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Restructuring Secondhand Fashion from the Consumption Perspective

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2.1 Introduction

The secondhand fashion market is gaining incredible momentum. Since the early 1990s, the industry has rapidly expanded due to heightened interest from consumers, investors and retailers (Hansen 2010; NARTS 2013). The number of secondhand, vintage and thrift stores opening, particularly those offering online resale, is growing fast: besides eBay, Facebook flea market groups also reach tens of thousands of consumers who are actively buying and selling used goods (Sihvonen and Turunen 2016). The full size of the resale market is challenging to

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estimate, because actors in the market may also be private consumers. However, the evidence shows that high-quality resale is a multi-billion-dollar industry and is among the fastest growing segments in retail (ThredUp 2016).

In particular, the digitisation of exchange platforms has changed the rules of secondhand retail and empowered consumers to become sellers of fashion items too. This brings challenges to traditional clothing businesses (e.g. Ferraro et al. 2016). It appears that the growing consumer segment for secondhand fashion searches for something more than affordability and low prices; for many, secondhand consumption offers the end-value of individuality, the experience of treasure hunting or that feel-good moment produced by reducing the environmental footprint and rescuing an item from landfill (e.g. Thomas 2003; Guiot and Roux 2010; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015).

While secondhand markets have been rapidly growing, the research around this interesting phenomenon has started to attract a number of researchers from varied disciplines. Secondhand—or previously used and owned—goods and consumption have thus been explored in different empirical contexts, e.g. clothing, furniture and cars (e.g. Edbring et al. 2016; Ferrero et al. 2016), and by different disciplines, for instance marketing, consumer research, textile and clothing studies, design management and social science studies (e.g. Cassidy and Bennett 2012; Cervellon et al. 2012; Veenstra and Kuipers 2013). Prior investigations have explored the topic of secondhand fashion from different perspectives and levels of analysis, such as consumption, business, society and culture (e.g. Isla 2013; Xu et al. 2014; Edbring et al. 2016). While each of these discussions has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of secondhand and vintage markets and their consumers, a comprehensive overview of the research agenda covered in the existing publications has been lacking. In this chapter, we therefore present a synthesis of what is currently known about secondhand fashion and vintage consumption.

The purpose of this chapter is to restructure the existing literature on secondhand fashion consumption by exploring its conceptual relations, theoretical approaches and empirical manifestations. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. The next section presents

a literature review of the prior investigations concerning what has been studied in the field of secondhand fashion in general and regarding secondhand luxury and vintage in particular. The review summarises the major contributions as well as the applied constructs, research questions and theoretical underpinnings in this research area.

While this section stresses the perspective of an individual consumer, the following section widens the examination to the level of consumer society and culture. At this point, we take the consecutive processes of the consumption cycle—acquisition, consumption and possession, disposition and production (Arnould and Thompson 2005)—as theoretical lenses to explore the prior literature further. Illuminating the existing scholars from a macro-level perspective enables us to show which processes of the consumption cycle are connected to the existing discussions and how.

In the concluding section, we discuss the theoretical and societal implications based on the literature review and make suggestions for future research areas. We emphasise that secondhand fashion seems to be repeating the logic of consumption and production by maintaining the cycle of consumption and, therefore, that the transforming role of secondhand fashion must be carefully considered alongside the boosters and hinderers of the circular economy.

2.2 Summary of Prior Studies on Secondhand Fashion and Vintage Consumption

A review of prior academic literature was conducted in the field of secondhand and vintage consumption, focusing on fashion items. We searched for publications in the following electronic databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost Business Search Premier and Science Direct. Search terms used included secondhand, vintage, fashion, luxury, disposing behaviour and previously used goods and consumption. In the first phase, the literature searches resulted in the identification of 41 publications which were then explored and organised according to their publishing dates, contributors, key constructs, research questions

and the theoretical approaches they applied. After that, we focused on peer-reviewed, academic journals on marketing and consumer behaviour and fashion management, and excluded all conference papers. Thus, the current review is not all-encompassing, but it covers the central publications in the chosen disciplines, and specifically, those which are cross-cited among researchers. Table 2.1 summarises the current state of the art of publications in the fields of consumer research and marketing.

It was evident that the academic research on the topic has steadily grown since the beginning of the twenty-first century, and that it began to grow rapidly after 2010. Our analysis initially focused on examining how the selected publications define second cycle goods, and which constructs they use. We found that most of the studies lack clear definitions, and that often, second cycle goods are aligned with previously used goods (e.g. Roux and Korchia 2006; Ferraro et al. 2016). The explicit differences between the secondhand and vintage constructs are only specified in a few academic papers. Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) present a conceptual analysis of the linkages between these two constructs. Based on prior investigations, they (*ibid.*, 59) define secondhand to include goods that have been used before, notwithstanding the age of the product, while vintage refers to previously owned, but not necessarily used, goods from a specific era. Cervellon et al. (2012) define the difference in relation to consumers' motivations, explicating that vintage goods are often bought as part of a treasure hunt, while secondhand shopping is driven by bargain hunting, frugality and economic motivations. It should, however, be noted that a few investigations discuss these constructs not as dichotomised, but rather find them more overlapping in consumers' experiences (Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Roux and Korchia 2006). Thus, we can conclude that either the product-related factors or the motivational drivers are used to distinguish the secondhand and vintage constructs. However, the researchers have not reached a consensus on how the motivational basis varies between secondhand items and vintage items.

Second, we reviewed the research questions of the selected publications. It appeared that two major questions permeated the

Table 2.1 An overview of the prior secondhand fashion literature (authors' own)

Contributor(s) and publication	Construct(s) referring to second cycle goods	Topic of the study	Theoretical approaches used
Xu, Y., Chen, Y., Burman, R., & Zhao, H. (2014) <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>	Secondhand	Cross-cultural comparison (USA vs China) of secondhand clothing consumption motivation	Theory of reasoned action
Guiot, D., & Roux, D. (2010) <i>Journal of Retailing</i>	Secondhand	Measuring the motives for secondhand shopping behaviour	Shopping behaviour in secondhand context
Bardhi, F., & Arnould, E. (2005) <i>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</i>	Secondhand	Ethnographic analysis of thrift shopping practices	Theory of shopping
Roux, D., & M. Korchia (2006) <i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>	Secondhand	Exploration of the symbolic and psychological aspects of both acceptance and rejection of used clothes	Used items purchasing
Ferraro, C. Sands, S., & Brace-Govan, J. (2016) <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	Secondhand	Exploration of modern consumer secondhand shopping behaviour and motivations	Secondhand consumption and consumer motivations (economic, recreational and fashion)
Sihvonen, J., & Turunen, L. (2016) <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	Secondhand	How consumers determine the perceived value of fashion brands in online flea markets	Theories of perceived value in marketing
Isla, V. L. (2013) <i>Journal of Consumer Culture</i>	Secondhand	Making sense of national and regional discourses influencing second-hand fashion consumption in the Philippines	Postmodern theories of fashion

(continued)

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Contributor(s) and publication	Construct(s) referring to second cycle goods	Topic of the study	Theoretical approaches used
Edbring, E.G., Lehner, M., & Mont, O. (2016) <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	Secondhand	Examining consumer attitudes, motivations and barriers relating to the alternative business models	Alternative modes of consumption (secondhand, access-based, collaborative)
Turunen, L., & Leipämaa-Leskinen, H. (2015) <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	Secondhand luxury, second-hand, vintage	Exploring the meanings attached to secondhand luxury possessions in the context of fashion	Luxury consumption and secondhand shopping
Cervellon, M.-C., Carey, L., & Harms, T. (2012) <i>International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management</i>	Secondhand luxury, second-hand, vintage	Exploring key drivers for acquiring vintage and secondhand goods	Antecedents to purchase behaviours
Reiley, K., & DeLong, M. (2011) <i>Fashion Practice</i>	Vintage	Examining fashion practices related to a consumer's desire for a unique appearance and sources of clothing acquisition	Theory of sustainable fashion
Veenstra, A., & Kuipers, G. (2013) <i>Sociology Compass</i>	Vintage, retro, used goods	Reviewing consumption practices concerning vintage	Theories of fashion consumption, consumer culture and subculture
Cassidy, T., & Bennett, H. (2012) <i>Fashion Practice</i>	Vintage	Exploring the principal factors and the demographics of vintage consumers in the UK and their consumption habits	Postmodern theories of fashion, identity and self-expression behaviours

investigations: studies either explore consumers' motivations for buying and using second cycle products or analyse the issue of secondhand and vintage in connection with fashion trends and consumption discourses. Regarding consumers' motivational drivers, our review identified a good number of publications which have examined this question and found that motivations can be related either to product characteristics or to consumers' experiences (Guiot and Roux 2010; Xu et al. 2014). The findings concerning the product-related motivations are relatively solid: often, the motivational drivers are divided into economic motivations (i.e. price sensitivity, which is only relevant in the context of secondhand, not vintage) and critical motivations (ethical, ecological and sustainability drivers). Although sustainability is highlighted as a key critical motivation driving secondhand consumption in general, in examining secondhand luxury, the majority of studies have not yet found direct relationships between eco-consciousness and the desire to buy secondhand goods (Cervellon et al. 2012; McNeill and Moore 2015; Yan et al. 2015). Neither was sustainability shown to have a direct impact on the consumption of vintage in Cervellon et al.'s (2012) research. In addition, particularly in the context of fashion, it has also been pointed out that fashionability or fashion motivations are driving characteristics, particularly in vintage and secondhand consumption (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013; Ferraro et al. 2016). The second group of motivations found among the publications is that of recreational drivers. These motivations are linked either to the purchasing experience, such as excitement and treasure—or bargain hunting (Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Cervellon et al. 2012; Ferraro et al. 2016), or to the actual intended usage of pre-used goods, such as playfulness or identity manifestations (Roux and Korchia 2006; Veenstra and Kuipers 2013).

In addition to a strong motivational stream of research, a relatively small number of publications focus on secondhand and vintage consumption in relation to fashion paradigms and ongoing consumption discourses. These studies seek to explain the general attitudes and practices in relation to secondhand and vintage fashion, used clothes and sustainable modes of consumption. For instance, Cassidy and Bennett (2012) discuss how vintage has begun to emerge as a fashion trend

in the UK, and Isla (2013) analyses how cultural discourses influence secondhand fashion consumption in the Philippines. Further, Edbring et al. (2016) thoroughly explore the attitudes and barriers towards the alternative modes of consumption, taking secondhand, access-based and collaborative consumption as empirical examples. Finally, Reiley and DeLong (2011) explicate how fashion consumption practices could be developed more sustainably. The overall conclusions made by these studies are that consumers are increasingly questioning throwaway fashion, and that attitudes towards secondhand and vintage fashion are more positive than before.

Finally, our literature review focused on the theoretical approaches used in the publications. Indeed, the topics have often been analysed alongside some other, often well-developed, theoretical discussions and concepts. The consumer theoretical frameworks applied are as follows: theory of reasoned action (Xu et al. 2014), materialism and theory of shopping (Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Guiot and Roux 2010), identity and self-expression behaviours (Roux and Korchia 2006; Cassidy and Bennett 2012), secondhand and sustainable shopping behaviours (Cervellon et al. 2012; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015; Edbring et al. 2016; Ferraro et al. 2016) and perceived value (Sihvonen and Turunen 2016). In the field of fashion studies, the topic has been explored in relation to postmodern theories of fashion (Isla 2013), sustainability and ethical fashion consumption (Reiley and DeLong 2011), and fashion and fashionability (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013). The plurality of the theoretical approaches adopted in the prior work stresses the cross-disciplinary nature of secondhand and vintage consumption.

2.3 Secondhand Luxury and Vintage Fashion Along the Consumption Cycle

This chapter's attention now turns to a macro-level perspective with the aim of building a more holistic understanding of how the discussions outlined so far can be positioned in relation to the consumption cycle (Arnould and Thompson 2005). At this point, we explore the publications selected in the first review table and include a few additional

studies primarily concerning clothing disposal behaviours. In the following analysis, we regard consumption cycle as a theoretical framework through which it is possible to illuminate the processes involved in the managerial and socio-economic activities of acquisition, consumption and possession, disposition and production (Arnould et al. 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the second cycle of consumption, specifying the roles and consumption practices that consumers adopt during this process. Leaning on Arnould et al.'s (2005, pp. 11–15) presentation, the figure specifies all the practices that may take place when goods are consumed for a second time. It is assumed that the item is acquired from a third-party operator, either from a consumer-seller or from a firm operating in the C2B2C markets, instead of from its original manufacturer/retailer. Having examined prior investigations in relation to these phases, it can be confirmed that most prior studies have focused on the phases of acquisition, possessing or disposition, while production practices have received less attention. However, the division between the processes is not straightforward, because consumers' roles as sellers, buyers, users and disposers overlap in the studies,

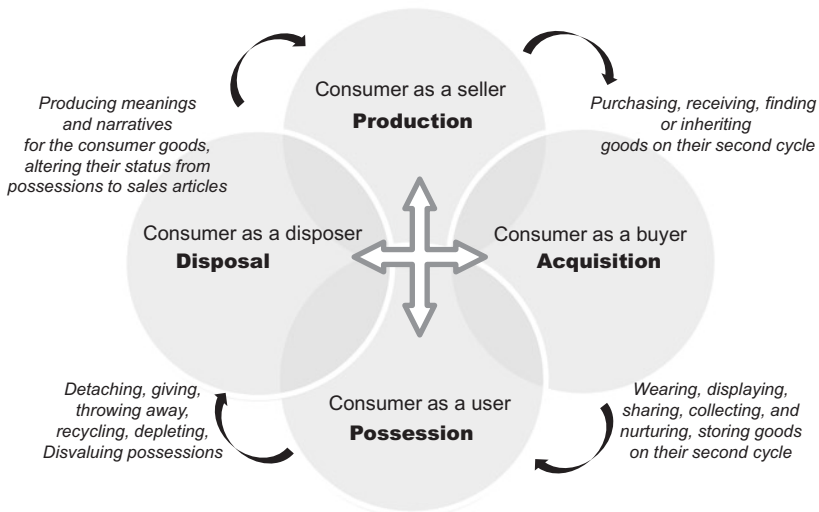


Fig. 2.1 The second cycle of consumption (modified from Arnould et al. 2005, p. 11)

which makes it difficult to situate each publication into a specific single phase of consumption. Therefore, the figure also depicts the phases of consumption as interrelated circles. Below, we take a more specific look at each of the phases of consumption cycle and exemplify how prior works relate to them.

First, the studies concentrating on the processes of *acquisition* examine the exchange behaviours connected to symbolic and experiential aspects and sociocultural complexities (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The current literature review has found that prior studies have tended to focus on purchasing practices of secondhand fashion items, ignoring other practices of acquiring such as receiving, finding and inheriting. As was discussed above, studies have looked for evidence on what motivates consumers to buy secondhand products (e.g. Roux and Korchia 2006; Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Guiot and Roux 2010; Ferraro et al. 2016). While the practices and motivations of purchasing secondhand objects have received considerable attention, only a few studies so far have focused on consumers' acquisition of vintage fashion. One exception is the study by Cervellon et al. (2012) in which the authors analyse the relationship between secondhand and vintage, concluding that the purchasing of secondhand items is primarily connected to the need to be economical and ecological, while the motivations of expressing oneself and being attached to fashion drive consumers to acquire vintage (ibid.).

Traditionally, the second phase of the consumption cycle, that of *consumption and possession*, has been widely explored in the field of consumer research (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Also, the current literature review shows that prior works have vividly discussed consumers' possessing. Often, the different aspects of possessing are discussed generally, and the specific practices of wearing, displaying, sharing and storing are not explicated. Collecting behaviours are, however, an exception, being the focus of several prior investigations (Gerval 2008; Zonneveld and Biggemann 2014). Regarding vintage and retro items, prior studies have explored, for instance, vintage consumption habits (Cassidy and Bennett 2012) as well as the possessing of vintage fashion from the viewpoint of consumer identity (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013). Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015)

focus on secondhand luxury and analyse the meanings that consumers attach to their possession of previously used luxury goods. Seeking to understand what makes someone's trash another's treasure, their findings show that consumers' motivations vary between self- and other-related dimensions in the case of secondhand luxury possessions.

The third group of prior studies are those focusing on the phase of *disposal behaviours*. Unlike consumption research in general, disposal behaviours have received considerable attention in the context of secondhand and vintage goods, offering valuable viewpoints in sustainable consumption and marketing (Morgan and Britwistle 2009; Lang et al. 2013; Laitala 2014). Laitala (2014) presents a conceptual overview of consumers' clothing disposal during the past 30 years and defines disposal as 'the act of getting rid of something, i.e. the end of life stage of the clothing with the present owner, regardless of whether the clothing is discarded of as waste or delivered to recycling or reuse' (ibid., p. 444). Prior studies have exemplified various disposal behaviours; for instance, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) differentiate between the practices of resale, reuse and donation in their efforts to exemplify consumers' motivations behind each of those behaviours. Similar questions are explored by Bianchi and Britwistle (2010, 2012), with the focus on sustainable clothing disposal behaviour. It is concluded that consumers' recycling behaviour and environmental concerns influence their willingness to donate used clothes to charity. These discussions have emphasised secondhand items, ignoring vintage pieces and luxury items altogether. Nevertheless, consumers do sell secondhand luxury and vintage fashion to other consumers and intermediary firms, and so far, studies exploring the reasons and practices as to why and how the disposer consumer is passing on unique pieces of secondhand or vintage products have been lacking.

Finally, the *production* phase of the consumption cycle stresses that consumers may take active roles as marketers and sellers of their previously used products. It also shows how consumers participate in the processes of meaning making, maintaining and transforming the symbolic meanings related to secondhand consumption and fashion markets within their sociocultural surroundings. To date, the productive aspects of fashion consumption have been substantially

explored from the viewpoint of ethical fashion (Reiley and DeLong 2011), slow fashion (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013) and resistance to dominant fashion norms (Thompson and Haytko 1997), but not precisely in the context of secondhand consumption and vintage. As an exception, Isla (2013) adopts this kind of cultural approach to secondhand fashion and investigates the discourses of secondhand clothing trade and consumption in the Philippines. Bringing forward opinions from both secondhand consumers and store owners, she shows how the fashion paradigms of modern and functional and postmodern and constructionist appear in the markets, and how the actors actively reshape the meanings within these paradigms.

In conclusion, most prior studies discussing secondhand fashion consumption have examined the phenomenon within a single phase of consumption, although the phases of consumption cycle may overlap in particular examinations. Our analysis shows that the processes of acquiring, possessing and disposing of the second cycle of consumption have been explored quite a lot, while the domain of production has virtually been ignored. When looking at the emphases in prior discussions separately from the viewpoint of the theoretical constructs of secondhand and vintage, even more differences emerge. Vintage items have been examined mostly in terms of possessing practices, while secondhand goods have dominated in the studies that explore acquiring and disposal practices.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the current state of consumer behaviour and marketing literature in its discussions of secondhand fashion consumption. The literature review revealed that the topics of secondhand and vintage have attracted increasing consumer research since the turn of the new century.

Taking the viewpoint of the individual consumer, the literature analysis uncovered the plurality of theoretical approaches applied in the context of secondhand and vintage fashion. As no established frameworks are used in the field, conceptual clarity is also lacking.

Our review points out some areas of overlap when defining the constructs, particularly when secondhand and vintage were discussed separately, and not challenged against each other (e.g. Guiot and Roux 2010; Reiley and DeLong 2011; Cassidy and Bennett 2012; Xu et al. 2014). While secondhand includes goods that have been used before, regardless of the product's age, vintage refers to previously owned, but not necessarily used, goods from a specific era. Secondhand luxury, for one, is a rather vague term that holds interrelated and overlapping meanings with secondhand goods and vintage (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015, p. 59). As a general expression for all the items that are acquired from a third-party operator, either from a consumer-seller or from a firm operating in the C2B2C markets rather than from their original manufacturer/retailer, we propose the term 'second-cycle products'. In so doing, it is stressed that second cycle products do not necessarily have to have been used before, but they do have to be pre-owned (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015).

When examining these publications from the macro-level perspective, we found that the prior literature has covered the acquisition, possessing and disposing aspects along the second cycle of consumption, but that the phase of production has received relatively little attention so far. Further, we identified differences with regard to the treatment of secondhand goods and vintage items, as secondhand goods are examined in connection with acquiring and disposing of them, while vintage items are thoroughly explored from the viewpoint of possessing practices. Consequently, we recognise some specific areas of research that would strengthen the prevailing understanding of secondhand and vintage consumption. For instance, the prior investigations lack the understanding of when, how and why consumers are willing to dispose of 'valuable', i.e. secondhand luxury and vintage, products. Therefore, we call for further research into aspects of disposing in the context of secondhand luxury and vintage. Moreover, we suggest further exploration of the productive aspects of consuming secondhand and vintage. For example, how are the symbolic and sociocultural meanings of secondhand and vintage consumption developed, maintained and reshaped by the consumers and producers in the markets? Advertisements, brands,

retail environments and media texts may serve as empirical areas in which the negotiating processes of these meanings could be analysed.

Finally, we argue that the vast majority of previous studies have explored the phenomena by stressing single phases of the consumption cycle, focusing either on the acquisition, possessing or disposing of the second cycle products. Adapting such narrow and isolated perspectives is a shortcoming from the viewpoint of sustainable consumption and can bring pitfalls. When the focus is placed on a single phase of the consumption cycle, the wider institutional and sociocultural structures that govern the processes of consumption, markets and consumption practices are easily ignored. In particular, if we look at the phase of disposal (e.g. the practices and motives for recycling), the danger arises that we neglect the practices that take place after that in the phase of acquisition. The same consumers who actively recycle or donate their used clothes may end up buying more and more new clothes, and thus, the second cycle of consumption is maintained without any actual changes in consumption practices. The second cycle of consumption is, then, a self-sustaining process that supports both consumers' and producers' desires for fast fashion (McNeill and Moore 2015; Lundblad and Davies 2015).

To overcome these pitfalls, we call for further research exploring the second cycle of consumption as a whole. Taking culturally oriented perspectives, these new investigations may critically analyse the sociocultural processes that drive the consumption cycle and explore how the single phases interrelate to, and influence, each other. In agreement with Edbring et al. (2016), we see a need to understand the processes of circular economy and how it works in the context of clothing and fashion markets in order to boost sustainable consumption and production in this industry.

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