

# **The White-Shirt Experiment: Influences of Product-Source Knowledge and Attributes on Perceived Values of Secondhand Clothes**

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*Despite economic benefits, sustainability, and potential hedonic experience; stigma exists regarding the purchase and use of second-hand products. This study explored the influences of that stigma on consumer perceptions by determining differences in perceived monetary values based on product-source knowledge and product attributes. Three gently used white shirts with varying attributes were used in the experiment with a convenience sample of 105 active consumers. While it was inconclusive whether negative perceptions towards second-hand merchandise are predicated on product-source knowledge alone, our findings suggested certain attributes of clothes may neutralize its influence. Second-hand shirts of recognizable high-end brands and ones with unique designs were perceived as having greater value and consumers were willing to spend more on them than on similar but basic or generic items. Consumers from all economic backgrounds can become educated and responsible shoppers by portraying admirable style with second-hand clothes. Resale operators could take away applicable knowledge for value-pricing practice.*

*Keywords: resale shopping, second-hand clothing, resale fashion, perceived value*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Recent reporting by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), U.S. Department of Commerce, indicates small changes in wages and salaries and a slight increase in personal income. Disposable personal income also experiences slow growth (BEA, 2022). A closer look at how Americans are faring with current economic conditions reveals concerning truth. Many individuals and families are facing the difficulty of making ends meet. Similar situations have been experienced by both hourly wage workers and many in highly paid white-collar professions. A combination of factors, including higher costs of housing especially in urban areas, have contributed to the decline in individual and household wealth overall (ABC News, 2018). In turn, the pressure to be frugal and an effort to stretch the value of the dollar increases. American consumers are finding ways to save money and reduce expenses on everyday necessities. Searching for deals, using discount coupons, and changing shopping habits are among the coping mechanisms utilized to

manage economic hardship and maintain a desirable standard of living. With the same motivation, many consumers find alternative channels to acquire needed goods and change their shopping model from retail to resale. Savings from resale shopping can enhance the quality of life when used for family activities such as vacations or entertainment and even for college and retirement funding (The Association of Resale Professionals, 2022).

Research in the areas of thrift and resale shopping and purchases of second-hand merchandise revealed motivations beyond economic reasons (e.g., Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Cervellon et al., 2012; Gerhard et al., 2017; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Williams and Paddock, 2003). Increased popularity and acceptance of thrift stores and second-hand shopping have been reported since the recession in 2008 (Cascade Alliance, 2017). Resale is considered one of the fastest-growing industries in the nation. Sales had steadily risen by more than 50 percent between 2008 and 2016 and reached \$17.2 billion in 2015 (Stern, 2017). This trend continues and the forecast for the second-hand and resale market is to reach about \$53 billion by 2023. An annual estimate suggests that approximately 16 to 18 percent of Americans will shop at a thrift store (The Association of Resale Professionals, 2022).

Either by means or by conscious choice; consumers can freely choose to benefit from the availability of second-hand stores and a plethora of resale merchandise categories at much lower price points than retail. Despite evident growth and increasing popularity and acceptance, certain stigma about resale shopping and second-hand products still exists among consumers. Given the unique circumstances of resale shopping, it would be helpful to study whether the knowledge of where the product is sourced has any impact on value perception and how product characteristics influence perceived value. Empirical findings may have implications for both consumers and sellers of second-hand merchandise. More consumers could find convincing evidence to overcome the stigma attached to second-hand products and have some general guidelines in their selection to optimize the monetary value of their purchases even further. For sellers, there may be marketing implications that help to maximize product desirability and profits.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Resale Shopping and Channels**

Guiot and Roux (2010, pg. 356) defined resale or second-hand shopping as “the acquisition of second-hand objects through methods and places of exchange that are generally distinct from those for new products.” This definition helps to encapsulate the various store types and settings as well as technology-enabled channels where second-hand products may be acquired. Second-hand shopping may take place at thrift or resale shops, estate sales, garage sales, flea markets, or auctions (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005). The majority of offline resale channels, however, appear to be the various types of resale shops. Recent statistics include more than 25,000 resale, consignment, and not-for-profit resale shops in the U.S. (The Association of Resale Professionals, 2022). Many are single-location shops and some are national store chains such as Goodwill, Savers, or Salvation Army. Goodwill, for instance, has more than 3,200 locations in the U.S. and Canada that offer a great variety of products with more than 2,000 items introduced onto the sales floor daily (Goodwill.org, 2018). Today, internet sites such as ThredUp, Ebay, or Craigslist in addition to smartphone apps (e.g., Letgo) also enable the purchase of second-hand items. The randomness and setting of these various resale channels and the nature of unpredictability make second-hand shopping attractive (Ertz et al., 2017).

### **Economic and Hedonic Values of Secondhand Shopping**

The early work by Bardhi and Arnould (2005) found that second-hand shopping serves both economic and hedonic functions for consumers. While second-hand shoppers are motivated by the savings and economic values of second-hand merchandise, the act of shopping for bargains itself can be fun and exhilarating. On one hand, these shoppers are conscious about resource (money) management; thus, practice thriftiness and careful consumption through second-hand shopping which they regard as a moral activity. On the other hand, they realize the secondary benefits such as entertainment, elements of the unexpected, and the thrill of a treasure hunt. Many find second-hand shopping as a festive treat to fulfill

their needs for materialistic self-indulgence (but justified on the moral ground of thrift). These hedonic values were identified broadly as the realization of fantasies and the pursuit of the unexpected. Shopper's fantasies are realized when they find so-called "treasures" at a bargain - items made with high-quality materials, bearing well-known mass-market brands or considered collectibles. Second-hand shoppers are often shopping for "surprise and luck." They have no specific goal in mind but simply carry out a continuous search for unexpected hidden treasures. This value can lead to a hobby and an obsession.

Situational factors can dictate shopping motivations and styles. Ertz et al. (2017) described two shopping styles of consumers in the second-hand economy: browsers versus hunters. Hunter-like shoppers have strong motivation and conscious knowledge of what to look for, especially when the shopping situation presents specific needs to be met quickly and with a utilitarian purpose/goal to reach. Shopping is thus instrumental to achieve some higher-order objectives. In other circumstances, the same shoppers can switch to the browser-like mode for shopping to serve more experiential or intrinsic purposes. They engage in second-hand shopping for pleasure or hedonic benefits. As browsers in these situations, they may not necessarily look for specific objects but use the activity as a hobby that can also present worthwhile outcomes by ultimately finding unique, special, or valuable objects.

In the line of assumptions from the economic perspective, low-income consumers (i.e., the Bottom of the Pyramid) should be driven to consume based on low prices. Consumption decisions are made in a rational, objective, and efficient manner (Gerhard et al., 2017). Thus, the consumption of second-hand merchandise fits this assumption and may be associated with the low-income population. However, researchers agree that utilitarian (i.e., economic) and hedonic consumption co-exist even in thrift and second-hand shopping experience. According to the Association of Resale Professionals (2020), the plurality of values presented by second-hand shopping thus can be attractive to diverse groups of consumers from all economic levels and not restricted to low income. Such evidence is found when ThredUP, the world's largest online second-hand clothing shopping site, broke down its active customer base by income brackets. A combined 67 percent of these shoppers have an income of at least \$100,000 per year (Brooke, 2017).

Further, young consumers such as the Millennials (i.e., Gen Y) find second-hand clothes fit their desires to stand out and make a statement. They are proud of being individual and unique. The originality achieved by wearing vintage clothes from resale stores allows them to become trendsetters (Tuttle, 2012). The Millennials' eco-consciousness and passion for a sustainable lifestyle also match the benefits of resale shopping (Cascade Alliance, 2017).

### **Sustainability Values of Secondhand Clothes**

Almost 75 percent of American consumers give importance to the environment in their lifestyle and shopping habits while 60 percent also feel that it is essential to recycle (PRNewswire, 2015). Many consumers who purchase second-hand merchandise, especially clothes, are motivated by environmental concerns and sustainability. Resale shopping allows these consumers to fulfill their recycling goals. The resale industry reclaims some of the textiles destined for landfill, helping also to lower greenhouse gas emissions (Cascade Alliance, 2017). According to ThredUP, extending the life of a garment by purchasing second-hand can keep it out of the landfill for an additional two years. The life extension of a garment reduces environmental footprints by as much as 73 percent, drastically lowers carbon dioxide emissions, and also reduces water and electricity use (PYMNTS.com, 2018).

Textile waste is one of the fastest-growing categories of environmental issues. "Clothing deficit myth" is the belief that when clothes are donated to a charity they will go to someone in need in our community. However, in the era of fast fashion, there are more unwanted clothes than there are people in need. Fast fashion is fast in its literal meaning; trends change almost every day rather than the traditional four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall) of the past. New items arrive at the store several times a week giving customers constant excitement to find something new. This practice amounts to half a billion products a year. Such a business/production model is contradictory to the sustainability effort that many fast-fashion companies try to communicate to the public. Some even say that it is "greenwashing." It may take 12 years to recycle what fast-fashion outlets sell in 48 hours. Therefore, the main cause of the problem is the fast-

fashion business model itself. Average consumers are buying too much, 400% more clothes since the 1980s. Clothing is one product category that relates to impulse purchases. An average consumer may buy 70 clothing items every year and possibly new unneeded clothes every week. Fast fashion has a massive impact on this issue. Consumers are enticed by cheap, trendy, and disposable clothes – low quality but fantastic prices (CBC Marketplace report, 2018).

Tons and tons of clothes donated to charity become leftover, and unwanted after they have been on the resale floor; they are stuff that thrift stores cannot sell. Donated clothes can end up being tightly packed into huge bails ready to be sold to the middleman (such as I:Collect, a company that handles the pickup and distribution). Retailers who implement recycling programs also do the same thing with unwanted, unusable donated clothes and may give money to non-profit organizations. Then, used clothes in unwearable conditions may be shredded and recycled, for instance, reused as insulation. Some old clothes are turned into new garments by recycling the fibers. This is a very complicated process and only 1% of used clothing is recycled in such a manner. Clothes made with blended fibers make this recycling process even more difficult in separating the fibers. Natural fibers like cotton and wool lose integrity and strength and quality diminishes after going through the fiber-recycling process. More advanced technology is still needed to prevent this degradation. Current technology is time-consuming and does not make economic sense to recycle fibers from old clothes and turn them into the new fabric to make new garments (CBC Marketplace report, 2018).

Most used clothes are still shipped and sold overseas by the middleman to developing countries like Kenya - not given to the needy as some consumers believe. In a year, about \$22 million worth of used clothes are purchased by Kenya from Canada. While some of the used clothes purchased are resold for profit by vendors in local markets overseas, much remains unwanted and will end up in landfill or burned. East African countries are now trying to ban second-hand clothes because of the environmental issues they have caused. Moreover, second-hand clothes can jeopardize the survival of the textile industry in those countries (CBC Marketplace report, 2018).

Buying less or buying second-hand clothes can be an effective and moral alternative but requires changes in habits and perceptions. The latter option may be feasible in theory but in practice, many consumers still have apprehension about buying and wearing used clothes.

## **OBJECTIVE/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Despite the obvious economic benefits and potential hedonic experiences, stigma regarding purchasing and using second-hand products still exists. To some, second-hand shopping relates to the poor. Additionally, while environmental concerns have gained global awareness, many consumers maintain attitudes and consumption behaviors that negatively affect the environment. The values of sustainability from reuse/recycle practices and limiting consumption waste are still overlooked.

Therefore, the broad objective of this research study is to underscore the economic benefits relating to the return in monetary values of second-hand products, specifically clothes, and to provide convincing evidence to help counter the unconstructive stigma and change the attitudes of more consumers toward second-hand clothes. The purpose of this study is three-fold: a) to explore possible influences of the stigma towards second-hand merchandise on consumer perceptions, b) to determine the perceived monetary values of second-hand clothes and differences based on product-source knowledge, and c) to describe how clothing attributes relate to value perceptions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Experiment Objects and Setting**

The objects selected for this experiment were three-point-collar, button-down white shirts. The rationale was that a white shirt is deemed basic and gender-neutral. It is also considered a timeless and versatile clothing item. These characteristics helped to avoid potential bias due to individual preferences and fashion trends. All shirts were acquired from the same Goodwill location. Each similarly cost \$ 3.52,

including tax. All were medium in size, in gently used condition, showing no obvious sign of wear, and had been cleaned and pressed. The three white shirts selected had subtle differences among them to represent different attributes of a garment: classic/quality, recognizable high-end brand, and unique design. These attributes followed Bardhi and Arnould (2005)'s findings, which reported characteristics of second-hand items that shoppers regard as found treasures or valuable objects at a bargain. Such items were made with high-quality materials, bearing well-known mass-market brands, or collectibles.

Shirt A represented classic/quality attributes. This shirt was made with 100% cotton fabric, simply tailored with no sartorial detail and no embellishment of any kind. The brand label was removed to avoid any potential bias should the participants recognize the brand. Without any brand association, the attention of the evaluators should be placed on the material and assigned the attribute of the shirt (i.e., classic/quality).

Shirt B represented a recognizable high-end brand attribute. This shirt was also 100% cotton but made by Polo Ralph Lauren with an emblem (jockey on a horse) on the left side of the chest and the brand name tag retained. The longevity of this American brand and its highly recognizable logo effectively represent the assigned attribute (Council of Fashion Designers of America [CFDA].com, 2018). Further, the exposure that the brand received for being official attire for the USA Olympic Team (U.S. Olympic Committee, 2018) enhanced its recognition.

Shirt C represented a unique design attribute. While this shirt was similar in fabric content and cut to the other two, it had embroidery details in foliage design as the pattern on the entire shirt. The unique design contributed to its collectability. The brand label was removed to ensure that there was no identifiable feature of a specific brand. The only feature that stood out was the visible design of the garment.

To affirm the different attributes represented by the three shirts, a panel of 10 individuals was asked to evaluate the shirts and describe each of them using three to five adjectives or words. Results from the overall perception of the selected panel toward each shirt corresponded to its assigned attribute.

In presenting the experiment objects to the participants, all shirts were on similar wooden hangers and hung on a white wall at average eye level in sequential order: A, B, and C. A placard with the alphabet was placed above each to identify the corresponding shirt. See figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**  
**PRESENTATION OF THE EXPERIMENT OBJECTS**



### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A convenience sample of 105 active consumers aged 18 and above was recruited from January 2018 to January 2019 for the study. Participants were assigned randomly to either the control or experiment group by drawing tickets with two different colors. To ensure that the experiment condition was maintained, each group was taken separately to the location where the experiment objects had been set up. Straightforward manipulation was employed by adding a statement in the instructions only for the experiment group to inform the participants in this group that the three shirts being evaluated were used items and were acquired

from Goodwill. Therefore, the control group were those participants without product-source knowledge. The experiment group were those participants with product-source knowledge.

Both groups received similar instructions to visually examine the shirts and to describe each shirt using three adjectives or words as well as to write down the perceived dollar value and maximum dollar amount to spend (if they were to buy the shirt) for each shirt. Demographic information questions were included at the end of the questionnaire along with two questions relating to clothing purchasing behaviors (i.e., average monthly spending and purchasing channels).

Adjective and word descriptions of each shirt were qualitatively analyzed, by sorting and reconstituting, to identify emerging common themes. This analysis helped to ascertain that the characteristics observed by the participants corresponded to the assigned attributes. Descriptive statistics were used to describe numerical data and to determine the perceived monetary values of the shirts. T-test statistics were employed to explore possible influences of the stigma towards second-hand merchandise on consumer perceptions and to determine differences in perceived monetary values based on product-source knowledge. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the differences in perceived values of clothes with varying attributes (i.e., how clothing attributes related to value perceptions).

## **RESULTS**

### **Participants and Clothing Purchasing Behaviors**

The participants comprised 58 males (55%) and 47 females (45%) aged 18 to 63, with an average age of 21.8 years. The majority of the participants were white/non-Hispanic (45%), followed by Hispanic (38%) and African-American (11%). Most had some college education or had completed an associate degree (86%) and some with a bachelor's or a graduate degree (12%). Because most of the participants were college students, 80% reported an income of less than \$20,000, and 6% with income between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Almost all of the participants were single (96%). The participants spent an average of \$84 a month on clothes at online retail stores (67%), discount/off-price department stores (61%), major department stores (56%), and brand retail stores (32%), as well as a shopped resale at physical stores (21%) and online or other channels (13%).

### **Descriptions of the Shirts**

Participants described each of the shirts in correspondence with its assigned attribute. The following results represent the major themes and relevant findings for further discussion. Note: number in the parentheses after each adjective or descriptor represents the frequency reported.

Shirt A represented classic/quality attributes. Without any detail on this shirt, participants described the shirt as plain (53), simple (13), basic (11), normal/original (7), bland (5), and classic (3). Physical attributes were easily observed and the shirt was described as white (40) and clean (16). The occasions of usage were mentioned as well including formal/dressed-up (18) and professional/work/business (12). The material of the shirt was detected and described as thin (23). Interestingly, only two participants attempted to describe the type of material of the shirt – cotton (1) and polyester blend (1).

Shirt B represented a recognizable high-end brand attribute. Most participants observed this attribute and recognized that the shirt is a brand-name product. The word “brand” (12) was used and even Polo/Ralph Lauren (12) was mentioned. Other descriptors were given and similarly affirmed the recognition of the brand including designer (3), logo/symbol (3), iconic (1), and know the name (1). Participants associated the recognized brand-name product with high price and status as well. They described the shirt as expensive (22) and fancy/classy/elegant (18).

Shirt C represented a unique design attribute. The design of the shirt was obvious to the participants. They described the shirt using words including floral/flower (32), decorated/patterned (15), and design (9). Participants also described their responses to the design, both positively and negatively. Positive descriptors included appealing/nice (23), creative/unique (18), interesting/exciting (15), and stylish (7). As for the negatives, the shirt was described as loud (8), flashy (7), and even unappealing (3).

## **Monetary Values and Effects of Product-Source Knowledge**

### *Data Normality*

The data were not normally distributed initially due to skewness in the assigned values for each of the shirts. As a result, all assigned values greater than two standard deviations of the mean were considered outliers and were subsequently removed from the dataset before the analysis. These data were approximately normal after removing the outliers.

### *Perceived Monetary Values*

Two-sample t-tests were performed to compare the perceived monetary values of each shirt between the control and the experiment group. There was a statistical difference in the perceived value for Shirt A between the control group ( $M = 21.88$ ,  $SD = 11.43$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 16.86$ ,  $SD = 9.00$ );  $t(96) = 2.480$ ,  $p = .015$ . There was not a statistical difference in the perceived value for Shirt B between the control group ( $M = 46.35$ ,  $SD = 19.66$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 44.92$ ,  $SD = 20.76$ );  $t(100) = .356$ ,  $p = .722$ . Also, there was not a statistical difference in the perceived value for Shirt C between the control group ( $M = 29.64$ ,  $SD = 13.85$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 24.80$ ,  $SD = 12.20$ );  $t(98) = 1.854$ ,  $p = .067$ .

### *Maximum Monetary Values to Spend*

Two-sample t-tests were performed to compare the maximum monetary values of each shirt between the control and the experiment group. There was not a statistical difference in the maximum value to spend for Shirt A between the control group ( $M = 15.12$ ,  $SD = 7.63$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 12.74$ ,  $SD = 8.29$ );  $t(100) = 1.507$ ,  $p = .135$ . There was not a statistical difference in the maximum value to spend for Shirt B between the control group ( $M = 32.00$ ,  $SD = 15.86$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 33.44$ ,  $SD = 21.25$ );  $t(91) = -.385$ ,  $p = .701$ . Also, there was not a statistical difference in the maximum value to spend for Shirt C between the control group ( $M = 19.56$ ,  $SD = 11.49$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 16.14$ ,  $SD = 10.06$ );  $t(100) = 1.595$ ,  $p = .114$ .

## **Monetary Values and Effects of Clothing Attributes**

### *Perceived Monetary Values*

A one-factor ANOVA was performed to determine whether there were statistical differences in the perceived value of clothing with varying attributes. The control and experiment groups were combined based on the shirt. The shirts were then classified into three types of categories: (1) Shirt A, (2) Shirt B, and (3) Shirt C. The highest mean perceived value was for Shirt B ( $M = 45.65$ ,  $SD = 20.12$ ), followed by Shirt C ( $M = 27.22$ ,  $SD = 13.21$ ), and Shirt A ( $M = 19.40$ ,  $SD = 10.56$ ). With a  $p < .05$ , a statistical difference in the perceived values was found among the three shirts with varying attributes.

### *Maximum Monetary Values to Spend*

A one-factor ANOVA was performed to determine whether there were statistical differences in the maximum values to spend on clothing with varying attributes. The control and experiment groups were combined based on the shirt. The shirts were then classified into three types of categories: (1) Shirt A, (2) Shirt B, and (3) Shirt C. The highest mean maximum value was for Shirt B ( $M = 32.71$ ,  $SD = 18.64$ ), followed by Shirt C ( $M = 17.88$ ,  $SD = 10.90$ ), and Shirt A ( $M = 13.95$ ,  $SD = 8.01$ ). With a  $p < .05$ , a statistical difference in the maximum values to spend was found among the three shirts with varying attributes.

### *Differentials of Perceived Monetary Values and Maximum Monetary Values to Spend*

For all three shirts, we found that the perceived monetary values exceeded the maximum monetary values to spend. A post-hoc analysis was determined to be helpful to further explore any potential effect of the product-source knowledge on the differential between the consumer of the value perceived of the shirts and how much they reported to be the maximum values to spend on them. Therefore, two-sample t-tests were performed to compare the differential of perceived value and maximum value to spend for each shirt, between the control and experiment groups.

There was not a statistical difference in the differential of perceived value and maximum value to spend for Shirt A between the control group ( $M = 6.24$ ,  $SD = 9.82$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 12.72$ );  $t(98) = .915$ ,  $p = .362$ . There was not a statistical difference in the differential of perceived value and maximum value to spend for Shirt B between the control group ( $M = 13.96$ ,  $SD = 20.81$ ) and experiment group ( $M = 11.48$ ,  $SD = 18.76$ );  $t(97) = .626$ ,  $p = .533$ . Also, there was not a statistical difference in the differential of perceived value and maximum value to spend for Shirt C between the control group ( $M = 10.00$ ,  $SD = 13.52$ ) and experiment group ( $M = 8.66$ ,  $SD = 16.45$ );  $t(94) = .445$ ,  $p = .657$ .

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Perceived Values and Influence of Product-Source Knowledge**

The overall perceived dollar values of all three shirts exceeded the actual purchase price of \$3.52. Perceived value was influenced by the product-source knowledge only for the classic white shirt (Shirt A) but not for the shirts with the recognizable high-end brand name (Shirt B) or with unique design/collectability (Shirt C). Certain desirable attributes provide the shirts with undeniable value and may neutralize the bias toward the product source. Where these shirts were purchased from does not matter in the eyes of the consumers. In the case of classic white shirt, is such a basic item and can be acquired easily at various price points. Thus, there is no value in sourcing it from an economical channel such as a resale store. Getting such an item as second-hand diminishes its value, as perceived by the consumers.

We did not find sufficient support that the negative perceptions consumers have toward second-hand clothes were based on product-source alone. Instead, garment conditions could be a contributing factor to the stigma. There may be a misperception that second-hand clothes are all dirty and old. Visible wear and tear or other condition issues that may exist in donated clothes certainly make them undesirable resale merchandise. However, as presented in this study, the items chosen for the experiment were second-hand shirts in good condition, donated to and sold at Goodwill. Clothes in similar like-new or new condition are not uncommon at resale stores. Further, indifference to the perceived values despite product-source knowledge could be because of the demographics of our sampled consumers. Most of them were Gen Y and Gen Z college students. These young generations' unconventional views regarding consumption and reported enthusiasm toward sustainability could guide their perceptions. Hence, new and second-hand clothes were equally acceptable. Values of the clothes were based on other attributes than product source.

When it comes to how much consumers are willing to spend, they maintain a value-seeking nature and want to spend less than the perceived value of the product. Product-source knowledge does not influence such a mentality. Similar in both the experiment and control groups, the maximum dollar amount to spend for each of the three shirts was lower than its perceived dollar value. Unbeknownst to them, the consumers surveyed were willing to spend about four to ten times more than the actual purchase price of \$3.52 for each shirt. Despite the knowledge that the shirts were acquired from Goodwill, consumers in the experimental group did not indicate wanting to pay any less than consumers in the control group. It is possible that the lack of experience shopping at resale stores and no knowledge of the pricing of second-hand merchandise limit the consumers' ability to set reasonable reservation prices.

### **Clothing Attributes and Value Perceptions**

Different product attributes influence value perceptions and the desirability of the product. Our findings suggested the order in which consumers assign values to clothes with varying attributes. The most valued attribute is the recognizable high-end brand name, followed by unique design/collectability and classic/quality, respectively.

Consumers perceive clothes bearing recognizable high-end brand names to be of great value and are willing to spend top dollar for them. These clothes are generally expensive, at retail. Consumers can immediately associate recognizable logos of high-end brands with high prices. This mental process also leads to decoding the symbolic meaning concerning the economic or social status of the wearers. Clothes with this attribute thus are desirable because they provide not only functional but also psychological benefits (i.e., portraying self- or aspiring self-image) for the consumers.



The unique design of clothes can make them valuable and desirable in the consumers' eyes. The added elements in the design can signify sophisticated fabrication, employing difficult techniques or extra work. Hence, clothes with this attribute can be perceived as having more value and more expensive. Consumers are more willing also to pay higher prices for clothes with observable unique designs than for ones that are similar but lacking design elements. The uniqueness in design, though, may evoke varying responses from the evaluators. For more reserved individuals, clothes with unique designs may be seen negatively as loud or flashy. Their views on aesthetics are influenced by conventional norms. At the same time, others could find uniqueness a positive quality. Individuals using a broader frame of reference for aesthetics may evaluate clothes with unique designs as extraordinary or rare, making them collectible.

Clothes in the traditional or classic style are generally regarded as basic and withstanding changing trends. If made well, they could last and provide superior functional benefits. The longer lifespan of this type of clothes creates compelling utility value. However, the lack of special features makes basic clothes bland and uninteresting. The value that comes from the utility can only be maximized by the qualities of materials and construction. These qualities are difficult to evaluate as there is no easily identifiable cue. Moreover, average consumers do not have the knowledge or experience to analyze the quality of materials and to distinguish between poorly made and well-made pieces of clothing. Therefore, compared to clothes with helpful cues for evaluation and association with high prices (i.e., recognizable high-end brands and unique designs), basic clothes are perceived to have the least monetary value. Also, consumers are willing to pay the least amount to acquire.

## **IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS**

### **For Consumers**

The stigma and attitude that resale shopping is “only for the poor” need to change. Many consumers have already found “thrifting” or second-hand shopping for clothes to be cool and trendy. Fashion enthusiasts may shop at resale shops for unique and genuine vintage pieces. These pieces are the inspiration for many fashion designers in creating current trends (Amer and Vincent, 2013). With the understanding of the trend cycle, they regard resale shops as the best place to find authentic styles from different fashion periods (Hiatt, 2017). More and more smart shoppers with adequate means also find great value in second-hand clothes. As the findings of this study have affirmed, perceived dollar values of second-hand clothes were higher than their actual purchase price. Especially, clothes of expensive recognizable brands and those that are collectible because of their unique design are desirable no matter where they were purchased from. There are values in the clothes with these attributes. Consumers we surveyed did not find the diminished value of such clothes from a second-hand store like Goodwill. In reality, clothes that we choose to wear are admired not only by us but by onlookers. There is no obvious indication or need to disclose the source we acquire our attire or fashion. Let the admiration be on impressive attributes of our clothes (quality, brand, and design) that we do not have to spend a fortune to acquire. This attitude makes a smart and educated consumer.

Perceptions regarding the condition and acceptable standards for the degree of wear and tear of personal items such as clothes are relative and depend on the individual's background. Many wealthy donors feel the need to declutter and get rid of gently worn past-season clothes as they acquire new ones to maintain reasonably fashionable wardrobes (Selmys, 2016; Tuttle, 2012). Thus, gently used items, to most consumers' standards, are being donated and can be acquired at resale shops.

Supporting resale shops not only contributes to the bottom line of many independent store operators but the bottom line of the shoppers, in terms of savings. The maximum dollar amounts consumers are willing to spend are less than what they perceive to be the value of the shirts. Such a difference indicates the value-seeking nature that most consumers have. Spending much less than expected at resale to acquire highly valued clothes would mean great savings for the shoppers' bottom line. Further, the social bottom line is being addressed. Revenues generated by non-profit organization resale stores help to support the communities by providing financial assistance and social programs for those in need. Lastly, resale

shopping contributes to the environmental bottom line by minimizing negative impact on the environment and even improving it (Montgomery and Mitchell, 2014).

### **For Resale Operators**

Not everyone who shops at resale stores is struggling financially or motivated solely by economic reasons. Many simply love bargains (Selmys, 2016). A bargain may only be marginally different between discounted new merchandise at a retail store and used items at a resale shop. Operators thus have to consider pricing that still creates value based on merchandise characteristics to optimize profits from shoppers with more hedonic motivations. Goodwill Boutique is a good example of how this concept is applied. Better-branded goods are available at this outlet at higher prices for the “wealthier” Goodwill shoppers (Cascade Alliance, 2017).

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Our convenience sample comprised mostly college students belonging to Gen Y and Gen Z. While they were active consumers; their age, income, and experiences could guide their perception and evaluation, possibly, in a unique direction. A more diverse group of consumers could provide further insights into consumer perceptions toward second-hand products and shopping as well as confirm our findings. Further, the more diverse demographics of consumers will allow analyses that determine whether ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds have any influence on perceptions.

The experiment objects for this study were limited to white shirts with different attributes. A white shirt was deemed basic and classic to avoid bias based on fashion trends or personal tastes and preferences. However, in representing the different attributes, a variation of a white shirt was necessary. Consumer detection and evaluation of the shirts and corresponding attributes still depend on individuals’ tastes, preferences, and background knowledge. Clothing style and choices are largely influenced by personal characteristics. This should be a caveat in interpreting the study’s results. Similar studies using other categories of products would be enlightening.

The study was conducted before the Covid-19 Pandemic. Given the changes in economic situations for many consumers, differences in attitudes and consumption behaviors may exist. Coping with financial hardship could mean consumers adjusting where and how they shop for essential goods and services, including clothing. The potential benefits of resale shopping for second-hand merchandise may become more attractive and provide a needed solution for the current situation. Therefore, changes of attitudes and consumption habits relating to second-hand shopping would be interesting research topics to explore.

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