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‘Sustainable Consumption Transition in England’s Fashion Industry:’ a Study of Second-Hand Clothing Consumption from a Generational Lens.

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The fashion industry is one of the most wasteful and resource driven industries in the world, and there is a call to transition towards more circular and sustainable consumption and production (SCP) systems. Second-hand clothing consumption as a reuse practice is presented in a growing body of literature as a sustainable consumption alternative and a circular business model, and there is a call for research of consumer behavior in this field, given the pivotal role of the consumer in the purchase, use and disposal of the garment.

Since the Post-War period (1945-onwards) the second-hand clothing and accessories market started to become a formalized market in many countries. What was once a charitable way of dressing for lower-economic classes is today presented in the academic literature as one of the most sustainable ways to shop, with key players of the fashion industry joining the resale resurgence. The business models that once encompassed the second-hand market (charity shops, vintage shops, flea markets and garage sales) are now only a fraction of all the available alternative business models within this circular economy practice.

The second-hand market has developed vastly in the last decades, and therefore, as highlighted by the literature, generations since the Post-war period have experienced this phenomenon very differently, with pre-used clothing being a ‘treasure’ for many and ‘trash’ for others. However, even if the literature calls for second-hand clothing consumption studies from a generational lens and scholarly interventions exist in other countries, no study has explored this element in England, a pioneer country within the second-hand market exchange.

Up-to-date research is needed in this area, and an understanding of generational differences in motivations for and against the purchase or non-purchase of pre-used clothing is a key aspect to be studied from a sustainable consumption lens. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to contribute to this body of knowledge by investigating generational differences in second-hand clothing consumption behavior in England.

Through offering a quantitative perspective, this study contributes to fill the gaps for research and extends the understanding of second-hand clothing as a circular business model and sustainable transition strategy to reach environmental impact reduction in the short-term, in an industry that has been quite resistant to change.

The findings of the study will present the results of the ongoing quantitative online questionnaire, with more than 150 participants living in England. The results will allow to translate knowledge into action in the sustainable consumption and production (SCP) field, by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote this type of consumption.