.

Credibility is further supported by the researcher's familiarity with the research context, as well as through triangulation. Prolonged engagement with the research context can enhance credibility by enabling a deeper contextual understanding of the phenomenon and identification of relevant patterns in the data (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Prior to conducting the study, the researcher had extensively engaged with themes related to second-hand fashion, sustainable consumption, and overconsumption, and this familiarity was further developed and deepened through engagement with relevant literature and empirical material during the research process.

Triangulation, on the other hand, refers to the use of multiple sources of evidence or perspectives in order to strengthen the robustness of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). Though this study uses only one dataset, triangulation was applied by examining multiple elements of the dataset, including many aspects of the creator-produced videos as well as audience responses in the comment sections. This allowed the phenomenon to be considered not only from the perspective of the content creators but also through the reactions and interpretations of viewers interacting with the content. In addition, perspectives from different fields of consumer research and literature on fashion consumption were used alongside the empirical material, allowing the phenomenon to be interpreted from multiple conceptual viewpoints.

Transferability concerns the extent to which the findings are applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In qualitative research, transferability does not rely on statistical generalisation but on providing sufficiently detailed descriptions of the research context so that readers can evaluate whether the findings might be relevant in other settings (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). This study focuses specifically on second-hand fashion content on TikTok and its relation to the consumption practices

and meanings associated with Generation Z. The findings are therefore strongly context-bound and are not intended to be universally generalisable. However, by providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, the dataset, the sampling criteria, and the analysis process, the study enables readers to assess whether the insights may be transferable to similar contexts, such as other social media environments or forms of digital second-hand consumption.

Dependability refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research process over time (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In qualitative research, dependability is strengthened when the research design, methodological choices, and analytical procedures are described clearly enough for others to follow the logic of the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 306). In this thesis, dependability has been supported by carefully documenting the different stages of the research process, including the data collection procedure, the inclusion criteria used for selecting videos, and the steps of the thematic analysis. These descriptions enable readers to trace how the empirical material was collected and how the analytical themes were developed. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the characteristics of the digital research environment. TikTok is a dynamic platform in which the visibility of content is shaped by algorithms and constantly changing user behaviour. As a result, the same search queries produce different results at different points in time, and some content may be removed. For this reason, the exact dataset used in this study may not be reproducible in identical form in the future. In this context, dependability should therefore be understood primarily in terms of the transparency and coherence of the research process rather than the exact replication of the dataset. As the phenomenon examined is closely connected to a particular moment in time, the study is time-bound and reproducing it in an identical form is also not intended.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are grounded in the empirical material rather than in the researcher's personal preferences or assumptions (Lincoln & Guba 1985). At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that in qualitative research, the researcher inevitably interprets the data through their own background, experiences, and theoretical understanding (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133). For this reason, reflexivity, meaning the researcher's critical reflection on their own role and assumptions, is an essential element of trustworthy qualitative research (Aaltio & Puusa 2011). In this study, confirmability has been strengthened by grounding interpretations closely in the empirical material and by describing the analytical process transparently. The researcher acknowledges a personal interest in topics related to second-hand fashion, sustainable consumption, and overconsumption, and such prior familiarity may shape initial assumptions about the phenomenon. For this reason, efforts were made throughout the research process to remain reflexive and to ensure that interpretations were grounded in patterns observed in the data rather than in the

researcher's personal views. By describing the reasoning behind interpretive choices transparently, the study allows readers to evaluate how the conclusions were reached.

4.4.2 Research ethics

Ethical considerations are another central aspect of qualitative research. This study has been conducted in accordance with the principles of responsible research conduct and good scientific practice outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2023). The core principles of *reliability*, *honesty*, *respect*, and *accountability* (TENK 2023) guided the research process from the formulation of the research questions to data collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination.

The empirical data used in this thesis consist of publicly available social media videos and their associated comment sections. The material analysed was openly published by content creators and commenters on a public platform, without access restrictions, and no interaction, intervention, or engagement with the content by the researcher took place. This approach is consistent with ethical guidelines for the use of publicly available online material in qualitative research. At the same time, the study recognises that publicly available social media content may still contain personal, or sensitive elements. To address this, all videos and comments included in the analysis were fully anonymised. No usernames, profile information, images of faces, or other identifiable details are presented in the thesis. Quoted material was carefully selected and presented in a way that prevents identification of individual content creators or commenters.

The researcher adopted a non-intrusive and observational stance throughout the research process. The study does not seek to evaluate, judge, or moralise individual people, but rather to understand broader patterns, meanings, and social dynamics surrounding second-hand consumption as they are constructed. The purpose of the research is analytical and explanatory, not accusatory. Additionally, in line with ethical principles of transparency and accountability (TENK 2023), the research process, methodological choices, and analytical decisions have been described openly and in detail. This openness allows readers to critically assess the ethical and analytical choices made throughout the study. Overall, the ethical approach of this thesis is based on respecting participants' autonomy and privacy and ensuring that the research contributes responsibly to academic and societal discussions on sustainable consumption and consumer culture.

4.4.3 Declaration on the use of generative artificial intelligence

I hereby declare that generative artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool in this thesis. In accordance with the policies of the Turku School of Economics, a detailed description of the tools used and their specific purposes in the research process is provided in Appendix 3.

All concepts and arguments originating from other authors have been thoroughly and systematically cited throughout the thesis. Generative artificial intelligence was used only to support the researcher's own writing, such as rephrasing sentences originally written by the researcher and assisting with finding synonym and translations, or with rephrasing of individual sentences. Artificial intelligence was also utilised to improve linguistic clarity and flow, as English is not the native language of the researcher. Nevertheless, all suggestions produced by artificial intelligence tools were critically evaluated and further edited by the researcher, who retains full responsibility for the content, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this thesis.

5 Gen Z's perception of excessive online second-hand consumption

In this chapter, the findings are presented in detail, supported by concrete example quotes from the dataset and discussed in light of the theoretical framework of the thesis. The findings are organised thematically, following the order in which they appeared in the data structure, moving dimension by dimension. Examples are drawn from multiple elements of the dataset, including written captions, on-screen text, comments, and hashtags, depending on their relevance to each theme. These examples are examined alongside previously introduced theory; studies, reports, and articles, allowing for a comparison between the findings and existing research, as well as the identification of emerging insights.

In sum, across the dataset, the different attributes come together in their contribution to *the normalisation of excessive online second-hand consumption*. Although the themes identified in the analysis highlight different aspects and sides of this phenomenon, they are united by a shared tendency to frame high-volume second-hand purchasing as socially acceptable, collectively validated, and even necessary through superlative expressions and words of affirmation, despite an underlying awareness of its problematic nature. Excessive consumption seems to not only be accepted but actively reinforced through different dimensions, to which the findings will dive deeper into.

5.1 Affective normalisation of excessive and compulsive consumption

This first dimension sets the tone for how excessive and potentially compulsive second-hand consumption is treated as a positive and socially acceptable behaviour throughout the dataset. Across the dataset, creators and viewers alike engage in affective practices that frame excessive consumption as normalised through shared emotions, humour, and expressions of admiration that ultimately dissolve its potential negative consequences. Importantly, this affective framing does not deny or ignore the excessiveness of the behaviour; instead, it openly acknowledges it while simultaneously neutralising it or even humorously highlighting its problematic nature. The following themes illustrate the different affective and linguistic mechanisms through which this normalisation unfolds.

5.1.1 Accepted self-awareness of excessive consumption

From the author's point of view, one of the most unexpectedly prominent observations that emerged from the dataset was the pervasive self-awareness of, and acceptance-oriented attitude towards, one's personal excessive consumption. Creators not only presented their purchases openly, but also frequently accompanied them with commentary expressing a sense of "helplessness" in relation to continued purchasing. Rather than clearly framing this behaviour as a problem to be addressed or

managed, excessive buying was often articulated in a playful or humorous manner, with seemingly little indication of an actual intention to change the behaviour.

“Guys, I need to start getting a time limit on Depop” (caption of a video)

“All these pieces just find me, I swear!” (caption of a video)

“I have a severe shopping addiction” (caption of a video)

“shopaholic’s haul” (caption of a video)

In this sense, creators appear to openly acknowledge the excessive nature of their consumption yet do so in a way that functions as a justification rather than a critique. By explicitly naming their behaviour as problematic while simultaneously framing it humorously, they also seem to be aware, or at least hope, that such admissions will not be met with judgement from viewers. This is further reinforced through direct forms of address towards viewers of the videos, such as *“Guys”* or *“I swear!”*, which appear to encourage understanding and compassion from the audience. To bring the implied starts of conversations with the audience into the picture, this approach seemed, without exception, to resonate well, as empathy, relatability, and encouragement were often visible in the comments of these videos.

“I think the addiction must go on” (comment to *“I have a severe shopping addiction”*)

“Chronically on Depopppppp” (comment to *“I need to start getting a time limit on Depop”*)

“I’ve probably spent hundreds on Depop” (comment to *“I spend too much money on this app”*)

The expressed compulsiveness of purchasing aligns with previously introduced theory, in which compulsive buying is defined as the continuation of shopping despite negative consequences, such as financial strain or time-related challenges (Dittmar 2008, 97–99). While these negative consequences, such as spending significant amounts of both time and money in the app, are explicitly articulated in the dataset, the recurring openness about addiction and the inability to stop is particularly prominent. Rather than being interpreted from subtle cues, compulsiveness appears as a straightforward and repeatedly acknowledged aspect of second-hand consumption content. What makes this especially noteworthy, however, is the relatively light stance towards it, signalling a form of acceptance of this kind of compulsive consumption. People are clearly aware of their addiction and openly express it, yet do so in a playful, even deliberately naïve manner.

At the same time, the repeated articulation of addiction could be interpreted as a coping strategy within this pattern of compulsive behaviour. By framing addiction in a humorous and relatable way, creators appear to anticipate empathetic responses from viewers, which may provide emotional

reassurance and reduce feelings of guilt associated with excessive consumption. As compulsive buying is often characterised by temporary satisfaction followed by regret or guilt (Dittmar 2008, 97–99), this negative cycle may be softened by transforming the issue into socially validated content and receiving affirmation from similarly thinking consumers. Notably, although creators acknowledge their behaviour as problematic in general terms, their communication rarely frames it as an issue requiring actual, serious change or intervention. Instead, compulsiveness is presented as something to be playfully recognised and shared, reinforcing its normalisation rather than challenging it. This could be read as an awareness of the problem that is reframed as relatable and lighter than it actually is or feels, thereby enabling the continued practice of such behaviour by easing potential negative internal feelings and thoughts associated with addiction.

5.1.2 Consumption framed as a necessity

To examine the nuance of the wording used more closely, this theme captures how excessive purchasing is framed through the language and narrative of *necessity*. Differing from the first theme, this theme was notably more visible in the comment sections of the videos rather than the captions written by the creator. Throughout the dataset, comments frequently used terms such as “*need*” and “*obsessed*,” often written in capital letters for emphasis. These expressions appeared repeatedly, amounting to hundreds of instances, and were particularly prominent among the most highly liked comments. Interestingly, such comments often referred to all items showcased in a video rather than to individual pieces, thereby implicitly endorsing not only the purchased items themselves but also the overall volume of purchasing.

“*Omg I NEED this kind of clothes!!!*” (top comment, 100 likes)

“*I. NEED. EVERY. SINGLE. ITEM*” (top comment, 35 likes)

“*Obsessed is an understatement.*” (caption of a video)

“*I’m obsessed with every single thing?!*” (comment of a video)

In this context, admiration and approval are articulated as necessity, positioning excessive consumption as something required rather than merely wanted or desired. While these expressions should not be interpreted too literally as indicators of actual needs, the consistent framing of admiration in this way is analytically significant. By invoking the language of necessity, creators, commenters, and those engaging with the comments contribute to a discourse in which large-scale consumption is normalised through necessity, as well as through an implied inability to stop. Similar to the previous theme, this kind of narrative functions as another way of acknowledging compulsive behaviour while remaining open and even somewhat positive about it. Although the language is

exaggerated, repeated references to the concepts of necessity and obsession suggest a loss of control, or an uncontrollable *urge* to buy, aligning closely with established descriptions of compulsive buying. Notably, the openness with which this kind of obsession is expressed, and the sheer volume of such expressions, was unexpectedly prominent across the dataset.

As previously noted, comments in this theme often addressed the entire set of clothing items presented in a video rather than focusing on individual pieces. This could be interpreted through the previously introduced concept of *hyperchoice*, in which an overwhelming number of options can reduce rational decision-making and generate a sense of cognitive overload (Solomon et al. 2016, 325). In the context of this theme, hyperchoice also appears to manifest in the form of audience reactions, not only in the act of purchasing something oneself, which will be discussed later. Within the comment sections, the rapid visual exposure to numerous items appears to heighten desirability, rendering all items attractive at once and making it impossible, undesirable, or unnecessary to differentiate between the clothing items shown. This way, everything becomes a *need* or an *obsession*.

5.1.3 Envy as affirmative validation of consumption

As a continuation of framing negative phenomena such as addiction or compulsion as something playful yet intense, another prominent theme was the expression of *envy* as a form of affirmative validation. This pattern, as well, was particularly visible in the comment sections of the videos, where expressions of jealousy were directed toward the creators. These comments frequently received exceptionally high levels of engagement, accumulating hundreds, even a thousand likes, positioning them as the most liked type of comments across the dataset. Similar to the language of necessity discussed in the previous theme, expressions of envy typically referred to the entirety of the showcased purchases rather than to individual items, thereby celebrating their abundance and implicitly affirming the overall volume of consumption.

“I am sick with jealousy right now” (top comment, 1,620 likes)

“Jealousy consumes me...” (top comment, 818 likes)

“You just slapped the smile right out of my face” (top comment, 389 likes)

“Life is not fair...” (comment of a video)

What makes this particularly interesting is that feelings of jealousy are generally not something people are willing to admit openly. Within the context of online second-hand purchases, however, envy appears as a relatable and voluntarily shared response, which at the same time frames excessive consumption as something to be jealous of and, ultimately, admired. The high number of likes further

amplifies this effect, transforming jealousy into a shared and collectively endorsed experience towards excessive consumption. At times, envy was already initiated by the creators themselves – some creators explicitly framed their videos as potentially “jealousy-inducing,” for instance by including warnings that viewers might experience envy when watching. The comment sections were often filled with viewers acknowledging that they had ignored the warning and consequently felt jealous. In this way, jealousy becomes a shared affective response between creators and audiences, reinforcing excessive purchasing as something so desirable and admired that feeling jealous is seen as a natural reaction.

“Don’t watch if you get jealous easily” (copy of a video)

“Well, I was warned.” (comment from the same video)

“Should’ve listened to the warning...” (comment from the same video)

The staggering number of likes attached to jealousy-related comments shows that these reactions are far from marginal, reflecting shared responses to excessive second-hand consumption among large numbers of consumers. In this sense, expressions of envy function in two directions: they convey a desire to be in the creator’s shoes, while simultaneously validating and admiring the creator’s purchasing behaviour. Through this mutual exchange, both creators and viewers appear to receive a form of peer affirmation, in which excessive consumption is collectively acknowledged, admired, and emotionally reinforced rather than questioned.

These findings on TikTok align with previous research highlighting Generation Z’s appreciation for platforms and channels that enable the open exchange of ideas and opinions, and where one can feel truly appreciated and understood (Witt & Braid 2018, 174). The highly liked expressions of jealousy can be seen as a direct manifestation of this dynamic, signalling shared understanding and emotional resonance among viewers. By liking such comments, users feel understood and want to publicly affirm their identification with them. At the same time, prior studies have shown that social media function as a significant source of inspiration shaping Generation Z’s consumption habits. This influence is clear in the jealousy-inducing nature of second-hand haul content, where expressions of envy not only reflect admiration but may also encourage viewers to aspire toward similar consumption practices. In this sense, jealousy operates as motivation, possibly translating emotional responses into aspirational consumption. This interpretation is further supported by second-hand platforms themselves, which identify social commerce as a key driver of future growth (ThredUp 2025). The dataset illustrates how this unfolds in practice, also reinforcing the close connection between resale platforms and other social media channels and contributing to a cyclical pattern of

consumption fuelled by strong emotional engagement. The dynamics between the social aspects of social media platforms and second-hand platforms will be further explored in the theme of platform attachment in their own section.

5.1.4 Admiration of the excessive consumer

Continuing the pattern of positive audience responses, this theme took validation to the next level: a notable number of straightforwardly admiring comments were directed first and foremost towards the creators of the videos, rather than solely towards the purchased items. Many comments positioned the purchaser as someone to admire or aspire to be, expressing admiration through superlative, even worshipful compliments related to appearance, style, and perceived personality. Words such as “cool,” “stunning,” and the recurring, all-inclusive reference to “everything” looking good were frequently used to praise how the clothing items appeared on the creator.

“The kind of girl I want to be” (top comment of a video, 17 likes)

“You’re so perfect. Everything looks good on you!” (top comment of a video, 20 likes)

“Jaw on the floor the whole video, you’re so cool” (top comment of a video, 50 likes)

“She’s the queen of Vinted!” (comment of a video)

“You’re the thrift goddess” (comment of a video)

By praising the creator’s appearance, style, or overall persona, viewers shift the focus from what is being purchased to who is doing the purchasing. In this way, excessive consumption becomes associated with desirable personal qualities, such as attractiveness or confidence. Comment after comment, the purchaser is positioned as engaging in a socially rewarding practice, receiving validation from viewers. Through this person-centred admiration, excessive second-hand consumption is normalised by being linked to admired identities and ways of being, with consumption framed as an integral part of who someone is rather than solely as material accumulation.

“Wish I was this good at Vinted...” (comment of a video)

“You have this glow, and I’m obsessed.” (comment of a video)

“Thank you so much for your services” (comment of a video)

This aligns with theory suggesting that 50% of representatives of younger generations purchase second-hand clothing items to create content or share their purchases on social media (ThredUp 2025). In light of the dataset, this practice appears to be motivated, at least in part, by the anticipation of receiving admiration and relatability through social media, becoming a driving factor behind this behaviour. These actions, particularly given their frequency, do not appear to be random or in vain;

rather, young consumers seem to showcase their purchases in order to gain validation for their choices, and, considering the overwhelmingly positive feedback across the dataset, this strategy appears to be effective.

As peer validation emerges as a recurring element throughout the findings, this theme can also be linked to questions of identity. As previously discussed, research suggests that in today's world, individuals continuously reconstruct who they are through consumption, as it becomes a way to navigate tensions in the pursuit of coherence and stability amid fragmented identities (Rokka & Ulver 2023, 20). Within this context, the practice of showcasing clothing hauls online can be understood as a way of reinforcing particular self-presentations and managing internal tensions between current and ideal or possible selves. This interpretation also aligns with theory suggesting that compulsive buying becomes more likely when materialistic values intersect with perceived gaps between one's current self and desired selves (Dittmar 2008).

In this way, the act of sharing second-hand hauls becomes socially rewarding in two ways – to get validation from peers affirming both the purchases and the identities constructed through them. As discussed earlier in the theoretical framework, Dittmar (2008, 29) introduces the notion “*to have is to be*” in her extensive work on consumption, and these haul videos appear to embody this idea in a new, more intense, contemporary context. When creating, viewing, or interacting with this type of haul content, young consumers are not only engaging with clothing but also with people and identities, as creators and commentators alike present and reveal themselves to be interpreted and evaluated through their purchases – helping to explain the sheer volume of such content.

5.2 Achievement-oriented escalation of consumption

Although all videos included in the dataset were centred on overconsumption to begin with, it was notable that the intensity of consumption was frequently presented as something to take *pride* in. Rather than revealing only a subtle or implicit positive orientation towards excessive consumption, this dimension in particular illustrates how overconsumption is framed as an achievement, not even open to interpretation. It is even portrayed as a form of competence or skill: the greater the quantity of purchases, the better the “finds,” and the stronger the resulting sense of accomplishment and success.

5.2.1 Escalating consumption as personal achievement

This theme illustrates how large online second-hand hauls are framed as an ongoing activity, and as something to be improved over time, akin to a skill. Caption texts by creators frequently evoke ideas

of *self-competition*, striving for improvement and progress, positioning second-hand shopping as an arena in which creators aim to surpass their own previous performances. Competition with other creators was not visible in this dataset, as even the comment sections did not feature bragging about personal skills or achievements, instead focusing on admiration, validation, and encouragement directed towards creators who appeared to be competing primarily with themselves.

“My biggest Vinted haul yet” (copy text of a video)

“Have I outdone myself again?” (copy text of a video)

“It actually doesn’t get better than this” (copy text of a video)

Creators openly acknowledge both the frequency and intensity of their second-hand shopping and often compare individual hauls to earlier ones. Copy texts framed as questions, such as *“Have I outdone myself again?”*, actively engage the audience in evaluating, validating, and celebrating these perceived milestones together with the creator. The repeated use of words such as *“yet”* conveys an expectation of continuation, suggesting that consumption is ongoing and even actively desired to escalate, resembling a never-ending quest for the perfect haul. The social dimension appears central to this dynamic, as progress is measured and affirmed through audience response.

Comment sections repeatedly expressed approval toward creators, particularly in videos where achievement-oriented shopping was most visible. In some cases, this took the form of general reactions common across the dataset, such as *“obsessed”* or *“love it,”* while in other cases comments directly addressed the achievement itself, for example, *“oh, you just keep topping yourself!”*. Such responses create the impression that some creators have developed an audience that actively anticipates new videos or has at the very least, engaged with their previous content. Across all themes, critical responses were notably absent; accordingly, comments within this theme encouraged creators to continue and reinforced the idea that each new haul represents further improvement.

This theme also adds an important nuance to existing research that highlights uniqueness and individuality as central values among Generation Z consumers (Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Ziółko et al. 2025; Baruönü 2025; Grieco et al. 2025). Even within a social setting such as TikTok haul videos, the focus was noticed to remain strongly on the individual creator, with other users actively supporting and validating this self-oriented presentation. Rather than being perceived as excessive, arrogant, or boastful, this form of self-focused consumption appears to be socially accepted and even respected by other young consumers, likely because it reflects a shared value among those both creating and engaging with this content.

Additionally, as previously discussed, a central feature of contemporary identity construction is the continuous updating of one's self-narrative in order to maintain a sense of coherence, particularly through social media, in the pursuit of an authentic or "true" self (Rokka & Ulver 2023). This helps explain why competition in these videos is consistently directed inward, toward surpassing one's own previous hauls, rather than toward other creators. Within this logic, second-hand consumption and the repeated showcasing of increasingly large hauls become part of an ongoing process of self-construction. For a generation that experiences identity as something fluid and rather unstable, and that is constantly searching for the current best way to be "me," this cycle of escalation and peer validation appears both understandable and socially reinforced, with the haul format of excessive second-hand consumption serving as a clear manifestation of this process.

5.2.2 Normalisation of speed and quantity as value

In addition to large hauls being framed as achievements, a clear "bigger is better" logic was also evident in the visual presentation of clothing items within the videos. Notably, the *speed* at which items were showcased often increased alongside the number of purchased items. Across the dataset, expressions such as "*huge*" and "*insane*" appeared frequently in copy texts, functioning as superlative descriptors that framed high quantity as a key hook for attracting viewer attention. In some cases, these quantity-related terms were combined with aesthetic labels, such as Y2K, a distinctive microtrend of 2025 discussed more later in the findings. Even when the apparent focus was on a specific style category or aesthetic, quantity remained central, operating as a primary source of appeal.

"Huge cheap Vinted haul" (copy of a video)

"Insane Vinted haul" (copy of a video)

"Huge y2k Depop haul" (copy of a video)

Although individual item display times were consistently brief across the dataset, the time per item varied, ranging from approximately twelve seconds to less than one second. Many videos were accompanied by upbeat, fast-paced music, with items presented either individually or worn by the creator. In several instances, items were shown so briefly that specific details were difficult to perceive, at least from the perspective of the author of this thesis. In larger hauls, speed itself appeared to function as a central part of the appeal, with minimal display time contributing to the overall sense of impressiveness and celebration of abundance. At the same time, this rapid pacing seemed to render the specific characteristics of individual items secondary or even insignificant, positioning quantity itself as the primary spectacle. Consistent with patterns observed across the dataset, audience

reactions remained overwhelmingly positive, frequently praising all purchased items even in cases where the number of items reached dozens and individual pieces were visible only momentarily, calling into question whether it was even possible for viewers to meaningfully evaluate each item.

In the theoretical framework, a study was introduced showing that consumers spend substantial amounts of time on second-hand platforms, often to the point of losing track of time, while *simultaneously* engaging in other activities (Juge et al. 2021). In a similar way, haul videos may reproduce this experience without requiring viewers to actively browse the platforms themselves, as on TikTok and haul videos, items are presented continuously in a fast, effortless stream. Once inspired by these hauls, the transition from social media platforms such as TikTok to second-hand shopping platforms becomes seamless, enabling a quick and efficient shift from viewing content to making similar purchases. Although this did not form a separate analytical category due to its limited frequency, several comments explicitly asked, “*Which keywords / search words did you use?*” to locate similar items on the same platforms. This suggests that viewers do often engage with these fast-paced haul videos with the intention of replicating the purchases shown, potentially inspired directly by the content they consume.

What makes this particularly interesting is that, as previously discussed, research has shown that checking second-hand platforms often occurs while users are engaged in other activities, meaning that full attention is not necessarily directed at shopping itself. As a matter of fact, the “*What did you search for?*” questions appeared in comment sections even under videos where dozens of items, sometimes seemingly quite different from one another, were shown rapidly, one after another. Despite this, viewers referred to the items collectively, asking questions such as “*How did you find that?*” This is noteworthy given how difficult it was to keep track of the individual items when they were presented at such speed, raising the question of whether viewers could meaningfully process the items in detail.

Now, previously introduced research has shown that Gen Z does not become overwhelmed by speed and abundance, but instead demands and appreciates it more, both in physical and digital environments (Thangavel et al. 2022, 724; Van den Bergh et al. 2024). However, when combining the extremely high speed of haul videos with these somewhat illogical questions referring to dozens of different items at once, together with the habit of scrolling these applications while engaged in other activities, the dynamics observed here seem to point in the opposite direction. Rather than indicating control over abundance and speed, these patterns suggest that young consumers may

indeed be overwhelmed by them, while only perceiving themselves as being in control, having become accustomed and dependent on speed.

As more and more videos come young consumers' way and more and more options appear on second-hand platforms, the cycle tightens, and the overwhelming nature of the content appears to take control, reducing the ability to concentrate on individual items with full focus. This also aligns with, once again, research showing that hyperchoice, meaning too many options to enable sensible purchase decisions, may in fact lead to increased purchasing. In the context of haul videos and Gen Z, this seems to manifest as *constant hyperchoice* across both social media and second-hand platforms, contributing to overconsumption driven by overwhelming abundance. From this perspective, the "appreciation and demand for speed" among Gen Z may itself be a result of continuous exposure to fast-paced content. Over time, these dynamics appear to shape Gen Z's way of engaging with consumption to the point where tolerance for speed increases, and slower paces and smaller numbers of choices may no longer feel engaging, allowing the need for speed to take over without young consumers necessarily remaining in control of it or being aware of it, ultimately resulting in overconsumptive behaviour.

All of this adds further context to existing research showing that 44% of Gen Z consumers have discovered new products through social media, that 85% report platforms such as TikTok influencing their purchasing behaviour (Tan & Trang 2023; ICSC 2023; Schapsis et al. 2025), and that TikTok ranks as the third most likely channel to prompt a purchase, right after family and friends (Gillis et al 2021, 6). The videos of the dataset also offer a concrete manifestation of research suggesting that rapidly appearing and constantly changing digital content drives young consumers to continuously reinvent and transform themselves (Stokes & Price 2017). When this cycle of being constantly exposed to different styles operates simultaneously across social media and second-hand platforms, the overall intensity of this increases. Combined with the developmental goals of adolescence and early adulthood, where the pursuit of an autonomous identity and personal style is central (Kamptner 1991), the speed and hyperchoice characteristic of social media further accelerate this process, contributing to increasingly difficult-to-control overconsumption. This effect is further intensified by online platforms offering significantly broader assortments and lower prices than physical stores, making the realisation of this consumption even easier to fall into.

5.2.3 Emphasis on cheapness to justify volume

A notable pattern across the dataset was the absence of references to the environmental or ethical benefits of second-hand consumption. None of the thirty analysed videos expressed sustainability-

related motivations or explicitly reflected on the choice of second-hand over other consumption options. References to the quality of the clothing items were also relatively limited. Instead, price emerged as a central point of emphasis across the videos.

“On average 2 euros per item!!!” (copy of a video)

“huge cheap Vinted haul” (copy of a video)

“Everything was under 10 dollars 😊” (copy of a video)

While an emphasis on affordability may be expected in the context of second-hand fashion, in these videos price was rarely framed in relation to the items being pre-owned. Rather, cheapness appeared to function as an additional marker of achievement and as a justification for purchasing in large quantities. The logic implied across the videos resembled a “because it is cheap, I bought more” mindset, positioning low prices as enabling and legitimising volume. In fact, the combined emphasis on low price and high quantity closely resembled discourses commonly associated with sales or discounts in conventional fashion retail, where abundance is encouraged and framed as an opportunity that should be seized. Although this observation cannot be taken as definitive evidence that sustainability is irrelevant to second-hand consumption for either the creators or viewers of the videos, it is nevertheless notable that sustainability-related attributes were largely absent from the dataset and did not feature as a meaningful focus in the analysed videos when compared to other, emphasised characteristics.

This aligns with existing research showing that finding bargains and experiencing the thrill of the hunt are central motivations for online second-hand consumption (Balińska et al. 2024; ThreadUp 2025). While theory suggests that these price-related attributes often override sustainability-related reasons, sustainability is nevertheless still present to some extent in previous research (ThreadUp 2025; Balińska et al. 2024; Bae et al. 2022; Ferraro et al. 2016). In contrast, within this dataset, sustainability was entirely absent, seemingly overridden by cheapness, quantity, and the other attributes identified in the findings. While it cannot be expected that meaningful reflections on sustainability would commonly appear in TikTok comment sections, it is notable that even the creators themselves did not once attend to the sustainable dimension of second-hand consumption. This absence may suggest that sustainability is not, in practice, a true motivation for participating in the purchasing from these platforms and is therefore not articulated unless explicitly asked about. In this sense, the dataset illustrates the value of analysing naturally occurring content: here, when individuals are not directly asked about the sustainability of their choices, it does not emerge as part of the discourse. Yet, if questioned explicitly, like in previous research, about their participation in

second-hand consumption, sustainability could well be invoked. Within the context of this dataset, however, other motivations clearly dominate. The complete absence of sustainability among the identified attributes thus slightly contradicts existing theory, in which sustainability was present at least to some degree, even if not positioned as central.

5.3 Platform-enabled habitualisation of excessive consumption

This dimension shifts the focus to how excessive consumption becomes routine and habitual through the deep affection towards and continuous engagement with second-hand platforms themselves. Across the dataset, platforms are described as constantly present, emotionally significant, and closely intertwined with daily routines, while shopping is framed as frequent, automatic, and difficult to separate from everyday life. In this sense, platform-enabled habitualisation represents a more subtle yet intensified form of normalisation, in which excess is sustained through routine, repetition, and continuous reinforcement by both creators and audiences of the videos of the dataset.

5.3.1 Normalised compulsion and platform attachment

The focus of the analysis in this thesis was specifically on online second-hand platforms as the most contemporary form of second-hand consumption. While this focus was expected to distinguish the content from other forms of second-hand consumption, the centrality of these platforms, and especially the degree of attachment to them, was nevertheless notably strong. Across the dataset, creators and viewers appeared to have formed deep relationships with the platforms themselves, in this context Vinted and Depop. References to these platforms were not limited to the hashtags through which the videos were identified but were also prominent in copy texts and frequently appeared throughout the comment sections.

“Live and breathe Depop” (copy of a video)

“Checking Depop the first thing when I wake up” (copy of a video)

“Been spending all my money on my favourite app again” (copy of a video, referring to Vinted)

Creators and commenters alike framed Vinted and Depop as integral parts of everyday life, describing them as routines, hobbies, or even lifestyle elements. Similar to earlier themes related to acknowledged compulsion, this attachment was often presented with an awareness of its potentially problematic nature, yet without an accompanying expectation of change. When creators expressed strong attachment to the platforms, viewers were quick to respond with relatable and affirming comments, showing empathy towards the creator.

“Vinted is just the best app in the world” (comment with 72 likes, responding to the copy

“Been spending all my money on my favourite app again”)

“Vinted for life” (comment on a video with the copy *“huge Vinted unboxing”*)

As with expressions of admiration directed toward creators and clothing items, superlative and expansive language, such as *“living and breathing”*, was frequently used to describe these platforms. While clearly exaggerated, such expressions nevertheless convey the perceived emotional significance of the platforms to their users. In this way, Vinted and Depop are framed not merely as marketplaces, but as emotionally meaningful spaces part of a meaningful life. This normalisation of platform attachment contributes to excessive consumption by positioning frequent engagement and purchasing as natural extensions of daily life, not as behaviours requiring reflection or restraint.

This kind of attachment to online platforms is, in many ways, natural for Gen Z. As mentioned earlier in the theory, this generation is the first truly digital generation, having grown up fully surrounded by technology, digital advancements, and social networks. Digital environments are therefore experienced as natural parts of everyday life, rather than as something separate from physical environments (Cheung et al. 2017, 2; Balińska et al. 2024; Singh 2024; Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Schapis et al. 2025). The dataset also provides a concrete example of consumer tribes, as introduced earlier in the theoretical background. The thesis outlined three types of marketplace cultures identified within Consumer Culture Theory: brand communities, brand publics, and consumer tribes. Of these, consumer tribes are formed around shared lifestyles or enthusiasms rather than specific brands. This was seen as particularly resonant with Gen Z, who are less brand-loyal than earlier generations and place high value on individuality and self-expression (Francis & Hoefel 2018; Fromm & Read 2018, 92; Thangavel et al. 2022, 724).

As previously analysed, Gen Z values second-hand platforms that incorporate social aspects into the user experience, appreciating spaces where thoughts and opinions can be freely exchanged and where users can feel understood (Bae et al. 2022; Witt & Braid 2018, 174). Additionally, social media platforms are also recognised as particularly influential sources of inspiration for this generation’s consumption habits (Balińska et al. 2024). Findings from the dataset align closely with these insights, offering a clear and surprisingly prominent example of how consumer tribes manifest in contemporary consumer culture. The word choices observed, such as *“living and breathing,”* *“the best,”* or *“Vinted for life”*, employ even worship-like language, framing these platforms as central elements of life. Notably, second-hand platforms appear to fulfil two seemingly opposing preferences at once: Gen Z’s pursuit of individuality and self-expression, alongside their social needs within

online environments. In this way, individuality-centred values are affirmed through collective approval. What may not receive validation within the purchasing app itself is instead sought elsewhere, a dynamic further reinforced by the high number of likes attached to these comments, signalling shared emotional endorsement.

Now, this could also be viewed in the light of previously introduced research, suggesting that consumers act as creative identity builders, navigating the possibilities and constraints offered by the marketplace (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 80). Within the context of this dataset, this dynamic takes a distinctive form. What Gen Z creators may not find within the second-hand platforms themselves – namely validation, discussion, and social approval – they seek and receive on TikTok through haul videos and their comment sections. For example, Vinted does not provide a built-in forum for discussion, which helps explain why the search for validation around platform attachment emerges on TikTok instead. In this way, these platforms become closely intertwined for Gen Z: attachment to purchasing and to the application itself is validated within a different, socially richer environment. Put differently, the consumer tribe surrounding Vinted and Depop appears to live primarily on TikTok, as these resale platforms do not incorporate social features, important to Gen Z, into their user interfaces.

Beyond the ease of accessing resale platforms with a single click, platforms like TikTok continuously expose users to consumption-oriented content, which may increase the likelihood of transitioning directly from viewing to purchasing, as well as of new consumers joining second-hand platforms purely based on inspiration on social media. In conclusion, when combined with the low prices of second-hand platforms and the free, highly accessible nature of TikTok as a space for inspiration and validation, this configuration appears to form a convenient and self-reinforcing cycle of consumption – both the consumption of images and the consumption of clothing items, mutually reinforcing one another. As introduced earlier, ThredUp has acknowledged the growing importance of social dimensions and expressed intentions to incorporate more social features into its platform in the future (ThredUp 2025). The findings of this dataset provide concrete empirical support for the demand for such characteristics.

5.3.2 Normalisation of habitual excessive consumption

In addition to the openly admitted and often celebrated attachment to specific platforms, a broader normalisation of addiction to the act of shopping itself on these platforms was clearly visible through recurring word choices. Some creators used very specific temporal expressions to describe exactly how frequently shopping for clothing takes place, positioning it as a normal and expected part of

everyday routines. Expressions such as “*this week’s finds*” suggest purchasing occurs so regularly that questioning it appears largely absent, both by the creator and the commentators.

“*We’re back for another Vinted haul*” (copy from a video)

“*This week’s finds*” (copy from a video)

“*I already ordered more stuff from Depop that’s on the way*” (copy from a video)

This theme differs from the others in that it is largely devoid of superlative language, which further reinforces its normalised character. Unlike achievement-oriented themes that emphasise surpassing previous hauls, this theme presents second-hand shopping as ordinary and routine, a rather everyday practice. This framing also aligns with earlier research suggesting that Gen Z consumers purchase from second-hand platforms on a weekly basis (Grieco et al. 2023). The dataset provides strong empirical support for this finding, as dozens of captions and comments openly admitted to shopping on these platforms weekly, daily, or in otherwise continuous terms.

As it has become evident through this dataset, overconsumptive second-hand shopping seems to be thoroughly normalised among Gen Z on TikTok. These findings can also be connected to concepts explored earlier in the theoretical framework, namely moral licensing, the rebound effect, and cognitive dissonance. As previously discussed, *moral licensing* occurs when individuals allow themselves to engage in morally questionable behaviour after prior performing an action perceived as morally positive (Merritt et al. 2010). In this context, second-hand consumption appears to be so morally and fundamentally accepted that the practice itself functions as moral credit, allowing excessive consumption to be perceived as justified. In other words, the second-hand nature of consumption serves to legitimise volume, to the point of normalised everyday consumption. Similar dynamics were identified in the context of fast fashion by Olson (2022), who found that consumers may be aware of the shortcomings of fast fashion brands’ sustainability-oriented marketing, yet still experience reduced guilt because of its presence, emotionally enabling increased consumption. The dataset here reflects this same phenomenon in a new context: the perceived sustainability of second-hand consumption is widely acknowledged and may thus simultaneously morally enable continuous, even everyday purchasing.

At the same time, the dataset reveals strong indicators of the rebound effect, which further strengthens the effect of moral licensing. As previously introduced, the *rebound effect* describes a paradox in which improvements intended to reduce resource use may instead lead to increased overall consumption, thereby cancelling out the intended environmental benefits (Sorrell & Dimitropoulos 2007). In this case, the affordability of second-hand platforms appears to accelerate moral licensing

by making excessive purchasing even easier, and their online-only nature it more accessible. Consumption becomes cheaper, inspiration and validation are freely available on TikTok, and continuous engagement with both kinds of platforms becomes constant and normalised.

Finally, this dataset provides further support for previous research suggesting that consumers who overconsume may experience less cognitive dissonance, understood as the mental clash between values and actions, rather than more (George & Yaoyuneyong 2010, 302). Essentially, continuous purchasing may function as a way of avoiding reflection – by consuming constantly, there is little space to pause and critically assess one’s own questionable choices; instead, these are effectively muffled by excessive, ongoing, and therefore normalised consumption. While creators and commenters openly acknowledge their addictive behaviour and even make it a shared discourse online, this awareness is not there to lead to confrontation or change, one possible reason being that stopping would require facing uncomfortable emotions, forcing to reflect and ultimately change behaviour. Rather, the cycle is sustained through repetition and social reinforcement, ultimately reframing excessive consumption as the new normal and reducing the perceived need to act otherwise.

5.3.3 Normalisation of resale-oriented excessive consumption

Most videos in the dataset focus on individuals purchasing clothing items for personal use. However, a notable share of the sample contained direct or indirect references to reselling some or all the purchased items. In some cases, creators mentioned reselling items that did not fit. In some cases, creators stated that the items were purchased with the explicit intention of reselling them. Specifically, three creators positioned themselves explicitly as resellers, using the hashtag *#depopseller* and directing viewers to shop the items through their own resale profiles, linked in their personal TikTok accounts. Additionally, dozens of users participated in this resell culture by providing their personal usernames on Depop or Vinted, luring other users to check their items on sale.

“Find these all on my Vinted” (copy text of a video)

“#depopseller” (hashtag used in a couple videos)

“Shop all on my Depop” (copy text of a video)

Notably, this was the only theme in which any critical responses appeared in the comment sections. A few viewers questioned why items were purchased only to be resold immediately, while others expressed frustration toward resellers by suggesting that they acquire desirable items before others even have the chance to find them. These comments framed reselling as undermining the element of discovery that is often associated with second-hand shopping, taking the joy of it away from others.

Then again, many commentators, easily overriding the criticism, appreciated the fact that another person was doing the work for them, expressing interest in purchasing these items by asking clarifying questions about them.

“It always goes to resellers whyyyy” (top comment of a video)

“How much is the first one??” (comment of a video)

From the perspective of overconsumption, resale-oriented excessive consumption represents a distinct form of it, as items are not purchased for the purchaser themselves. Though intended to be resold, the act of purchasing remains in the hands of one individual, meaning that overall consumption is not reduced but just changing form. This goes against the logic of conscious consumption, where reducing unnecessary purchases and extending the life cycle of garments are central. While individuals buying for personal use may also leave some items unworn, resellers differ in that they know from the moment of purchase that the items are not intended for their own use, adding another, very short phase to the life cycle of a garment, or at worst just end up owning clothes that will not resell but are not getting used by the purchaser, either. Moreover, the possibility of reselling items later can function as a justification for buying in excess – once again a form of moral licensing – as purchases are framed as low risk or harmless due to the perceived ease of “getting rid of” unwanted items, combined with the thought that buying second-hand is morally alright to start with, even when done inconsiderately.

As widely discussed in the previous theme, online second-hand platforms do not provide dedicated discussion forums for their users, which has made much of the conversation around style and consumption move to other spaces, such as TikTok. However, as highlighted in the theoretical discussion, Depop has extended the social dimension of reselling further. On Depop, users can become so-called *top sellers* by selling frequently and in large quantities, and many sellers have built their own recognisable “brands” within the platform. Users may even receive a “verified” status, closely resembling those on social media such as Instagram, where such symbols are typically reserved for well-known public figures. Depop’s interface itself also resembles that of Instagram, and to further strengthen the connection between resale and social media, many users promote their Depop shops on other platforms to increase visibility and traffic to their stores (Bae et al. 2022). While Vinted also enables users to become top sellers, this is not structured in the same gamified and hierarchical way as on Depop, where popularity and visibility are more explicitly rewarded.

The dataset provides concrete evidence of how this manifests in practice. Three out of the thirty video creators explicitly identified themselves as Depop sellers through hashtags and copy texts

encouraging viewers to explore their own "shops". These creators used haul videos as a form of marketing, showcasing clothing items purchased specifically for resale in their own branded shops. This behaviour aligns with the findings of Juge et al. (2021), who suggest that some Gen Z consumers purchase clothing they never intend to wear, instead treating items as short-term profit opportunities rather than meaningful possessions. What the dataset further reveals is how openly this practice is conducted: comment sections are largely accepting and often participatory, with viewers either expressing interest in purchasing the items or even promoting their own resale accounts, adding another layer of social media and second-hand platforms being tightly connected. Reselling thus appears as a normalised and validated mode of consumption, with purchasing for resale rarely framed as problematic.

*"Check my Depop: *Depop username* I have similar items!"* (a comment of a video)

*"My Vinted: *Vinted username* If you need more corsets, I got you"* (a comment of a video)

These observations also help contextualise the figures presented in ThredUp's (2025) resale report, which states that 39% of younger consumers have resold purchased items within the past year, and that 64% consider resale value an important factor when deciding whether to purchase an item. While ThredUp's report does not allow definitive conclusions about whether this behaviour stems from purchasing items solely for resale, this dataset provides clear evidence that such practices do occur, at least to some extent, specifically for the purpose of reselling. Items are purchased with the explicit intention to resell, showcased and advertised to large audiences through haul videos, and used to encourage viewers to visit the creator's own resale shop, thereby representing a distinctly contemporary mode of overconsumption among young consumers.

5.4 Aesthetic and microtrend-driven structuring of excessive consumption

Finally, despite not chosen as a deliberate focus of the sampling strategy, as the study aimed to capture broader patterns of excessive second-hand consumption rather than examine its occurrence within specific trends, microtrends and generally niche category-focused consumption nevertheless emerged clearly across the dataset. By approaching online second-hand consumption content more broadly, the organic appearance of microtrends within the search results highlights their central role in contemporary consumption practices.

A notable pattern was that many videos in the more general haul format differentiated themselves by linking the showcased items to a particular microtrend or aesthetic through the video's copy text or hashtags. Moreover, some videos appeared to be microtrend-driven without explicitly naming any

specific trend: the clothing items were of a particular type and highly specific style, and the comments further reinforced this interpretation. For example, the word “coded” appeared frequently in the comments. In this context, “coded” functions as an abbreviation within contemporary digital culture, signalling that something, often a clothing item, strongly embodies the visual cues associated with a specific aesthetic and the lifestyle or way of being this aesthetic represents.

“The first skirt is so barbie fairy coded” (top comment of a video, 339 likes)

“#y2kaestehtic” (hashtag of a video)

“Huge Y2K Depop haul” (caption of a video)

“#y2kaesthetic, #y2kfashion, #y2kstyle, #2000style” (hashtags of a video)

While many different microtrends emerged within the dataset, one rose above the others, most likely because it was the most prominent trend at the time of data collection: Y2K fashion. This trend was characterised by references to early 2000s fashion, incorporating stylistic elements and clothing items associated with the beginning of the 21st century. This provides an interesting context for the previously discussed theory on the performative nature of microtrends and their description through the *Cultural Appropriation Model* of representation, in which symbolic and visual materials from specific subcultures are borrowed and detached from their original contexts, often lacking any real connection or depth to the cultures behind the looks (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 83; Beswick 2024). Many young people participating in the Y2K aesthetic movement have not themselves lived at the very beginning of the 21st century, or at least do not recall the era, and therefore lack a lived understanding of the style. Whether driven by nostalgia, a wish to have lived during that time, or simple aesthetic inspiration, this microtrend illustrates how styles are stripped of their original social significance and adopted only temporarily, until a new visually appealing trend emerges and the current can be left behind.

“#japanesefashion” (hashtag of a video)

“#koreanfashion” (hashtag of a video)

“#chinesetop” (hashtag of a video)

“#lolita, #fairycore, #trendy” (hashtags of a video)

While the Y2K aesthetic represents a visual imitation of a specific past era and the lifestyle associated with it, an even more intense example of cultural meaning being flattened in favour of surface-level aesthetic appeal was the emergence of various Asian-inspired aesthetics in the dataset. The dataset suggests that, for one reason or another, aesthetics inspired by Asian countries were at this time seen as relevant and visually appealing. Existing solely as aesthetic preferences – an interpretation

supported by the frequent use of the hashtag *#trendy* – these looks allow for easy movement from one style to another, as no deeper attachment to these countries the inspiration is coming from is required. Interestingly, many haul videos also contained several microtrends within a single video, further emphasising their intensity and disposable nature. Within one video, a creator might have presented a look described as “lolita,” followed by another labelled “fairycore,” two stylistically distinct trends that coexist as fashionable at the same time. Whether this reflects personal stylistic experimentation or an attempt to attract buyers as a reseller of second-hand clothing, it reinforces the disposable way in which clothing items appear to be perceived, valued mainly for their temporary visual appeal.

When it comes to visuality, the dataset also aligns with research highlighting how visual-centricity has become central to style in the digital age in a new way, with aesthetic self-expression often overriding utility or practical necessity (Koo et al. 2007, 169–170; Pauluzzo & Mason 2022, 197). In several videos, items were showcased not only briefly, which was discussed previously, but from specific angles, giving the impression that they were not necessarily intended for everyday use but primarily for visual presentation. This observation aligns with ThredUp’s report (2025), which states that 50% of younger consumers purchase second-hand apparel to create content on social media. Notably, the nature of some videos suggests that items may at times be purchased primarily, or even solely, for the purpose of being shown online, overriding their utilitarian value. This also connects with theory suggesting that consumption increasingly includes intangible content, such as images and videos shared online (Edwards 2000, 118–119). In this context, clothing items may be purchased as much for online display as for personal use, while viewers themselves “consume” these items by watching and interacting with the content. In line with existing theory, the dataset suggests that haul videos and trend-cycle-based shopping have indeed become a process of image processing (Edwards 2000, 118–119), both for creators and audiences, ultimately contributing to increased material consumption as well.

Finally, the findings align with existing research suggesting that adolescence and young adulthood are central life stages for exploring and experimenting with style, with material goods serving as tools in the process of identity formation (Dittmar 2008). However, the dataset illustrates how this process manifests in a distinctly contemporary and more intense form among this generation: when this natural developmental stage is combined with Generation Z’s more fluid and less fixed sense of identity, the affordability of second-hand fashion, the strongly visual and online-centred modes of expression dominating today’s fashion landscape, the tight connection between social media platforms and second-hand platforms, and the speed at which all of this unfolds, the dataset appears to capture the outcome of these intersecting forces. In other words, these haul videos illustrate the

mechanisms through which young individuals attempt to move closer to their ideal, continuously evolving selves through an intensified and accelerated form of consumption, ultimately revealing a previously underexamined configuration of contemporary consumer culture.

6 Conclusions

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the study. It begins by discussing the findings in relation to the research questions and research gap set for this thesis, followed by theoretical contributions and an outline of practical implications for managers and policymakers. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the study's limitations and offering suggestions for future research.

6.1 Discussion

The findings of this thesis suggest that excessive online second-hand consumption among Generation Z is not only clearly present but increasingly socially normalised within online environments. These environments, most prominently TikTok in the context of this study, function as arenas where excessive, even obsessive consumption behaviour can be openly expressed, validated, and reinforced through discursive, psychological, and platform-related mechanisms. While previous research already suggests that second-hand consumption can reproduce elements of overconsumption traditionally associated with fast fashion, the findings of this thesis provide deeper insight into how these dynamics manifest from the perspective of a young consumer cohort central to the recent and ongoing rise in popularity of online second-hand fashion. In particular, the results illustrate how excessive purchasing becomes embedded in everyday digital interactions and is normalised through a combination of structural conditions and socially shared behavioural patterns.

Figure 4 synthesises these findings by illustrating how the underlying assumption of second-hand fashion as inherently sustainable creates the conditions under which surrounding structural and generational factors give rise to specific behavioural patterns, many of which are expressed through discursive practices within online environments. Together, these dynamics contribute to the broader *normalisation of excessive second-hand consumption among Generation Z within contemporary digital consumer culture*. In doing so, the figure presents a conceptual model explaining how excessive second-hand consumption emerges, is reinforced, and ultimately becomes normalised in today's platform-mediated fashion landscape.

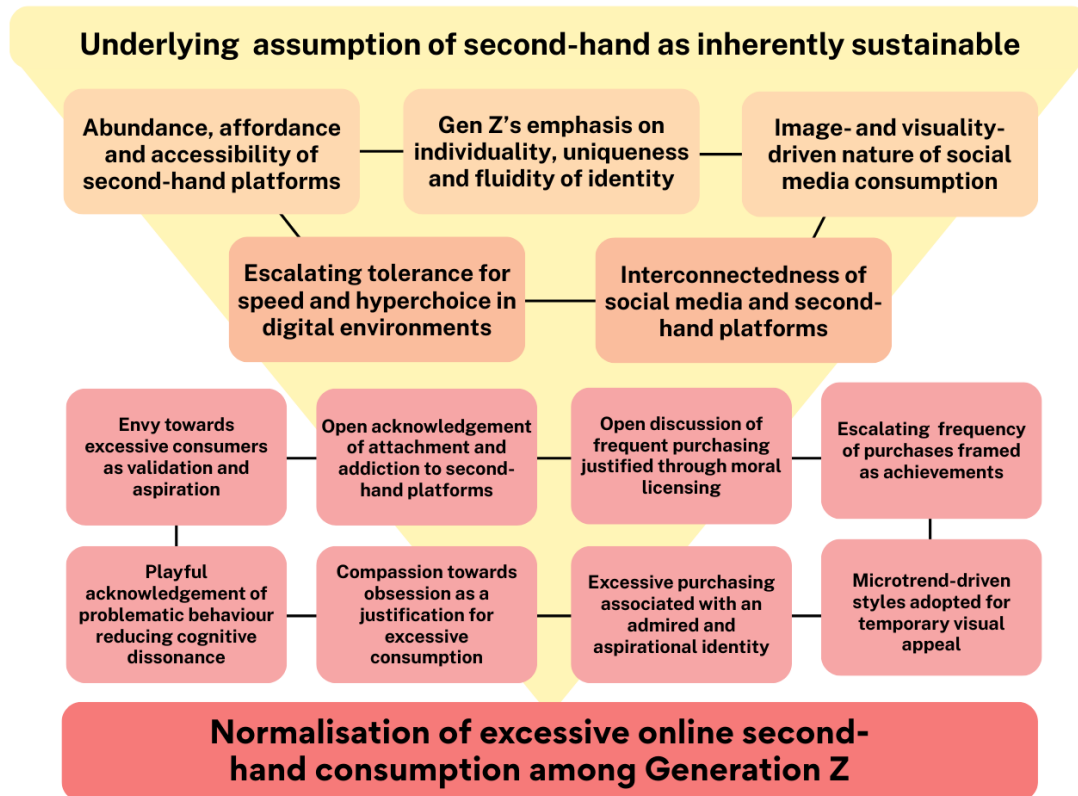


Figure 4. Structural conditions and behavioural mechanisms driving the normalisation of excessive second-hand consumption among Generation Z

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study in relation to the research questions in greater detail. Section 6.1.1 examines the mechanisms through which overconsumption in online second-hand fashion is constructed and sustained, while Section 6.1.2 explores Generation Z's potentially conflicting values and their relationship to how second-hand consumption is perceived and practised. Finally, Section 6.1.3 synthesises these insights to address the overarching research question: How do Generation Z consumers perceive overconsumption in the context of online second-hand fashion?

6.1.1 Psychological mechanisms and platform affordances reinforcing second-hand overconsumption

As the fashion industry has been identified as one of the most environmentally harmful industries globally, increasing pressure has been placed on both firms and consumers to adopt more sustainable modes of consumption (Balińska et al. 2024; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). In this context, second-hand fashion has been widely positioned as a sustainable alternative to fast fashion, and the resale market has shown rapid expansion and growing legitimacy within the fashion industry (Cantista et al. 2022; Ziółko et al. 2025). Industry reports further indicate that the global second-hand market is growing significantly faster than the apparel market overall (ThredUp 2025), reinforcing its role as a

central pillar of contemporary fashion consumption. In the past few years, this growth has led to and been strongly enabled by the emergence of online second-hand platforms that simultaneously address economic, self-expression-, and convenience-related consumer needs through low prices, constant access, and extensive selections of choices (Bae et al. 2022; Ziółko et al. 2025). The findings of this thesis align with the above-mentioned by demonstrating how online second-hand consumption is both extremely popular, especially among younger generations, and framed as enjoyable and effortless – yet at the same time intensely abundant and addictive. When it comes to the latter, the findings extend previous research by showing that the popularity and characteristics of these platforms do not merely facilitate conscious second-hand consumption but actively contribute to the construction and normalisation of overconsumptive behaviour within this form of consumption.

Prior research on fashion overconsumption highlights both structural drivers, such as accelerated trend cycles and the intensification of the fast fashion business model (Cachon & Swinney 2011; de Koning et al. 2024; D'Itria & Colombi 2024), and psychological mechanisms, including impulse buying, compulsive buying, hyperchoice, and moral licensing (Dittmar 2008; Solomon et al. 2016; Merritt et al. 2010). While these dynamics have been extensively studied in the context of fast fashion, more recent research has begun to suggest that similar mechanisms may also emerge within second-hand fashion (Turunen et al. 2018; Dekhili et al. 2025; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). The findings of this study strongly support and deepen this emerging perspective from the point of view of the most recent shift to the online-nature of second-hand consumption. In the analysed dataset, excessive purchasing is not only clearly visible but openly displayed, emphasised, praised, and repeatedly reinforced through social media interaction, indicating that overconsumption has become a normalised and socially accepted dimension of contemporary online second-hand fashion consumption.

Reasons to the road to overconsumption and its manifestation in online second-hand are many. Firstly, compulsive buying has been defined in prior literature as continued purchasing despite awareness of negative consequences and a perceived loss of control (Dittmar 2008, 97–99). The findings clearly reflect this definition, as creators frequently describe their behaviour using terms such as “addicted,” “obsessed,” and many other ways of expressing an inability to stop shopping. What is novel, however, is the way this compulsiveness is framed. Rather than being concealed or problematised, it is communicated very openly and met with humour, empathy, and encouragement from audiences. This suggests that compulsive consumption in online second-hand contexts is also a socially shared and collectively validated phenomenon, a dimension that has received limited

attention in previous research on second-hand consumption – and that this light attitude towards it further enables overconsumption.

The findings also provide concrete empirical support for the concept of hyperchoice as a driver of overconsumption. Prior research argues that an abundance of options can reduce rational decision-making and increase purchasing volume (Solomon et al. 2016). In this study, this effect of hyperchoice in consumption is clearly visible – not only as a reason to buy excessively, as the analysed videos all displayed excessive amounts of clothing items, but also in the way people consume the videos in which these items are displayed on social media. Hyperchoice seems to be reproduced in the reactions to these haul videos, where dozens of items are presented rapidly, often making it difficult to even catch the details of the clothing items. Despite this, audience responses consistently praise entire hauls rather than specific items, indicating that quantity itself becomes a central source of value and desirability, with viewers being unable or uninterested in differentiating between individual clothing items. Overconsumption thus seems to be constructed also on the basis of becoming somewhat blind to abundance, with everything becoming desirable both in the admiration of others' purchases and in one's own purchasing behaviour, further driving and maintaining overconsumptive behaviour.

In addition, the findings strongly support existing research on moral licensing and rebound effects. Moral licensing theory suggests that individuals permit themselves less responsible behaviour after engaging in an action perceived as morally positive (Merritt et al. 2010). Prior studies indeed suggested that the perceived sustainable nature of second-hand consumption can function as such a moral license, enabling higher levels of purchasing (Turunen et al. 2018; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). The findings reinforce this argument by suggesting that second-hand consumption appears to be morally accepted by default, a notion further supported by the fact that sustainability is never explicitly mentioned in these videos. This implicit moral acceptance enables continuous and even everyday purchasing without the need for explicit justification. Consequently, rather than reducing overall consumption, second-hand fashion in its online form appears to replicate fast-fashion-like dynamics, supporting concerns raised in recent literature (Dekhili et al. 2025), as well as critical journalistic discussions on the topic (Vogue Business 2022, Eetti 2024, The Mancunion 2024, Havusto 2025; Aikkila 2025; Kaura 2025)

Resale-oriented practices further contribute to the above-discussed dynamics. Previous research suggests that the ease of reselling items may reduce perceived risk and encourage frequent wardrobe turnover (Sihvonen & Turunen 2016; Baruönu 2025), and industry reports further indicate that resale

is indeed a significant motivation behind purchasing second-hand items (ThredUp 2025). The findings of this study provide clear empirical evidence of this logic in practice. References to reselling, resale value, and purchasing with the expectation of selling items again are common throughout the dataset. Rather than functioning as a corrective mechanism, resale appears to legitimise excessive purchasing by framing items as temporary, low-risk, and easily replaceable.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that overconsumptive behaviour in online second-hand fashion is constructed and maintained through a combination of platform affordances, combined with dominant price- and self-expression-focused motivations, psychological mechanisms driving overconsumptive behaviour, the supposed underlying sustainable nature of second-hand, and socially reinforced discourses that normalise all of this. While previous literature often positions second-hand fashion as a potential alternative to fast fashion – which it can be – the empirical evidence from this study suggests a more counterintuitive outcome. In its online form, second-hand fashion may end up reproducing, and even intensifying, the same overconsumptive logic it is generally assumed to counteract, along with mechanisms previously associated primarily with fast fashion.

6.1.2 Assumed sustainability reducing value tensions in excessive second-hand consumption

Previous research consistently characterises Generation Z as environmentally conscious and concerned about sustainability (Deloitte 2020; 2024; Prisco et al. 2025). At the same time, several studies note a gap between these stated values and actual purchasing behaviour, particularly in fashion consumption (Berthem & Marsh 2022; Palomo et al. 2023). In the context of second-hand fashion, environmental motivations are often present but rarely ranked as primary drivers, with affordability, uniqueness, and the thrill of the hunt being prioritised (Turunen et al. 2018; Balińska et al. 2024; ThredUp 2025). The findings of this study partially align with this literature but also introduce an important nuance. While prior research suggests that sustainability plays at least a secondary role in second-hand consumption, sustainability was entirely absent from the dataset of this thesis. None of the videos or comments explicitly, or even indirectly, referenced themes related to sustainable consumption. This represents a notable divergence from earlier findings and suggests that, in naturally occurring social media contexts, where individuals are not questioned about their motivations, sustainability may not function, at least not visibly, as an authentic motivation.

One interpretation of this finding is that sustainability operates, as previously discussed, as an implicit assumption, and therefore as a justification, rather than as an explicit, internalised value. Because second-hand consumption is generally framed as environmentally positive by default, consumers may

not feel the need to justify their behaviour, even when consumption is excessive. This would also align with cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests that individuals seek coherence between conflicting values and actions (Festinger 1957), a dynamic commonly discussed in fashion consumption (Pauluzzo & Mason 2022). In this context, excessive second-hand consumption appears to offer an easy resolution to potential value conflicts: consumers can engage in frequent and excessive purchasing while maintaining a positive moral self-image, without actively reflecting on sustainability. This is somewhat contradictory to what might be expected based on the framing of the sub-question. Instead of *tensions* between competing values needing to be negotiated when excessively purchasing second-hand, the tension may not necessarily exist in the first place. Emphasis can instead be placed on more hedonistic and superficial values, as the sustainability value is perceived as automatically covered. Alternatively, the value may not be internalised or even present to begin with, while the externally expected aspect of sustainability is nevertheless fulfilled, meaning no conflict needs to be resolved. This would conflict rather sharply with previous research on Generation Z's sustainability values but can be logically explained by the nature of the data: here, no one was interviewed or directly questioned about their beliefs and values, whereas most studies and industry reports are based on interviews or survey data.

When it comes to other values of Gen Z, previous research shows that Generation Z places strong emphasis on individuality, self-expression, and uniqueness (Francis & Hoefel 2018; Van den Bergh et al. 2024), and characterises their views on identity as more fluid, undefined, and changing compared to previous generations, with individuality being more important than conformity to norms (Francis & Hoefel 2018, 4; Gillis et al. 2021, 3). Previous research also suggests that the rapid pace at which new trends emerge and override previous ones makes it difficult and undesirable for Gen Z to commit to a single style (Gupta et al. 2018). The findings support this but also show how the relationship works both ways: fluid views on self-expression and the accelerating speed of trends appear to reinforce one another, forming a cycle of continuous stylistic renewal. Haul videos function as spaces where fashion identity is publicly constructed and validated, and the emphasis on individuality and uniqueness is clearly present, as audience responses frequently focus on the individuality and perceived persona of the creator rather than solely on the clothing items themselves. This also aligns with Consumer Culture Theory, which conceptualises contemporary identity as fluid, market-mediated, and continuously negotiated (Rokka & Ulver 2023). The findings extend this theory by showing how second-hand overconsumption, when combined with social media, becomes embedded in stylistic identity formation, with excessive purchasing framed as a way of moving closer to constantly changing ideal selves.

Microtrends, the ultimate outcome of cyclicity in both identity and fashion, are described in prior literature as contemporary, fast-moving, visually driven, and closely tied to digital platforms (Bimo & Bhandari 2023; Beswick 2024). They can be considered deeply interconnected with how Generation Z views fashion identity and consumption practices, and the findings support this explicitly by showing how second-hand consumption is harnessed as an enabler of the realisation of social media-mediated, short-lived microtrends that encourage rapid wardrobe turnover. Sustainability concerns are overshadowed by the immediacy of visual alignment with desired stylistic identities, which is further reinforced by positive audience reactions. This creates a consumption logic in which constant change and replacement are normalised. This also connects to previous research suggesting that Gen Z cares less about brands or high prices and more about achieving a particular look, for example one that appears high-quality or expensive (Van den Bergh et al. 2024), making the findings of this thesis appear logically consistent with existing theory. Prior theory has discussed how some forms of style adoption can be seen as cultural appropriation, in which symbolic elements of specific subcultures are detached from their original contexts and adopted primarily for aesthetic appeal (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 83). The findings provide direct examples of this dynamic through the emergence of aesthetics such as Y2K and various Asian-inspired aesthetics. When there is no desire or ability to maintain stable, gradually developed stylistic identities, nor a requirement to be personally connected to the cultures or eras from which styles are borrowed, moving between styles becomes even more effortless and normalised, ultimately contributing to overconsumptive purchasing.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Generation Z do not *negotiate* competing values but reframe them to fit desired ways of consuming. Sustainability is assumed rather than discussed or questioned, while identity expression, affordability, and social validation dominate decision-making. This supports earlier research on value inconsistency among Generation Z but also extends it by showing how online second-hand platforms and social media environments make this inconsistency easier to live with and less cognitively demanding. At the same time, the findings counter previous literature that positions sustainability as a central or prioritised value in Generation Z's consumption practices, suggesting that in everyday, platform-mediated second-hand contexts, sustainability may function more as a taken-for-granted moral assumption than as an actively negotiated value.

6.1.3 The social normalisation of openly acknowledged excessive second-hand consumption among Generation Z

By synthesising the two sub-questions, this study provides an answer to the main research question. In sum, the findings of this study suggest that Generation Z does not primarily perceive

overconsumption in online second-hand fashion as a problem, although the findings simultaneously and visibly prove that it is happening at a historically fast-paced scale. Instead of being framed as an issue, or at least as something that should not be openly talked about, overconsumption is perceived as a normal, socially accepted, even encouraged and emotionally rewarding practice. The behaviour is openly acknowledged but rarely questioned, criticised, or framed as requiring serious change, although the need for change is very frequently playfully mentioned. Second-hand hauls containing excessive numbers of purchased clothing items are met with admiration, envy, and encouragement, indicating a fundamentally different attitude from that known to be associated with fast fashion.

Importantly, however, the findings suggest that this phenomenon may not be as black-and-white or superficial as it might first appear, meaning that overconsumption is not entirely unrecognised as a problem among the generation. Rather, constant excessive shopping may also function, at least partly, as a coping mechanism to avoid the negative feelings associated with the underlying and acknowledged problematic nature of overconsumptive behaviour. This interpretation too is supported by the persistent framing of consumption as problematic, albeit consistently in a playful manner in the dataset. The playfulness itself appears to be key: by humorously acknowledging addiction or overconsumption, individuals may internally ease discomfort by recognising the problem without fully confronting it. Continuous consumption further functions as a way to avoid pausing for reflection, while the humorous framing can momentarily create a sense that the issue is being addressed – especially as such expressions are met with validation and encouragement from audiences. This aligns with previous research suggesting that continuous consumption may reduce experienced cognitive dissonance by avoiding reflection altogether, meaning that compulsive shoppers may experience less, rather than more, cognitive dissonance (George & Yaoyuneyong 2010), even when their actions represent intensified forms of behaviour that conflict with stated values. At the same time, the findings suggest that this dissonance may still be present but managed through both continued consumption and the way it is socially framed.

The findings also highlight the importance of platform structures in shaping how second-hand consumption is perceived. Prior industry reports suggest that social dimensions will become increasingly central to second-hand platforms (ThredUp 2025), and this study provides empirical support for that claim by showing how TikTok and resale platforms together form a self-reinforcing cycle of inspiration, validation, and purchasing. Within this configuration, digitally native consumers engage in both the consumption of images and the consumption of clothing items, with each reinforcing the other. The interconnectivity between these platforms, as well as the sheer openness

and positivity of discussions surrounding excessive consumption, emerged as central findings, somewhat unexpectedly.

These dynamics point to a combination of social media functioning as a prioritised arena for self-expression, the avoidance of cognitive dissonance, and the acceleration of fast-moving trend cycles. In this sense, the findings align with theoretical views of consumers as creative identity builders who use what is available to them while navigating the limits set by the marketplace (Crockett & Weinberger 2024, 80). However, in contrast to earlier arguments that second-hand platforms alone lower these limits by enabling self-expression, the findings suggest that a key part of their appeal lies in their connection to other platforms, particularly TikTok. These social media platforms add layers of social connectivity, visibility, and validation that are not as prominent within resale platforms themselves. When viewed through the lens of consumer tribes, defined as groups formed around shared enthusiasm or lifestyles in consumption (Cova, Shankar & Coffin 2024, 96–98), the interconnected use of TikTok and online second-hand platforms can be understood as forming a tribe organised around excessive second-hand consumption. Importantly, this shared lifestyle appears to include not only realisation and celebration of consumption but also collective acknowledgement of its problematic nature. This may help explain the volume of encouragement, validation, and continuous discussion surrounding overconsumption observed in the data. In this sense, the emerging consumer tribe may function not only as a space that celebrates excessive second-hand consumption, but also as a social environment in which the problematic aspects of it are collectively managed, normalised, or deferred rather than seriously addressed.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Generation Z perceives overconsumption in online second-hand fashion as a natural and normalised part of contemporary consumer culture, no matter how acknowledged its problematic nature is. While the mode of consumption has shifted from new to second-hand, the underlying logic of fashion as temporary and replaceable appears to remain largely unchanged. This study therefore contributes to the literature by showing that second-hand fashion, rather than solely disrupting overconsumptive culture, may in its contemporary digital form reproduce and even intensify it, revealing a previously underexamined configuration of contemporary consumer culture among a generation with rising purchasing power.

Importantly, it must be argued that this phenomenon is not caused intentionally by the generation now under a microscope. Although this generation has grown up surrounded by digital technologies and describes online environments as a natural extension of everyday life (Cheung et al. 2017, 2; Balińska et al. 2024; Singh 2024; Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Schapsis et al. 2025), and although

constant connectivity and high-speed environments are perceived as normal and even expected (Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Thangavel et al. 2022), these are not conditions the generation has consciously chosen or decided to adapt to. This again does not mean that individual consumers lack agency or the ability to change their behaviour, but the surrounding conditions clearly make this more difficult than it may have been before or for previous generations. Online second-hand platforms, built to be attractive through vast collections, advanced algorithms, low prices, and constant availability, make habitual engagement difficult to resist. When combined with the developmental need to build an autonomous identity during youth (Kamptner 1991), the constant presence of social media in everyday life, the visual-centricity of social media platforms such as TikTok, and the acceleration of trend cycles, the result is an intensely demanding consumption environment.

This phenomenon can be understood as an intensified manifestation of long-established concepts: Dittmar's (2008, 29) notion of fashion captured by the saying "to have is to be," the idea of fashion items as part of the extended self (Belk 1988), and its contemporary extension to digital expressions such as social media images becoming part of the self (Belk 2014). In other words, the long-standing discussion surrounding fast fashion and the problematic nature of overconsumption is now visible in an intensified and accelerated, never-seen-before form. Although this development can now be better understood as a reflection of its time, based on both theory and the findings of this thesis, it remains concerning and raises an open question of when and how will this direction of consumption be meaningfully addressed or changed.

In sum, the findings show that, at present, overconsumption of second-hand fashion can be simultaneously openly acknowledged, internally conflicted, shared, socially validated, and even celebrated among Generation Z – while also representing its most intense form to date. In demonstrating this, the thesis highlights the need to critically reassess the sustainability dimension of second-hand fashion consumption in its current form. As Generation Z is becoming an increasingly powerful force in global purchasing power, influencing consumer values, market trends, and the future of fashion consumption, this thesis provides important insights into where the generation currently stands in terms of fashion consumption habits and attitudes. Moreover, these insights contribute to a broader understanding of the trajectory of sustainable consumption and the evolving nature of consumer culture, particularly amid the rapid and demonstrably accelerating rise of both second-hand platforms and Generation Z's purchasing and decision-making power.

Ultimately, the findings also reveal a central paradox of contemporary second-hand fashion. While the focus of this thesis has been on consumers, the results suggest that this tension has not gone

unnoticed by either side of the platform economy. Both platforms and consumers appear to embrace resale as an inherently sustainable alternative, yet the digital environments through which it increasingly operates may simultaneously reproduce the very dynamics of overconsumption and unsustainability it is supposed to challenge. As demonstrated in the findings, this contradiction is openly acknowledged within consumer discourse, suggesting that awareness of the paradox does not necessarily prevent its continuation.

6.2 Theoretical contribution

This thesis contributes to existing literature on fashion consumption, second-hand markets, consumer culture, and Generation Z consumption in several important ways. First, the thesis advances research on second-hand fashion consumption by critically examining overconsumption within its contemporary online form. While second-hand fashion has often been framed as a more sustainable alternative to fast fashion consumption, several studies show that second-hand consumption is motivated not only by sustainability but also by hedonistic and fashion-related values such as affordability, bargain hunting, uniqueness, trendiness, and the thrill of the hunt (Guiot & Roux 2010; Cervellon et al. 2012; Turunen et al. 2018; Machado et al. 2019; Bae et al. 2022; Cantista et al. 2022; Prisco et al. 2025; Ziółko et al. 2025). Building on these discussions, this thesis focuses on these other emerging motivations and shows that when second-hand consumption becomes embedded in digital platforms and social media environments, these motivations may be reproduced and even intensified, reinforcing overconsumptive dynamics. In this way, the thesis extends prior literature by demonstrating that the sustainability promise of second-hand fashion becomes more questionable in digitalised environments characterised by speed, visuality, abundance, and constant circulation.

Second, this thesis contributes to the literature by extending behavioural and psychological theories of overconsumption to the context of online second-hand fashion. Previous research has linked fashion overconsumption to mechanisms such as impulse buying, compulsive buying, hyperchoice, cognitive dissonance, moral licensing, and rebound effects (Festinger 1957; Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982; Dittmar 2005; Dittmar 2008; Merritt et al. 2010; George & Yaoyuneyong 2010; Solomon et al. 2016; Turunen et al. 2018; Dekhili et al. 2025; Peleg Mizrahi & Sharon 2025). While these concepts have mainly been used to explain excessive consumption in fast fashion or more general consumer contexts, the findings of this thesis show how they also clearly operate in second-hand consumption and how second-hand's seemingly ethical nature may make them more difficult to detect. More specifically, the findings suggest that second-hand consumption can reduce guilt through moral licensing, ease value conflicts through cognitive dissonance reduction, and stimulate further

purchasing through rebound effects and hyperchoice. The thesis therefore extends existing theoretical frameworks by showing that the psychological mechanisms commonly associated with unsustainable fashion consumption do not disappear in second-hand contexts but instead appear in a reframed form, with the characteristics of second-hand consumption even reinforcing these effects.

Third, the thesis adds nuance to existing research on Generation Z consumption by critically examining how sustainability-related values are negotiated in practice. Previous studies often describe Generation Z as environmentally aware and committed to circularity and sustainable consumption (Francis & Hoefel 2018; Deloitte 2020; Wang 2021; Tan & Trang 2023; Deloitte 2024; Van den Bergh et al. 2024; Prisco et al. 2025). At the same time, other research has pointed out a gap between these stated values and actual purchasing behaviour, as Gen Z also places strong emphasis on uniqueness, self-expression, affordability, aesthetics, and social recognition (Berthem & Marsh 2022; Palomo et al. 2023; Verma et al. 2025; Baruönü 2025; Ziółko et al. 2025). The findings of this thesis contribute to this discussion by showing that in naturally occurring second-hand consumption content, mentions of sustainability are strikingly absent, while other motivations take the lead. Users appear to either lack such value conflicts or resolve them by assuming that second-hand is inherently sustainable and by trusting that this is the commonly accepted view.

Fourth, the thesis contributes to consumer culture and identity research by showing how these overconsumptive dynamics are also socially and discursively reinforced. Consumer research has long emphasised that identity is continuously constructed through market-mediated resources, shared meanings, and social interaction (Belk 1988; Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Belk 2014; Rokka & Ulver 2023; Crockett & Weinberger 2024; Cova, Shankar & Coffin 2024). Existing research has also shown that clothing and style play central roles in self-expression, identity construction, and the pursuit of ideal selves (Dittmar 2008; Koo et al. 2007; Pauluzzo & Mason 2022). This thesis builds on that literature in a contemporary setting by showing how, in the context of second-hand content on social media, consumption is collectively legitimised through different forms of validation and encouragement.

This observation is also closely connected to the thesis's contribution highlighting the importance of platform interconnectivity in shaping contemporary second-hand consumption. Previous literature has shown that digitalisation has transformed shopping by lowering barriers to consumption (Edwards 2000; Hagberg et al. 2016; Juge et al. 2021; Singh 2024; Ziółko et al. 2025). Similarly, research on Generation Z has demonstrated the central role of social media, visual culture, and digital self-presentation in shaping how identity and consumption intersect (Stokes & Price 2017; Francis &

Hoefel 2018; Witt & Baird 2018; Stahl & Literat 2023; Van den Bergh et al. 2024). This thesis extends that discussion by showing how TikTok and online second-hand platforms should not be understood as separate arenas but as interconnected spaces that together form a self-reinforcing cycle of inspiration, validation, aesthetic experimentation, and purchasing. In this sense, the thesis offers a more integrated understanding of online second-hand fashion as a consumption environment in which second-hand platforms and social media become closely intertwined, creating a distinctive consumption phenomenon.

In addition, this thesis contributes theoretically by developing a novel conceptual framework for understanding how online second-hand overconsumption is formed among Generation Z. Based on the literature reviewed and the empirical findings of this study, the framework brings together structural conditions, social media dynamics, generational characteristics, and behavioural and psychological mechanisms, into one comprehensive model. To the author's knowledge, previous research has examined many of these elements separately but has not combined them into a single framework that explains how they interact to shape a contemporary arena of normalised overconsumption.

6.3 Practical implications

The findings of this thesis have important practical implications for online second-hand platforms, policymakers, and consumers themselves. As second-hand fashion continues to grow rapidly and holds clear potential to contribute to authentic solutions to fashion overconsumption, understanding how it is currently practiced and experienced is crucial for ensuring that this growth genuinely supports sustainability goals rather than merely reframing, masking, or legitimising ongoing overconsumptive patterns.

6.3.1 Implications for online second-hand platforms and industry actors

The findings of this thesis reveal a notable structural tension within the platform economy. From a financial standpoint, the success of resale platforms is largely driven by transaction volume: the more items that are bought and sold, the more economically successful the platform becomes. In this sense, overconsumption can directly benefit these platforms financially. At the same time, however, these platforms are widely promoted and perceived as sustainable alternatives within the fashion system. These two logics therefore pull in different directions: while second-hand platforms benefit from the increased circulation of garments, the sustainability narratives associated with them would ultimately require a reduction in overall consumption. This paradox highlights the

importance of critically examining how platform structures and communication strategies shape consumer behaviour.

For online second-hand platforms such as Vinted and Depop, these findings highlight the need to reassess platform design choices and user engagement mechanisms. Importantly, the results indicate that Generation Z seeks social interaction, validation, and a sense of community around second-hand consumption primarily outside the platforms themselves, most notably on TikTok, where excessive purchasing is openly normalised and encouraged. At the same time, resale platforms primarily facilitate consumption through efficient platform attributes such as accessibility, algorithms, affordability, and large product selections. This separation limits the ability of resale platforms to influence how second-hand consumption is framed within broader digital culture, while also highlighting a significant opportunity for platforms to take a more active role in shaping these narratives.

Platform design could therefore respond by developing built-in features that encourage more reflective and responsible engagement with second-hand fashion. For example, platforms could integrate educational or inspirational content that promotes longer garment use, repair practices, reuse narratives, and slower consumption patterns, rather than focusing primarily on attributes such as ease, novelty, and low prices. In a digital culture where trends are rapidly created and adopted, practices such as caring for clothing, extending garment lifespans, and valuing durability also have strong potential to reach large audiences on social media. Closer and more intentional engagement with social media could further support this shift. As the findings demonstrate, social media is already deeply intertwined with online second-hand consumption. Rather than leaving this connection largely unmanaged, platforms could collaborate with social media creators, influencers, or other visible figures to promote second-hand consumption in ways that highlight longevity, responsible consuming, and more thoughtful wardrobe building. Importantly, such approaches can remain inspirational rather than moralising, encouraging more mindful consumption without placing blame on individual consumers.

Ultimately, the key implication is that promoting “better” consumption choices alone is not sufficient if the underlying logic of volume, speed, and constant renewal remains unchanged. Addressing overconsumption in second-hand fashion therefore requires moving beyond assumptions or purely marketing-driven sustainability narratives and engaging directly with the ways in which consumption is shaped, shared, and legitimised in digital environments. Platform communication and marketing

strategies should move beyond purely volume-driven or vague sustainability narratives and instead consistently support consumption practices that are genuinely aligned with sustainability goals.

6.3.2 Implications for sustainability policy and regulation

The findings also carry important implications for policymakers, particularly in the context of broader circular economy initiatives and regulation. Policymakers, as well as actors in the fashion industry, should be cautious about treating the mere growth of second-hand markets as a sufficient indicator of progress toward sustainable consumption. While the expansion of resale markets is often presented as evidence of a shift toward circular fashion systems, this thesis suggests that the relationship between resale and sustainability is more complex: the environmental benefits of second-hand may be reduced if increased consumption leads to higher overall purchasing volumes, resulting in a rebound effect.

Policy frameworks could therefore place greater emphasis on sustainability outcomes rather than participation in second-hand markets alone. For instance, evaluation metrics could focus more explicitly on indicators such as reductions in total garment production, extended product lifespans, and slower consumption cycles. Developing more nuanced measures of circularity would help ensure that policy frameworks capture the broader environmental impact of consumption practices rather than focusing solely on resale activity.

In addition, the findings point to a growing role for regulation in addressing platform responsibility. As digital platforms play an increasingly central role in shaping consumption norms and practices, policymakers may need to consider how platform design choices, algorithms, and advertising practices influence consumer behaviour. Greater alignment between platform practices and sustainability policy objectives could help ensure that resale contributes meaningfully to sustainability-related goals rather than functioning as a new justification for continued consumption. Importantly, such regulatory considerations should extend beyond second-hand platforms alone. Addressing overconsumption in fashion requires a broader sector-wide shift that also includes fast fashion brands and other fashion producers shaping the fashion ecosystem, as meaningful change is unrealistic to expect to be achieved through the actions of individual actors alone.

6.3.3 Implications for Generation Z consumers

The findings of this thesis also carry important implications for Generation Z consumers themselves. While the study highlights surrounding conditions that shape contemporary consumption practices, factors that are at least partly beyond the direct control of individual consumers, it also illustrates how

everyday online interactions can contribute to the normalisation of excessive consumption. As the findings indicate, social media platforms such as TikTok function not only as spaces for inspiration but also as environments where consumption behaviours are interpreted and discussed.

At the same time, these digital spaces are also arenas where alternative perspectives can emerge. As demonstrated in the findings, problematic consumption behaviour is often openly acknowledged within these discussions, even if it is frequently framed in a light or playful way. This visibility suggests that attitudes toward such behaviour are not fixed and may be open to change. Recognising the dynamics at play, including the influence of platform structures and online discourse on consumption practices, can therefore be an important first step in enabling more reflective engagement with fashion consumption.

In practice, this could involve questioning how online trends and platform design influence purchasing decisions, considering more deliberate consumption practices such as evaluating the necessity of purchases, or engaging with second-hand fashion in ways that extend product lifespans rather than accelerating wardrobe turnover. At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that responsibility for addressing overconsumption cannot rest solely on individual consumers. Generation Z operates within digital environments characterised by constant connectivity, rapidly evolving trends, and platform structures designed to encourage engagement and purchasing, making it difficult to fully separate individual choices from broader technological and market dynamics.

Nevertheless, Generation Z consumers possess considerable cultural influence within contemporary consumption culture. As one of the most visible and trend-setting generations on social media, their discussions, choices, and shared practices contribute to shaping broader consumption norms. Consumers themselves therefore have the potential to participate in shifting the narratives surrounding second-hand fashion. At the same time, Generation Z will increasingly occupy roles as future policymakers, industry actors, and decision-makers shaping the direction of sustainability transitions. While individual actions alone cannot resolve the structural drivers of overconsumption, they can contribute to reshaping the social meanings and expectations surrounding fashion consumption, both within digital culture and in the broader societal and policy contexts that this generation will help shape.

6.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study provides in-depth insights into contemporary online second-hand fashion consumption, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses on one social

media platform, TikTok, and specifically on haul videos and their comment sections. This approach enables a rich examination of naturally occurring consumption practices and discourses, but it also limits the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific platform and content format examined. However, the choice of platform is justified by its central role in the phenomenon under study, as TikTok has become a particularly influential environment for the circulation of second-hand fashion content and consumption-related discourse. Moreover, the methodological aim of this study was to examine the phenomenon as it unfolds organically, without interviews or direct interaction with participants. Future research could expand this perspective by examining similar dynamics outside digital environments, such as in physical second-hand stores, or by comparing different national or cultural contexts to assess how transferable the observed dynamics may be across different settings.

Second, the nature of TikTok as a platform designed to produce highly engaging short-form content could be viewed as challenging its credibility as a source of “neutral” data. However, within the context of this study, this characteristic represents a central feature of the phenomenon itself rather than a limitation of the data. The videos analysed are intentionally produced and consumed within this particular format, and the rapid, visually driven nature of the content is closely linked to how second-hand consumption is presented and interpreted within these environments. The aim of the study was therefore precisely to understand how overconsumption is constructed and normalised within the digital spaces where it takes place. Consequently, the findings should be understood as describing the manifestation of second-hand consumption within these specific online contexts rather than second-hand consumption in general.

Third, the study focuses on publicly visible expressions of consumption rather than consumers’ privately articulated motivations. As such, the findings capture how overconsumption is performed, shared, and normalised within public digital environments, but they do not reveal how individuals might describe or rationalise their behaviour when explicitly asked about it. While this can also be considered a strength of the study, as it provides an alternative perspective to interview-based research on fashion consumption, future research could combine naturally occurring social media data with interviews or surveys. Such an approach would allow researchers to explore how publicly performed consumption practices relate to individuals’ private reflections, values, and potential tensions between attitudes and behaviour.

Fourth, this thesis focuses on Generation Z as a central actor in contemporary second-hand consumption. While this focus is justified given the generation’s growing purchasing and decision-making power and the clear relevance of the phenomenon within this group, it also limits insights

into how these dynamics may differ across age groups. Future research could adopt a comparative generational perspective to examine whether similar patterns of overconsumption emerge among older consumer groups using online second-hand platforms. Such research would help clarify the extent to which these practices are shaped specifically by generational characteristics or more broadly by the digital environments in which contemporary fashion consumption takes place. Additionally, as generations following Generation Z begin to gain purchasing power, continued examination of this topic would be valuable for assessing whether and how the dynamics observed in this study evolve over time.

Finally, given the central paradox highlighted in this thesis, namely that second-hand consumption is widely framed as a sustainable alternative while potentially reproducing dynamics of overconsumption, future research could shift the analytical focus toward the platforms themselves. Examining how platform designers, managers, and industry actors understand the sustainability role of second-hand platforms, as well as how their business models, advertising strategies, and communication practices shape consumer behaviour, would provide valuable insight into how these platforms contribute to the development of contemporary second-hand consumption practices. Such research could deepen our understanding of how digital platforms shape the relationship between overconsumption and sustainability within contemporary fashion systems.

7 Summary

The aim of this thesis was to examine an emerging phenomenon by exploring how overconsumption is constructed, maintained, and, in particular, perceived in the context of online second-hand fashion consumption among Generation Z. While second-hand fashion is generally framed as a more sustainable alternative to fast fashion, recent developments and public discourse suggest that its most recent digital, platform-mediated forms may also enable and normalise practices of overconsumption. This thesis therefore sought to examine how these dynamics are perceived and experienced by a young generation of fashion consumers, a topic that remains underexplored in existing research. To address this research gap, the thesis focused on the following sub-questions: (1) *how overconsumptive behaviour is constructed and maintained in contemporary online second-hand fashion*, and (2) *how Generation Z consumers negotiate competing values in excessive online second-hand fashion consumption*. Together, these sub-questions formed the basis for answering the main research question: *how do Generation Z consumers perceive overconsumption in the context of online second-hand fashion?*

The literature review explored several interconnected areas of research, drawing on studies and perspectives across different disciplines: overconsumption in fashion, the rise of online second-hand platforms, and Generation Z as consumers, in order to build a cohesive theoretical background for the phenomenon under examination – overconsumption of second-hand fashion among Generation Z. Existing research has paid limited attention to how these elements interact in practice within online, platform-driven second-hand contexts, even though the phenomenon is increasingly visible in public discourse and, to a lesser extent, in emerging academic work. Based on the reviewed literature, the thesis adopted a social constructionist perspective, viewing consumption practices and meanings as shaped through interaction and discourse.

Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative netnographic approach. The empirical material consisted of 30 TikTok haul videos related to excessive consumption on online second-hand platforms, along with their captions, hashtags, and comments. The data were analysed using abductive thematic analysis, supported by a Gioia-inspired data structure, allowing for a systematic connection between empirical observations and existing theory. This approach enabled the examination of publicly shared consumption practices in their natural online context.

The findings demonstrate that overconsumptive behaviour in online second-hand fashion is openly displayed, socially validated, and largely perceived as normalised. Platform affordances such as low prices, vast choice, ease of purchasing, and the possibility of reselling contribute to high-volume and

frequent consumption. Psychological mechanisms previously associated mainly with fast fashion, such as compulsive buying, hyperchoice, moral licensing, and rebound effects, were also evident in the second-hand context, indicating that these mechanisms are now recontextualised within second-hand consumption. Additionally, sustainability was entirely absent from the analysed content, suggesting that second-hand consumption is often treated as morally acceptable by default rather than being actively reflected upon.

When it comes to value negotiation, the findings suggest that potential conflicts between Generation Z's sustainability- and self-expression-centred values are often softened by the taken-for-granted sustainability of second-hand fashion, the playful framing of compulsive buying as a problem, strong social validation within online environments, and even by the act of overconsuming itself. Taken together, these findings suggest that online second-hand fashion may, quite counterintuitively, reproduce and even intensify the same overconsumptive patterns it is often expected to counteract, particularly due to how these practices are perceived and normalised among consumers.

Overall, this thesis contributes to research on sustainable consumption, fashion consumption, second-hand fashion, and consumer culture by offering a novel perspective on how overconsumption operates within contemporary platform-mediated environments. By focusing on naturally occurring social media data and Generation Z consumers, the study provides insight into how second-hand consumption is constructed, discussed, and normalised in digital culture. In doing so, the findings highlight a central paradox of contemporary second-hand fashion: although second-hand is widely framed as a sustainable alternative to conventional fashion consumption, its current online forms may simultaneously reproduce dynamics of overconsumption. The study therefore calls for a more critical reassessment of the sustainability assumptions surrounding online second-hand markets and the broader cultural and technological environments in which they operate.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Full dataset – categorising second-hand haul videos for further analysis

Video ID	Copy in the caption	Copy on the video	Additional hashtags	Quantity & time per piece	Top comments' tone	Top-liked comment example	Brands mentioned	Prices mentioned	Reselling mentioned
1	"it actually doesn't get better than this"	"the best Vinted haul you'll ever see"	#winterhaul #thriftd	10 items, 3 seconds per piece	Jealousy	"The jealousy has turned me pure green"	Yes	No	No
2	"obsessed with everything omg"	"insane vinted haul!!! <3"	#2000sfashion #babyphat	10 items, 7 seconds per piece	Jealousy	"Jealous of the baby phat one"	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	"it's been a while"	"try-on vinted haul"	#depop seller #vintedfinds	11 items, 2,5 seconds per piece	Brand inquiry	"i need the brand name for all of them!!!"	No	No	Yes
4	"the last packet?! i'm so in love"	"we're back for another Vinted haul"	#vintageheels #vintagefashion #unboxing	10, 30 seconds per item	Approval	"I grinned in agreement at everything"	Yes	No	No
5	"my winter fashion essentials"	"Big Vinted unboxing"	#unboxing #vintedfinds	8, 4 seconds per item	Obsession	"Vinted for life"	No	No	No
6	"I still can't believe my luck"	"INSANE vinted haul & best find of all time"	#japanesefashion #archivefashion	10, 3,5 seconds per item	Obsession	"I. NEED. EVERY. SINGLE. ITEM. OMG"	Yes	Yes	No
7	"Vinted try-on haul"	"end of summer vinted haul"	#depop seller #thrift #vintedfinds	9, 4 seconds per item	Jealousy	"i am sick with jealousy rn"	No	No	Yes
8	"one of my best hauls yet"	"huge INSANE y2k thrift haul (don't watch if you get jealous easily)"	#y2kaesthetic #y2kfashion #y2kstyle	12, 6 seconds per item	Jealousy	"yeah no... i'm jealous"	No	No	Yes
9	"did I go a little crazy on Vinted, perhaps"	"my biggest vinted haul yet"	#vintedfinds #vintedtryon	10, 12 seconds per item	Obsession	"obsessed with every single item!!!"	No	Yes	No
10	"winter vinted haul <333"	"i've been spending all my money on my favourite app again"	-	9, 6,5 seconds per item	Approval	"Vinted is just the best app in the world"	No	Yes	No
11	"Whimsigoth haul"	"this week's finds"	#whimsigoth #charityshop	8, 7 seconds per item	Approval	"everything is perfect"	No	No	No
12	"let me know your fav in the comments"	"MEGA VINTED HAUL"	#y2kfashion #girly #summerdress	10, 3,5 seconds per item	Approval	"girl everything !! are you kidding me??"	Yes	No	No
13	"obsessed is an understatement!"	"Insane Vinted haul!!!"	#fashion	8, 5,5 seconds per item	Jealousy	"i need to stop watching hauls i'm making myself"	Yes	No	No

						sick with jealousy"			
14	"on average 2€ per item!!"	"huge cheap vinted haul"	#avantgarde #fashionschool #ootd	18, 3 seconds per item	Jealousy	"jealousy consumes me..."	No	Yes	No
15	"everything was under 10€ :)"	"Huge Vinted haul"	#y2k #y2khaul	21, 3 seconds per item	Approval	"this is the best vinted haul i've seen"	No	Yes	No
16	"live and breathe depop"	"literally bought all my saves"	#summerfashion	16, 2 seconds per item	Admiration	"jaw on the floor the whole video, you're so cool"	Yes	No	No
17	"a haul of my recent depop finds"	"I spend too much € on this app..."	#altfashion	17, 3 seconds per item	Approval	"bruh I've probably spent hundred on Depop"	No	No	No
18	"no more depop allowed for me"	"pov: you're a depopaholic"	#vintagefashion #thriftok	7, 7 seconds per item	Approval	"the depop 'please fit' prayer is so real"	No	No	No
19	"checking depop the first thing when i wake up"	"huge y2k depop haul"	#y2k #vintage #fashion	22, 2,5 seconds per item	Jealousy	"you just slapped the smile right out of my face"	Yes	No	No
20	"summer depop haul part 1"	"i'm not done shopping ;)"	#ibizaoutfits #sequindress	21, 3 seconds per item	Obsession	"oh my GOD i need everything???"	No	No	No
21	these pieces just find me I swear	"best vintage haul of my entire life"	#vintageshopping	15, 3 seconds per item	Obsession	"everything 10/10 i'm obsessed"	No	No	No
22	"guys i need to start getting a time limit on depop it's getting bad"	"second-hand haul from a girl with a long depop screentime"	#fryeboots	7, 3 seconds per item	Admiration	"you're so perfect omg. everything looks amazing on you"	Yes	No	No
23	"i have severe shopping addiction and i need to be stopped."	"things i thrifted from depop recently"	#clothes #thrifting	9, 4 seconds per item	Jealousy	"how are you finding all the absolute cutest stuff on there??"	No	No	No
24	"shop my depop"	"massive thrift haul part 1"	#y2k	10, 1 second per item	Judgement	"it always goes to resellers whyyy"	Yes	No	Yes
25	"purchasing my wishlist items"	"recent depop finds"	#koreanfashion #streetstyle #y2k	7, 5 seconds per item	Obsession	"omg i need all of these pieces."	Yes	No	No
26	"my favssss"	"my current favs on my depop"	#lolita #fairycore #trendy #vintagemarket	17, 2 seconds per item	Jealousy	"i love feeling jealous over these"	No	No	No
27	"more recent vintage finds!! which	"depop try-on haul"	#2000sfashion #y2kfashion	10, 6 seconds per item	Obsession	"omgg i need this type of clothes!!"	No	No	No

	piece is your fav?"								
28	"I already ordered more stuff on depop that's on the way"	"shopaholic haul"	#clothing	10, 11 seconds per item	Admiration	"your closet is probably sooo fire"	No	No	No
29	"buying my whole summer wardrobe on vinted"	"one of my best vinted unboxings"	#vintedfinds	7, 4 seconds per item	Approval	"the first skirt is so barbie fairy coded"	No	No	No
30	"can you spot a theme?? find these all on my vinted"	"vinted haul + try on"	#chinesetop #cheongsam	8, 8 seconds per item	Admiration	"what key word for a jacket like that??"	No	No	Yes

This table provides an overview of the dataset used in the analysis and outlines how the selected videos were categorised for further examination. Each column represents a specific attribute used to structure and interpret the empirical material. *Copy in the caption* refers to the text written by the creator in the video's official description, while *Copy on the video* refers to textual elements added directly onto the video as on-screen text. Both were treated as equally relevant parts of the video's communicative content, as together they describe the creator's framing of the video and provided central material for analysing the discursive patterns that informed the findings of this thesis. *Additional hashtags* lists the hashtags used in each video, which indicate how creators categorised their content and positioned it within broader stylistic or thematic trends. These hashtags were particularly useful for identifying microtrends present in the dataset.

Quantity & length per piece covers both the number of clothing items presented in each video and the approximate duration for which each item was shown. This measure helped illustrate the role of speed and volume in haul videos, which informed the discussion on the accelerated nature of online second-hand consumption. *Top comments' tone* captures the dominant tone of the most visible comments under each video, allowing patterns within audience reactions to be identified. These reactions were further illustrated through the column *Top-liked comment example*, which provides a representative example of a highly liked comment. Together, these columns helped identify recurring themes in viewer discourse and reveal how audiences respond to the creators' discursive framing. Finally, the columns *Brands mentioned*, *Prices mentioned*, and *Reselling mentioned* were included to track the presence of these recurring themes within the videos. These indicators helped assess how frequently brand references, price discussions, and reselling practices appeared within the dataset, informing the thematic analysis presented in the findings.

Appendix 2 Example screenshots of videos selected as data

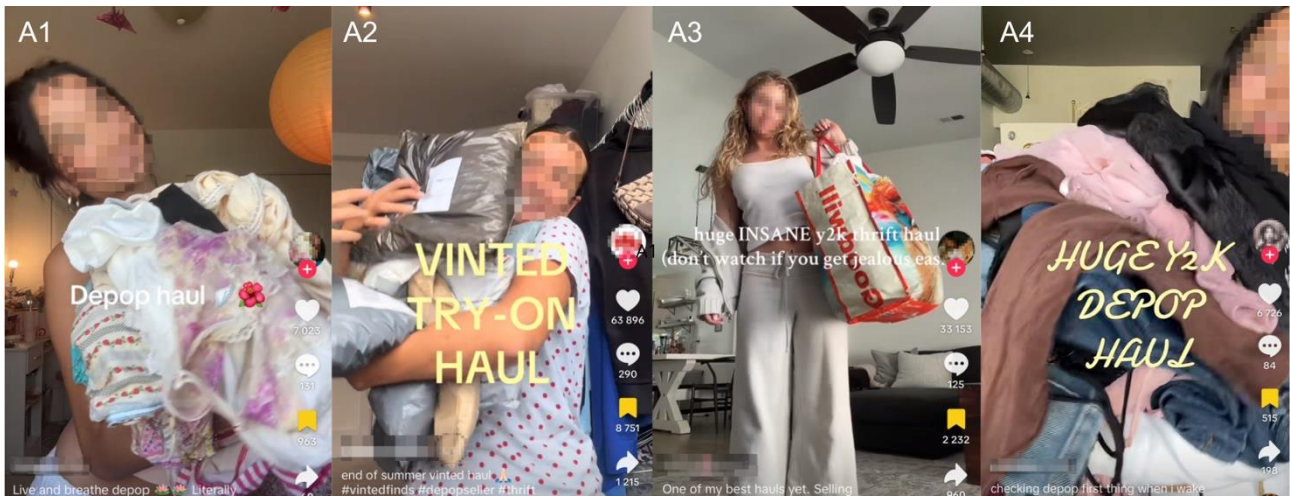


Figure A1. Screenshot from dataset video 16 (#depophaul), anonymised creator, TikTok (2025).

Figure A2. Screenshot from dataset video 7 (#vintedhaul), anonymised creator, TikTok (2025).

Figure A3. Screenshot from dataset video 8 (#vintedhaul), anonymised creator, TikTok (2025).

Figure A4. Screenshot from dataset video 19 (#depophaul), anonymised creator, TikTok (2025).

Appendix 3 Examples of the use of artificial intelligence

In the preparation of this thesis, generative artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool. The tools, purposes, and verification measures are described below. The researcher confirms that all AI-assisted materials were critically evaluated, that no AI-generated content was used without critical review, and that full responsibility for the content, interpretations, and conclusions of this thesis remains with the researcher.

1. Tool: OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5)

- **Stage of use:** Language refinement
- **Purpose of use:** ChatGPT was used to rephrase sentences originally written by the researcher to improve clarity, fluency, and academic tone.
 - **Example prompt (December 2025):**
“Can you make this sentence more concise, while keeping the meaning unchanged: This suggests that second-hand fashion is often seen as sustainable and thereby unproblematic by default, rather than something that is actively reflected on.”
- **Verification:**
 The researcher evaluated the suggested rephrasing to ensure that the meaning and intent of the original sentence were preserved. The final wording was edited further by the researcher and integrated only where it clearly improved readability.
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- **Stage of use 2:** Research focus refinement
- **Purpose of use:** ChatGPT was used as an aid to refine the framing of the research topic in the early stages of the thesis, where the focus was still under refining.
 - **Example prompt (January 2025):**
“I want to focus on the underlying problematic nature of contemporary second-hand consumption and its connection to fast fashion. Is it possible to focus on both these aspects in a master’s thesis, or would it be more feasible to narrow my focus?”
- **Verification:**
 The AI’s response was used to clarify the scope and feasibility of the research topic in its early stages, which contributed to narrowing the focus specifically to second-hand fashion rather than examining second-hand and fast fashion in parallel. All final decisions regarding the research focus were made independently by the researcher based on a review of academic and non-academic literature and discussions with supervisors. Overall, the AI supported the researcher in refining an initially broad topic into a more focused and manageable research scope.