



Factors Influencing Purchase Intention of Second-Hand Clothing Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This small-scale study examined consumer behaviour regarding second-hand clothing purchases among students at a public university in Malaysia. The study aimed to:1) Identify the factors influencing university students' purchase intentions for second-hand clothing and, 2) Determine the primary deterrents to secondhand clothing purchases. A questionnaire survey was employed as the research instrument, using an online Google form. Snowball sampling was utilized, where the questionnaire link was initially shared with 30 participants. By the end of the study period, the number of participants had increased to 126. The findings revealed that when making second-hand purchases, respondents considered product condition the most important factor, followed by price, while brand had a more moderate influence. This suggests that respondents prioritize practicality in their purchasing decisions. Concerns about second-hand purchases were primarily centered on hygiene and product quality, while the stigma associated with buying second-hand clothing was a less significant deterrent. Among those who had never purchased second-hand products, the main barriers were quality concerns (63.2%) and hygiene issues (57.9%). Overall, the results indicate that second-hand shopping is widely accepted among university students in Malaysia. However, improving perceptions of hygiene and product quality could further encourage participation. Implementing better cleaning standards, quality assurance measures, and awareness campaigns to address misconceptions about second-hand products may help enhance consumer confidence and promote sustainable purchasing behaviours.

Keywords: Purchase Intention, Second-hand Clothing, Product Reuse, Economic Factors, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of thrift shopping and second-hand items surged during the Covid-19 pandemic, largely due to economic factors. However, the demand for various pre-owned goods, including gadgets, furniture, toys, tableware, kitchenware (Lai, 2023), and clothing (Pfordten, 2023), has continued to grow post-pandemic. Malaysia's apparel and clothing sector now ranks as the tenth-highest earner among its export industries (Farhana et al., 2022). This rise in the second-hand market extends beyond financial necessity or social class, as individuals from diverse income brackets are embracing this trend (Chan, 2020). The Carousell Group Recommerce Index 2021 report revealed that eight out of ten Malaysians have made second-hand purchases (Aman, 2021). Whether motivated by cost savings or environmental consciousness, Malaysia has emerged as one of the largest global markets for used clothing (Pfordten, 2023). With growing emphasis on sustainability and waste reduction, purchasing second-hand clothing is increasingly popular, particularly among younger generations (Purinton et al., 2019).

Product Reuse

Product reuse is a key strategy for reducing the consumption of new resources in manufacturing industries. It plays a crucial role in waste minimization, aligning with waste prevention and zero waste goals. However, for





product reuse to be viable, there must be both a supply of used items and demand for them. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the popularity of second-hand clothing among youth, driven by a combination of environmental consciousness, unique fashion choices, and economic considerations. The sales of second-hand products particularly second-hand clothing through 'bundle' shops, has seen a significant rise worldwide. The shift towards a more sustainable and environmentally conscious lifestyle and fashion trends (Appelgren, 2019; Valor et al., 2022), and the desire to own luxury items at affordable prices (Lou et al., 2022) have fuelled the growth of the second-hand market. This trend is not only limited to traditional thrift stores but has expanded to on-line platforms, making it easier than ever for consumers to buy and sell pre-owned goods (Yrjölä et al., 2021).

Several studies have been conducted on second-hand clothing consumption in Malaysia. For instance, Mohammad et al. (2020), focused on how electronic word-of-mouth influences people's purchases of second-hand clothing. Similarly, Koay et al. (2022) explored the general purchase intention (PI) of second-hand clothing among Malaysian consumers, while Rachel (2020) examined the trend of second-hand clothing shopping in Malaysia driven by conspicuous consumption. Another study by Ko and Ng (2023) specifically investigated Generation Z's purchase intention of second-hand clothing in the Malaysian context. Chan (2020) concluded that the increase popularity of second-hand clothing in Malaysia is due to the hipster subculture, where discovering rare or unique items at thrift shops is perceived as enhancing social capital.

This study focuses on factors influencing purchase intention of second-hand clothing among university students. It was conducted with the aim of understanding their motivation behind their decision to purchase second-hand products, particularly second-hand clothing. The objectives of the study were 1) To identify the factors influencing purchase intention of second-hand clothing among university students. 2) To determine the primary deterrent of second-hand clothing purchases. Two research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives: 1) What factors influence the intention to purchase second-hand clothing? 2) What is the primary deterrent of second-hand clothing purchase?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Purchase Intention

Understanding customers' purchase intention of second-hand products involves exploring the motivations, preferences, and concerns that drive their decision-making process. By recognizing the value that second-hand shopping offers in terms of affordability, sustainability, and unique finds, businesses can better cater to the needs and preferences of this growing segment of environmentally conscious consumers. The purchase intention (PI) for sustainable products like second-hand clothing influences consumers' actual purchasing decisions. When customers have positive purchase intentions, they are more likely to commit to the products, which subsequently leads to actual purchasing action (Mahmoud, 2018).

B. Motivation to Purchase Second-hand Clothing

When considering purchasing a second-hand product, customers are often motivated by various factors such as cost savings, the opportunity to find rare or vintage items, the convenience (ease of use and usefulness) (Padmavathy et al, 2019) and the satisfaction of reducing waste by giving a new life to a previously owned item (Khurana & Tadesse, 2019). The growing awareness of the negative impact of fast fashion and excessive consumption on the environment has led many consumers to opt for pre-owned items as a more sustainable choice. It was reported that in Malaysia, textile-generated waste has reached approximately 1,000 metric tonnes per day (Mohammad et al., 2020). Thus, purchasing second-hand clothes is viewed as a way to promote sustainability. Hur (2020) aptly summarises four distinctive second-hand clothing consumers as: (1) price-conscious, (2) quality- and style-conscious, (3) brand-conscious, and (4) environmentally and socially conscious groups. The second-hand clothing consumers are driven by value for money purchases, hedonic experiences derived from a unique array of product options (e.g., nostalgia and vintage looks), and the holistic benefits of second-hand clothing and the environmental and social benefits of ethical consumption.





Environmental Awareness

Reused clothing eliminates the need for new production, thereby mitigating the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry (Peña-Vinces et al., 2020). By extending the lifespan of unwanted garments and increasing their usage, reuse practices help lower overall consumption. For instance, second-hand clothing offers consumers affordable options (Borg et al., 2020), and substituting new items with used ones reduces material and resource demand while minimizing waste (Klepp et al., 2020). A review by Sandin and Peters (2018) on the environmental effects of textile reuse and recycling found that both practices generally have a lower environmental impact compared to incineration or landfill disposal, with reuse providing greater benefits than recycling.

Lower Price

The second-hand clothing industry is rapidly growing due to increased demand. Consumers sought out second-hand clothes mainly due to their lower cost. The low cost of used clothes attracts customers, while sellers find profit opportunities, in the resale of second-hand clothing (Koay et al., 2022). Generally, second-hand luxury clothes are cheaper than the brand-new ones, which means that consumers would obtain similar commodity quality while paying less money. Consequently, the price-performance ratio of second-hand luxury goods is an incentive to consumers to make their second-hand purchases (Lou et al., 2022)

High Fashion at Bargain Price

In Malaysia, second-hand clothing stores, known as 'Bundle Shops', were initially intended to relieve consumers' financial burdens. However, they have evolved into a phenomenon that goes beyond economics becoming a democratizing force across social classes, and addressing economic, social, and cultural concerns (Chan, 2020). 'Bundle shopping', has especially gained popularity as a symbol of cultural and social capital, proudly embraced by the youth. Many youngsters consider purchasing second-hand clothing as an adventure, offering a thrill of finding something valuable at a bargain price (Lang & Zhang, 2019). This trend is fuelled by fashion entrepreneurs, who are promoting second-hand clothing as high fashions. One such influencer, with a tag line, "Wearing cheap clothes doesn't mean you're broke. Remember, you have a family to feed, and not a community to impress" (Chan, 2020, p. 382), became trending on twitter garnering many followers.

C. Deterrent for Purchasing Second-hand Clothing

Hur (2020) identified four main categories of consumers who avoid second-hand clothing: (1) those who prioritize social acceptance and status, (2) individuals focused on quality and hygiene, (3) those who value style and self-expression, and (4) people concerned with time efficiency and professionalism. The primary obstacles deterring them from purchasing second-hand clothing include perceptions of low material quality, outdated or unfashionable designs, concerns about cleanliness and product transparency, limited availability in online and physical stores, and worries about personal and social image.

Social Acceptance and Status

Several studies highlight that one of the primary barriers to purchasing reused garments is the perceived stigma and association with a deprived social status. This stigma stems from the cultural perception of 'used garments' as low-status goods (Kim et al., 2021; Lang and Zhang, 2019; Laitala & Klepp, 2018; Rulikova, 2020). Silva et al. (2021) identified social embarrassment as the most significant factor negatively influencing second-hand clothing purchases. Consumers are heavily influenced by social motives (Styven & Mariani, 2020), with common concerns revolving around the embarrassment and stigma of being linked to individuals of lower socioeconomic status (Laitala & Klepp, 2018; Lo et al., 2019). This results in anxieties about the image projected to their peers and a fear of judgment when acquiring second-hand clothing. Although buying second-hand clothing can provide satisfaction and offer hedonic and ethical benefits (Lundblac & Davies, 2016),





consumers still express significant concerns about how such purchases might affect their social image and the perceptions of others.

Quality And Hygiene

Research by Hur (2020) highlights that a significant barrier to the acceptance of second-hand clothing is its perceived lack of cleanliness and the notion of 'negative contamination' from previous users. Buyers frequently express doubts about whether these garments have been professionally cleaned, reinforcing Edbring et al.'s (2016) findings that negative perceptions of the unhygienic nature of second-hand goods are a critical obstacle to their broader adoption. These concerns make many individuals, particularly older generations, reluctant to purchase second-hand products, especially clothing. This negative stigma appears to be more pronounced among older consumers compared to younger ones, who may be more open to the concept (Williams & Hodges, 2022).

Style and Self-expressive

The perception of second-hand clothing as unfashionable and offering limited style options has significantly influenced consumers' feelings, as it is seen to restrict self-expression and creativity. The limited availability of desired sizes, quality, and styles, as highlighted by Hur (2020), often requires more effort and time when shopping for second-hand clothes. These challenges directly contribute to perceived risks to self-enhancement and the ability to express one's identity. Non-second-hand clothing consumers express concerns about the unpleasant experience associated with second-hand clothing consumption and the threats it poses to their identity construction, given the restricted resources and options provided by such clothing (Taylor et al., 2023).

Time Efficiency and Professionalism

Deterrents to purchasing second-hand clothing arise from a combination of practical and psychological factors. Negative perceptions tied to unknown or inexpensive brands, which often lack the appeal of recognized names, discourage potential buyers. Conscious consumers value high-quality product information, including detailed descriptions, accurate sizing charts, and clear images, which are often unavailable for second-hand items (Tymoshchuk et al., 2024). The process of finding suitable products is also time-consuming, adding to the reluctance. Social and psychological concerns further amplify these barriers, with fears about the impact of second-hand clothing on social status, self-image, and professional appearance. For instance, Hur (2020) cites a participant who noted that second-hand clothes are not considered "smart enough" for professional settings. These factors collectively hinder the adoption of second-hand clothing despite its potential benefits.

METHODOLOGY

The method of this study was an online survey employing snowball sampling, also known as respondent-driven sampling (Naderifar, 2017). The research instrument utilized was an on-line questionnaire, divided into three sections. Section A collected demographic information, Section B targeted respondents with prior experience purchasing second-hand products, and Section C focused on those who had never bought second-hand items. Initially, the survey link was shared with 30 students enrolled in a Report Writing class at UiTM Perak, who were encouraged to complete the questionnaire and share it with their friends and acquaintances. The survey link remained accessible for one month, from December 10, 2023, to January 9, 2024. This timeframe allowed for the collection of data from larger pool of respondents beyond the initial group, broadening the study's reach.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

By the end of the study period, the number of respondents who participated in the survey was one hundred and sixty-two (162) people. The results are presented in the following sub-sections.

Section A: Respondents' Demographic



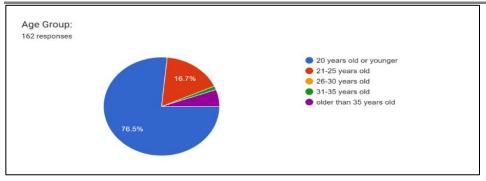


Figure 1: Respondents' age

Based on Figure 1, the pie chart shows that the majority of the respondents (76.5%) are twenty years old or younger, 16.7% are between 21 to 25 years old while the remaining 1.2 % and 5.6% are between the age 31 to 35 years old and older than 35 years old respectively.

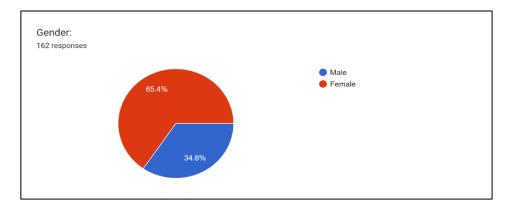


Figure 2: Respondents' gender

Based on Figure 2, out of the 162 respondents, 65.4% are female while the remaining are males.

Section B

Question 1 in section B of the questionnaire was designed to distinguish between respondents who had prior experience purchasing second-hand products and those who had never made such a purchase. If the answer was 'YES', the respondents would continue to answer the remaining questions in section B. However, if the answer was 'NO', the respondents would go straight to section C.

Q1. Have you ever bought second-hand products?

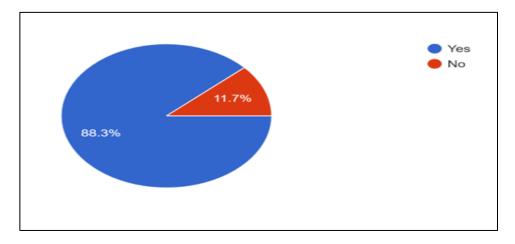


Figure 3: Respondents who have/ do not have experience buying second-hand products



Based on Figure 3, it was found that 143 respondents or 88.3% of the respondents, have had the experience of buying second-hand products. This is consistent with the findings published by Carousell Group Recommerce Index 2021, which reported that eight out of ten people in Malaysia have made second-hand purchases (Aman, 2021). The second question in this section asked the participants who had experience purchasing second-hand products to indicate the types of second-hand purchase they had made.

Q2. *If yes*, what are the type of second-hand products that you have bought? You can choose more than one answer:

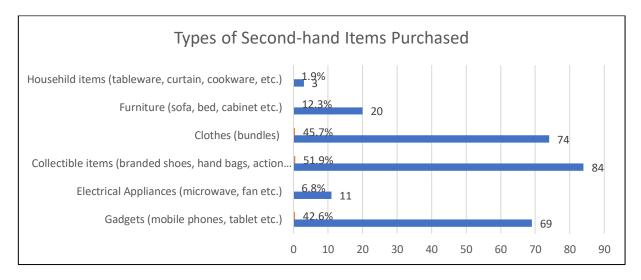


Figure 4: Types of second-hand products being purchased

The graph highlights the distribution of second-hand items purchased across various categories. Collectible items, such as branded shoes and handbags, are the most popular, with 51.9% of buyers (84 individuals) choosing them. Clothes, particularly from bundle shops, follow closely at 45.7% (74 buyers), while gadgets like mobile phones and tablets are also widely purchased, accounting for 42.6% (69 buyers). Furniture, including sofas and beds, sees lower interest, purchased by 12.3% (20 buyers), and electrical appliances, such as microwaves and fans, account for 6.8% (11 buyers). Household items like tableware and curtains are the least popular, purchased by only 1.9% (3 buyers). Overall, the data reveals a strong preference for fashion-related items and gadgets, with practical household and electrical items attracting fewer buyers.

Based on the results, it can be seen that second-hand clothes from bundle shops were the second highest second-hand products being purchased by the participants, accounting for 45.7%. The third and fourth questions in section B were meant to evaluate whether the participants were environmentally conscious.

Q3. What do you do with your personal clothing when you do not want to use it anymore? You can choose more than one answer.

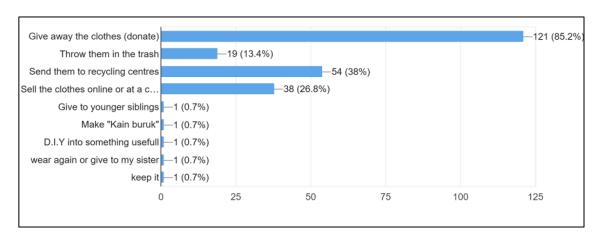


Figure 5: Actions taken on old personal clothing

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The graph shows various actions people take when they no longer want to use their personal clothing. The majority of respondents, 85.2% (121 people), choose to donate their clothes. 38% (54 people) send their unwanted clothing to recycling centres, while 26.8% (38 people) sell them online or at car boot sales. A smaller proportion, 13.4% (19 people), throw their clothes in the trash. Other actions, each chosen by only 0.7% (1 person), include giving them to younger siblings, repurposing them as "kain buruk" (rags), transforming them into something useful through DIY, wearing them again or giving them to a sister, or keeping them. Overall, donation is the most popular choice; while discarding or repurposing clothes sees minimal interest.

It can be concluded from the results that the majority of respondents prefer donating their used clothing rather than discarding it. Sending used clothes to recycling centres helps reduce the burden on landfills, benefiting the environment, particularly when the clothing items are no longer in usable condition. Additionally, some respondents engage in second-hand businesses by selling their used clothing online or at car boot sales.

Q4. Do you know the location of a recycling centre for clothing materials near you?

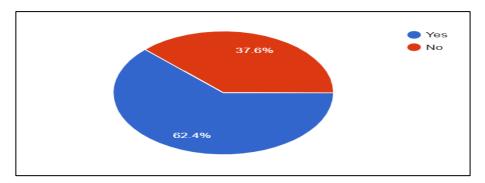


Figure 6: Awareness of recycling centres

Based on the pie chart in Figure 6, the majority of participants were aware of the existence of a recycling centre for clothing materials near them. The responses to questions 3 and 4 indicate that the respondents are aware of and conscious about the environment and actively try to participate in environmentally friendly activities.

Q5. When deciding to buy second-hand products, what is the factor that influenced you to make the purchase.

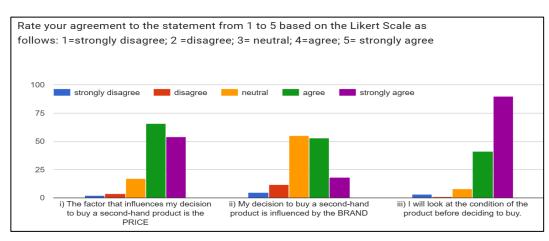


Figure 7: Factors influencing second-hand product purchases

The graph in Figure 7 evaluates the factors influencing decisions to buy second-hand products based on three key aspects: price, brand, and condition of the product. For price, the majority of respondents agree (level 4) or strongly agree (level 5), with price being a significant influence. Neutral responses (level 3) are present but less frequent, while disagreement is minimal. Regarding brand, there is a more even spread across the levels of agreement. While some agree (level 4) or strongly agree (level 5) that brand influences their decision, a



considerable number remain neutral, and a smaller proportion disagrees. Next, for the condition of the product, the majority strongly agree (level 5) that it is an essential factor in their decision-making. Agreement at level 4 is also significant, with minimal disagreement or neutral responses. Overall, product condition appears to be the most critical factor, followed by price, while brand has a more moderate influence on second-hand purchase decisions.

Q6. What is your main concern when buying second-hand products?

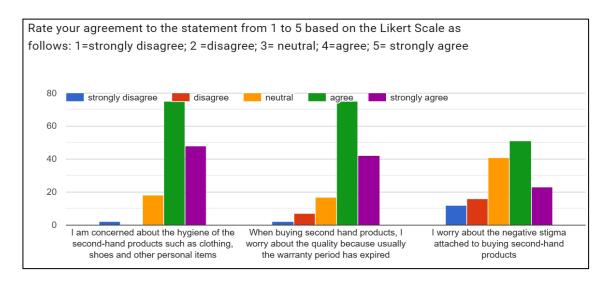


Figure 8: Main concerns when buying second-hand clothing

The graph in Figure 8 illustrates respondents' concerns when purchasing second-hand products based on three key aspects: poor hygiene, product brand, and negative stigma associated with buying second-hand products. Regarding hygiene concerns for items such as clothing, shoes, and personal products, a significant number of respondents expressed strong agreement (level 5) or agreement (level 4), indicating this is a primary issue for many. A smaller portion of respondents remained neutral (level 3), with very few disagreeing (level 1 and 2). Concerns about quality and the absence of a warranty were also prominent, as most participants either agreed (level 4) or strongly agreed (level 5), showing this is another critical factor influencing second-hand purchases in contrast, opinions about the negative stigma surrounding second-hand purchases were more divided. While a significant number agreed (level 4), many respondents were neutral (level 3), and a smaller portion disagreed (level 1 and 2). While many agreed with this concern, a notable number of respondents remained neutral, and a smaller number of respondents expressed disagreement. Overall, the findings highlight that hygiene and quality concerns are the most significant barriers, while views on stigma show greater variation.

Q7. Shopping media used when buying or selling second-hand products

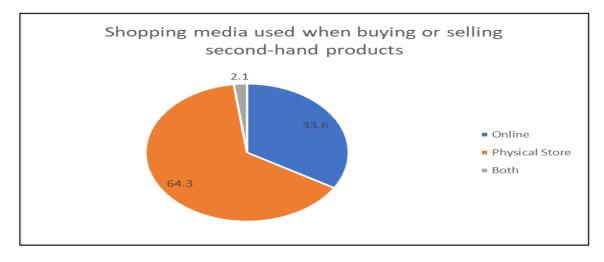


Figure 9: Shopping media for second-hand clothing





Section C

Section C focusses on the respondents who had never made a second-hand purchase. The questions tried to determine the factors that deter them from purchasing second-hand clothing.

Q1. *If no*, what are the main deterrents for you in buying second-hand clothes? You may choose more than one answer:

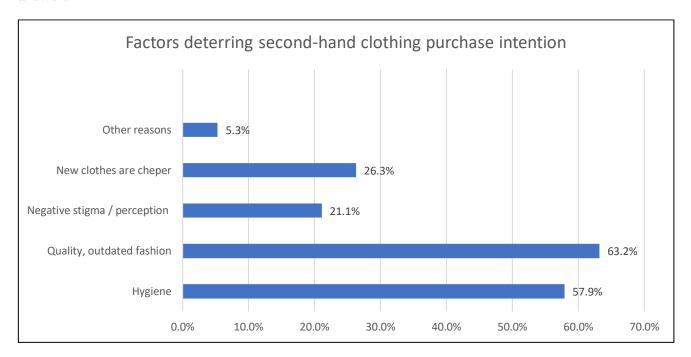


Figure 10: Main deterrent to buying second-hand clothes

The main deterrents to buying second-hand clothes, as shown in Figure 10, highlight that quality concerns, particularly outdated fashion, are the most significant issue, with 63.2% of participants identifying this as a barrier. Hygiene is the second most cited concern, with 57.9% of respondents expressing this as a deterrent. Negative stigma or perceptions associated with purchasing second-hand items were noted by 21.1% of participants, while 26.3% indicated that buying new items being cheaper than second-hand was a factor. Lastly, only 5.3% of respondents mentioned other reasons. Overall, quality and hygiene concerns are the most prominent barriers to purchasing second-hand clothes.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into consumer behaviour regarding second-hand product purchases. With 162 respondents participating in the survey, the findings indicate a strong preference for second-hand products, as 88.3% of the participants reported prior experience with such purchases. The study also explored respondents' environmental consciousness, revealing that the majority (85.2%) preferred donating their used clothing rather than discarding it, while 38% sent their clothing to recycling centres. Additionally, most respondents were aware of nearby recycling centres, indicating a strong environmental awareness and engagement in sustainable practices. When considering second-hand purchases, respondents identified product condition as the most crucial factor, followed by price, while brand played a more moderate role. This suggests that the respondents are practical in making their purchase decisions. Concerns regarding second-hand purchases were mainly centered around hygiene and product quality. Stigma of buying second-hand clothes is less significant deterrent, in contrast to findings by Kim et al. (2021), Lang and Zhang (2019), Laitala and Klepp (2018) and Rulikova (2020) who found that the primary barriers to purchasing reused garments is the perceived stigma and association with a deprived social status. For those who had never purchased secondhand products, quality concerns (63.2%) and hygiene issues (57.9%) were the primary barriers. The concerns are aligned with the findings by Liang and Xu (2018) who stated that although buying used apparel is widely practised in the Western world, Chinese (from China) buyers despise wearing the clothes of others. The cause





of second-hand clothes purchasing among young Chinese consumers was due to high environmental concerns and sensitivity to subjective standards. Overall, the results suggest that while second-hand shopping is widely accepted by university students in Malaysia, improving perceptions of hygiene and product quality could further encourage participation. Promoting better cleaning standards, quality assurance, and awareness campaigns addressing misconceptions about second-hand products may help enhance consumer confidence and engagement in sustainable purchasing behaviours.

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