

# Thesis Declaration Page

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### Research Students Declaration Form

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**Perceptions and motivations influencing  
second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption  
by Generation X in Ireland.**

**An attitudinal thematic study.**

Bernie Curran (X23120118)

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Science in Management  
at National College of Ireland.

Supervisor: Corrinna Sherrin

August 2025

## Abstract

This thesis explores the key perceptions of Generation X ( born 1965 -1980) towards second-hand clothing shopping, as well as the motivations driving their purchases, from an Irish context.

The research question was investigated through semi-structured interviews with eight participants, both males and females. Both convenience and purposive sampling were used, and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

The research explored attitudes across several key themes, including environmental concern, ethical consumerism, economic considerations, nostalgia, and digital engagement.

Findings suggest a strong awareness of and alignment with sustainable values and ethical issues, particularly around fast fashion and global textile waste.

The study also found generational differences in engagement with online platforms, a fading stigma related to SH shopping, and a preference for in-person shopping methods.

Motivations for shopping in SH stores, related to ecological responsibility, financial frugality, support for good causes, enjoyment of unique fashion, and both nostalgia and hedonic factors were expressed.

There was a difference in males and females related to intention, in that males were motivated by need, and females were motivated by the treasure hunt aspect or the satisfaction in finding something unique, at a lower price.

There was also an attitude-behaviour gap identified, where intentions to shop sustainably were often undermined by convenience, habit, and practical issues.

The study also explores the barriers to consumption, and key points of concern were hygiene, quality, self-expression, and social perception.

Finally, despite the small sample size, the study uncovered the complex value-driven consumer behaviour of Generation X, with decisions not only driven by environmental factors but also by cultural identity, social norms, and personal experience.

## **Declaration**

‘I declare that this dissertation, which I have submitted to the National College of Ireland for the award of MSC in Management, is the result of my investigations, except where otherwise stated or acknowledged by references. This work has not been submitted for any other degree.’

Student: Bernie Curran

Student number: 23120118

Date : 15/08/2025

## **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this dissertation to all those who have never been allowed or had the opportunity to study or send any works to publication, but have enormous abilities to write great things.

For me, study is both a curse (at the time of much-needed commitment ) and a blessing (when achieved)

Special thanks to my partner Derek, who has been the eternal optimist.

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# **Perceptions and motivations influencing second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption by Generation X in Ireland.**

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The fast fashion industry has a global market valued at approximately \$123 billion. By 2022, it reached a valuation of \$106 billion, and projections estimate it will rise to \$179.5 billion by 2030. (Re-economy & Zion Market Research, 2024).

However, whilst fast fashion is a booming economic force, there are significant environmental factors associated with the industry as a whole. Textiles are ranked as the fourth-highest category for primary raw material and water consumption, following food, housing, and transport, and are the fifth-largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission, 2020).

Each year, consumers around the world contribute to 92 million tonnes of textile waste, a figure expected to climb to 134 million tonnes by 2030. Additionally, the industry is responsible for 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases annually, a number which is set to increase by 50% over the next five years (Rai, 2024).

The Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that the average Irish citizen consumes 53 kg of new textiles annually—double the European average of 26 kg (European Environment Agency, EEA, 2019). This excessive consumption leads to significant waste, with approximately 63,000 tonnes of textiles ending up in Irish landfills each year (Oxfam, 2024).

Upcoming European regulation changes will affect domestic textile waste disposal (Walsh, 2024; European Commission, 2024). Efforts to reduce the environmental burden of fast fashion focus on promoting the CE, with SH clothing markets offering a sustainable alternative. The findings from this study may indicate that there is an opportunity for those who manage CE activities to better inform and educate the public.

This research was designed as a two-stage study, with an initial pilot study of one participant to test the interview process. The pilot served as a small-scale trial to test the feasibility of the study and its potential effectiveness as a survey instrument. Pilot studies are often referred to as mini studies or feasibility assessments aimed at pre-testing the research tools to ensure clarity, relevance, and to gain the insights needed (Kezar, 2000)

After the pilot study was completed, some tweaks were needed before the next eight interviews were undertaken, as this researcher did not elicit the answers needed for a robust study analysis. This outcome may be attributed to inexperience and unclear instructions, nervousness, and adaptation to the new technology used, and these factors may have influenced responses. The questions in the pilot study resulted in somewhat monolithic and uniform answers, and it was felt were resistant to differing perspectives.

After the pilot study, it was clear that the study needed revision with prompts for the interviewer and adaptation through rephrasing of questions before the full-scale implementation took place.

There were three versions of the interview questions before the right version was finalised for the remainder of the study, with prompts added for the researcher to elicit richer data. Version three was decided upon for the remaining part of the study for the next eight participants.

This study will offer valuable insights into customer values and expectations, critical stakeholder considerations for effective planning and supply chain management in SH retail. As consumer motivation is closely linked to CE principles (Camacho et al, 2018), understanding these behaviours supports the development of more sustainable project designs. Additionally, identifying potential shifts in consumer demand enhances risk assessment and risk management strategies for businesses operating within the CE (Rizos et al, 2016).

Given the significant transformation required in the fashion and retail sectors, effective change management is essential. The rise of platforms like Vinted and Depop reflects a broader behavioural shift toward SH consumption (Vinted, 2024). By analysing these trends, this research contributes to enabling and managing this industry-wide transformation (Chang et al., 2018).

According to Ferraro et al, there has been some evolution related to SH consumption. Firstly, when the Global financial crisis occurred in 2008, there was a shift due to economic necessity, but also due to the value that is presented by SH shopping. These motivations stem from price sensitivities and price consciousness among consumers, as well as motivations that evolve due to the bargain-hunting element of shopping in thrift stores and the search for a fair price within the market (Guiot & Roux, 2010).

Later on, the topic of fashionability was explored and widely documented as a factor driving consumption in 2012, with the idea that fashion was a major influencing factor, and SH markets had become fashionable in their own right, with specialised markets opening up across the Globe.

Later, in 2014, sustainability was peaking in interest amongst the general public and prompting conversations with all stakeholders who started to question the fashion industry as a whole (Ferraro et al, 2016). As these studies are dated now, it will be interesting to see what shifts in opinion, if any, have occurred or to see what is currently topical with the participants from an Irish perspective.

As Ireland is slow to change consumer habits related to SH shopping as a solution, this warrants greater exploration from an Irish perspective. This research seeks to explore consumer perceptions and motivations surrounding SH clothing markets, intending to uncover key behavioural attitudes that could be influenced toward positive environmental change. Understanding these attitudes may lead to effective strategies for shifting consumption patterns and promoting sustainability in fashion in Ireland.

This proposed research aims to explore this phenomenon further, with a focus on Ireland, as behaviours can vary significantly across regions. For example, when comparing Ireland to its European neighbours, notable differences in consumption patterns emerged, as reported by the EPA above, but also reported by the European Economic Area reports. (Environmental Protection Agency & European Environment 2022).

This research problem is worthy of study because selling SH clothing presents a challenge, as buyers need to be persuaded through effective marketing strategies or nudged to feel a sense of psychological ownership over others' items (EPA, 2022).

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2:1 Overview and introduction to the literature**

The CE is a novel approach to production and consumption, taking decisive action to reduce related emissions ( Camacho-Otero et al, 2018). The Literature suggests that buying SH clothing reduces textile waste and mitigates pollution from clothing production ( Pearson & Hinton, 2023; Han et al., 2022).

The CE aims to decouple value creation from waste generation and resource use by radically transforming production and consumption systems, and SH shopping plays a major part in this transformation ( Camacho-Otero, Pettersen, 2018).

SH markets play that part by contributing to a socially just CE by extending the life cycle of garments, reducing demand for new clothing, and diverting waste from landfills. Repurposing also offers a second life opportunity through upcycling, creating social enterprises, and saving on energy and resources ( Bartl, 2019).

The now-famous ‘butterfly diagram’ by The Ellen MacArthur Foundation documented three principles of the CE, and one of those principles, which is of significant importance to this study, is the longer circulation of products and materials in both the biological and technical cycles (Camacho-Otero, Pettersen, 2018).

The butterfly diagram represents the whole CE system and demonstrates how materials continuously circulate within two cycles, the biological and the technological cycle. The foundation goes on to state in the technical cycle that materials and products are preserved and recirculate through our activities when we repair, reuse, remanufacture, and recycle them, just as we do with the process of SH shopping, garments are given that second life by being

passed to another person, but are sometimes remodelled, repaired and recycled within the industry. In the biological cycle, the emphasis is on biodegradable materials, things that are made from natural substances like recycling food waste, wood, cotton, and paper. These are considered materials that can safely be broken down in the environment and can be vital nutrients for the soil or environment, helping the ecosystem remain healthy. However, we know that textile waste remains a huge problem, as it does not always have an end, which is considered natural regeneration. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019)

The relevance in this study is primarily the technical cycle, whereby SH clothes shopping keeps products in use for longer, thus reducing waste. Whereby producing new products and materials requires raw materials, energy, and ultimately creates emissions.

Buying SH conserves natural resources and reduces pollution in the production process; therefore, it is essential to understand consumer perceptions and motivations for purchasing SH clothing. To do this, it is essential to examine existing literature and previous studies that explore the factors that may or may not influence decision-making.

Common themes that have previously emerged include fast fashion and sustainable fashion, as well as consumers' perceptions of both areas (Pejak, 2022; Ting & Stagner, 2021; Busalim et al., 2022; Hill & Lee,; Gwoek et al., 2012). What customers are aware of or understand is also relevant in previous studies. (Niinimaki 2010)

The impact of culture on trend development, especially on different demographics, can also play a part. ( Murphy, 2017) Media can play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour, and often we see the use of 'influencers' in social media targeting CE actors ( Markova, I., & Grajeda, J., 2018). These and other relevant studies will be explored in greater detail later.

While many companies often promote their sustainability efforts and alignment with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, some of these claims amount to ‘greenwashing’ rather than genuine commitment to sustainable practices ( Nguyen & Ngoc, 2023).

As this concept interacts with motivations and perceptions, this writer will further discuss the concept of greenwashing to uncover how/if this may impact a person’s decision to choose new over SH clothing.

## **2.2 Trend Analyses of the fast fashion and the wider global fashion industry, Ireland included, 2015 to 2025**

Pejak ( 2022) discusses the serious social and environmental impact of overconsumption because of the fast fashion business model. Fast fashion, mass production, quantity over quality, and the emergence of quicker distribution channels are still major environmental concerns.

There are also difficulties in establishing the actual value of the fashion industry as a whole and the fast fashion industry, as estimates are conflicting due to how different countries have different classification parameters, and there is no globally accepted measurement.

A pertinent quote by Ting and Stagner encapsulates this rapidly exploding trend of fast fashion by stating, “Living irreversibly for today’s trends will deprive us of tomorrow’s future”. (Ting & Stagner, 2021). The trend seems to be continuing, for example, Table A demonstrates the trajectory of the value of fast fashion and how it has continually grown since 2015. Interestingly, Ting and Stagner could only document the value of fast fashion from the year 2015, as fast fashion was not a term used before this year in much of the literature.

Table A sets out the Global fashion industry and the Global fast fashion industry values, and the comparisons to the Irish fashion industry, which shows the growth in both fashion as a whole and later fast fashion. Trends in Global fashion and fast fashion show continued growth and the same interruptions or stagnations from the global pandemic. In Ireland, growth spurts occurred from 2021 to 2025, and are at a faster pace compared to the rest of the world (marketresearch.com, 2024)

**Table A. Global trend analysis and Irish comparator 2015-2025**

Year	Global Fashion Industry Value	Global Fast Fashion Industry Value	Fashion industry in Ireland Value
2015	\$3 trillion (fashionunited.com, 2017)	\$ 68.6 billion (Globenewswire.com, 2021)	€3 billion: clothing, footwear, and textiles (research.intertradeireland.com, 2000)
2020	\$ 2.4 Trillion (Gitnux.org, 2025)  The market was affected by COVID-19	\$ 68.6 billion.  Note that the market was affected by COVID-19 and stayed stagnant	<b>Not readily available.</b> However, reports show a decline of 20.1% due to lockdowns (Globaldata.com)
2021	\$1.55 trillion (Gitnux.org, 2025)	\$91.2 billion (topnews.com, 2025) – huge increase on the previous year as markets/society reopened	<b>Not readily available.</b> However, a surge was reported for sales up by 10.6% and growth in online 9.5% between 2020 and 2025 (CSO, 2022)
2022	1.7 trillion (expertbeacon.com)	\$103.2 Billion (alliedmarketresearch.com)	3.8 billion euros (leadingmarketresearch.com )
2023	1.7 trillion (fortunebusinessinsights.com)	\$122.98 Billion (Globalnewswire.com )	4.6 billion (Marketresearch.com, 2024)
2025	1.84 trillion Projected (Uniformmarket.com, 2025)	\$179.5 billion projected (Re-economy & Zion Market Research, 2024)	€5.22 billion (Irishtimes.com, 2025)

## 2.3 Sustainable fashion

Many definitions of sustainable fashion exist also, from one of the earliest being penned by Niinimaki in 2010 who described sustainable fashion as “Clothing that is designed for long lifetime use, it is produced in an ethical production system, perhaps even locally, it causes little or no environmental impact and makes use of eco-labelled or recycled materials” (Niinimaki, 2010).

This definition is only partly relevant when considering SH clothing in particular, as it refers to the production phase of garments and products.

However, it has relevance if we relate it to SH clothing shopping in that SHC shopping causes little or no environmental impact as products don't have to be produced, and they are already recycled products. Conversely, we have to ask the question: back in 2010, could Niinimaki have ever considered waste from the CE, as this is omitted from her definition.

There has been significant criticism of the waste generated from SH stores, and this was not considered. Furthermore, she concentrates on design and production, and somewhat ignores the end phase of the products and materials within the CE.

However, she makes clearer and more relevant points in another paper, specifically relating to clothing. This paper is entitled: Eco clothing, Consumer identity and Ideology, which is discussed later.

Another significant study when we talk about the definition of sustainable fashion is from Turner et al. ( 2019). In this study, there is a discussion surrounding how new technologies are disrupting agents, and they posit that the customer should be near the production process of the products or services to be classed as sustainable products or services. An example of how our solutions may not be entirely correct is the explosion of Vinted – a supposedly sustainable approach !. With new technologies enabling online sales globally, materials and products lose that sense of sustainability because they are being shipped all over the world by

train, plane, and automobile, using up vital resources and energy that they tried to save in the first instance by using environmentally friendly production methods!

Although Niinimaki's definition of sustainable fashion is well documented, she delved further in her research surrounding the concept of eco-shopping, which is the relevant point to this author's literature review. Her position when she states that clothing should have a long lifetime and be recycled, contributes to the concept that SH shopping should be considered at the design stage by manufacturers and that clothing and textiles need to be reused, recycled, remodelled, and stay in the CE for as long as possible, and not be for single use. In summation, she states that the product lifecycle of fashion items should be long-term. This dissertation is in the same sphere as Niinimaki regarding the topic of study, and if we understand people's perceptions and barriers to SH shopping, we may have more robust solutions for the future.

She states that eco-shopping is not just about the environment but can intersect with a person's identity and self-expression. Niinimaki makes relevant arguments that clothing is a symbol through which individuals express themselves and their ethical values, identity, and attitudes. And this is important to those in management, in the CE space, so they can translate this into actual consumption in SH stores. She goes on to state that it remains challenging to do this, as there is an 'attitude-behaviour gap' it is not simply enough to be educated and aware and mindful of environmental factors to empower consumption, we need to understand the consumer identity to fully promote sustainable fashion choices (Niinimaki, 2010) The takeaway from Niinimaki is the fact that a consumers ethical beliefs do not always align with their buying habits, citing three issues: price sensitivity, fashion trends, and social pressures. (Niinimaki, 2010)

In Niinimaki's heavily cited works, the positive aspects are well known; however, there are limitations in her studies, and criticisms arise, such as limited labour analyses. This limitation is born out of studies by Tansy Hoskins (2014), who highlighted the limitation of prioritising materials and markets over people and power. The way this has been documented is through: 1. labour analyses, 2. consumer framing, and 3. technology. Hoskins criticised the fashion industry as a whole and criticised it for prioritizing materials and markets over people and power, valuing profits, the use of raw materials, and expansion over people.

It does not contradict Niinimaki's definition of sustainable fashion but they look at things from two different perspectives: Hoskins from a Marxist anti-capitalist focus and Niinimaki from a holistic approach.

Sharma and Rudd (2003) also criticize the work of Niinimaki (2010) and highlight the problem of shifting agency and responsibility away from corporations and governments to the individual. Tying in with the research question of "*what are the perceptions and motivations influencing second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption by Generation X in Ireland*", it is abundantly clear that gaps exist in the literature and thereby putting a spotlight on the usefulness of a study such as this paper.

As definitions changed over the years, scholars started to incorporate other principles in the definitions of sustainable fashion, such as principles that reflected fair trading and the use of materials that did not cause harm to the environment ( Goworek et al., 2012). There are many authors who disagree or contest this view, and there are many debates on sustainable fashion and whether it lacks a fixed, coherent definition ( Palm & Busch, 2022).

Whilst Rotenberg (2021) argues that sustainable fashion is in itself conceptually oxymoronic because fashion is trend-driven and this clashes with the ideals of sustainability. Niinimaki

later highlights the fact that the whole definition needs to be redesigned, encompassing values and moral frameworks ( Niinimaki, 2025)

Goworek et al. (2012) evaluated strategies in the sustainable clothing markets in the UK in 2012. They also found that the participants had limited awareness of the sustainability impacts of clothing, and price and convenience were the important factors for consumers. This study also touched on disposal habits, which are equally as important in the debate, and encouraging consumers to reflect on their practices could lead to greater sustainable practices. Reflecting this study, education was a key feature mentioned (Goworek et al., 2012)

Sustainable fashion has continued to be a topical issue over the last decade, attracting attention from policymakers, firms, and consumers. Social psychology of consumer behaviour has some relevance to this exploration, as we are trying to understand consumers. The key areas of most academic studies are related to understanding individual factors of cognition, perceptions, attitudes, and motivation. However, social factors such as social influence, cultural influence, social class, and the impact of reference groups all impact consumers' motivations, highlighting the need for targeted marketing.

Marketing implications relate to persuasion, brand building, marketing strategies, and also to ethical marketing. Summing up the psychology of consumer behaviour is the link between individual psychology and its social context, where the space in which the consumption of SH clothing occurs. (Wanke, M., 2008)

According to Busalim et al.(2002), the volume of publications related to consumer behaviour has significantly increased since 2009, encompassing qualitative, experimental, and cross-cultural studies; however, longitudinal studies are significantly underrepresented in the

literature. One issue is that much of the research published is not adequately grounded in theory; therefore, additional studies grounded in theory are needed if we want to change perceptions and consumer behaviour, especially regarding SH shopping (Busalim et al., 2022).

Hill and Lee state that the fashion industry harms the environment and society across all stages of the product life cycle. Because of harsh criticism such as this of the fast fashion industry, sustainability is consistently on the agenda and continues to be topical across the entire fashion industry (Hill & Lee, 2012).

It is interesting to read that both Hill and Lee found, amongst a cohort of 80 young students (aged 18-25), that there were low levels of knowledge and understanding of the holistic principle of sustainability and the adverse effects of the clothing industry. The results from their study confirmed that more concise educational and marketing campaigns are needed in this area (Hill & Lee, 2012).

Most studies relate to younger people, particularly women; therefore, it is imperative to research all age groups, such as this study, which concentrates particularly on Gen X, males, and females, who are also consumers of SH clothes. The novelty of this study has identified a gap and aims to concentrate on Gen X, thus adding to the growing literature.

Research on sustainability and sustainable fashion has increasingly explored issues related to sweatshops and labour conditions, highlighting the negative impacts that production processes can have on workers within the fashion industry (Reimers et al., 2016). This is another reason why we need to displace new products with SH products.

And conversely there are also some negative views on what is now being termed as ‘recommerce’ by scholars such as Rubing and Soundararajan (2024), who categorically state that the rise of ecommerce platforms, although it creates opportunities for greater sustainability and stronger brand experience control, it has to be stated it poses a risk of cannibalisation of the sales of new items ( Rubing & Sundararajan, 2024) So much debate from all sides almost makes the topics controversial.

Reimers, alongside two other academics, Magnuson and Chao, broached another topic, such as the ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ that is reported to exist relating to SH consumption. They asked the question about how this ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ discussed earlier exists, and could the academic conceptualisation of ethical clothing could be the cause of the ‘attitude-behaviour gap’?

The research talks about the differing definitions of ethical clothing in that consumers think about animal welfare, slow fashion, and affordability, whereas in academia, academics define ethical clothing in terms of environmental and labour-related issues. They go on to say that different marketing strategies are needed, and communication needs to change to resonate with consumers to contribute to that gap in what consumers say they will do (attitudes) and what they do (behaviours) (Reimers et al., 2016).

Despite its well-documented environmental harm and the adverse effects on workers within its supply chain, the fast fashion industry continues to thrive economically, generating significant profits for global stakeholders. This paradox reflects a deeper conflict of interest: the financial incentives of fast fashion versus the growing awareness of its catastrophic environmental effects. Although the necessary solutions are well understood, the industry’s momentum and consumer habits are often slow to adopt solutions, and this is reflected in Ireland’s consumer habits ( Fagerhus & Hallqvist, 2020).

Understanding this, in turn, could boost participation in the CE. Although Evans et al state that higher levels of ecological consciousness are associated with SH shopping behaviour, this may be conflicting with Irish consumers' attitudes (Evans et al, 2022) Early statistics are scant on the value of the Irish market regarding SH clothing; however the table below, when reports are available, show huge growth in the three years from 2021 to 2023 and this is estimated to grow further.

**Table B. Trend analyses of SH fashion consumption globally and in Ireland**

Year	Global SH Clothing Industry Value	Irish SH clothing industry Value
2021	\$ 36 billion (Thredup.com, 2021)	€11.3 million - €26.4 million (EPA.ie)
2022	\$119.7 billion (Global market insights.com)	€53 million charity shop sales (charityretailireland.ie)  €25 million export revenue (Fabricofchange.ie)  €40-€50 million domestic online /thrift/vintage spend (Irishtimes.com, 2023)
2023	\$152.5 billion (cognitivemarketresearch.com)	€53.7 million (charityretailireland.ie)  €60-70 million (ireachinsights.com)
2024	\$204.7 billion (just-style.com)	€169.9 Million (Ibisworld.com)

The table above shows steady growth in both Ireland and globally, and this trend signifies important factors, firstly, that sustainability is a driver, as consumers are increasingly motivated by environmental concerns.

Secondly, the economy is another factor, as we have seen in much of the research, that as prices rise in clothing, these pressures have made affordability a key consideration for consumers, pushing them towards lower-priced items that they may need to purchase from SH markets.

Digitalisation is also key, opening up the availability and revolutionizing markets with platforms such as Vinted. These three factors are now converging to transform consumer SH markets, and rapid growth is expected to continue (Custom market insights, 2024).

## **2.4 Consumer perceptions towards SH clothing shopping from an Irish perspective**

To give context to this research, two studies conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from 2021 to 2022 were examined; although these were Irish studies, they had certain age and gender limitations.

The first study, conducted in 2021, of 1000 participants, both male and female, had very positive infographics and statistics that the EPA hoped would inform policy, behavioural change interventions, and awareness campaigns around textile recycling.

Although the first study consisted of a larger sample base and covered both males and females, the follow-on study had various limitations because the cohort was smaller, just females, and within the age range of 18-35 years old.

From these two studies, a knowledge gap has been identified, and this author suggests that the rationale exists for further exploration, which should provide a valuable addition to the academic literature in the future.

The above EPA studies provided insights into the attitudes of both regular SHC buyers and those less engaged in the practice. It was interesting to note that younger participants had a better understanding of where to shop, due to their greater technological skills and frequent use of online platforms like Depop, for both purchasing and selling. (EPA, 2022).

Technology influences the shopping behaviours of women in different age groups. Women aged 18-24 tend to shop more online, while those aged 25-35 show lower awareness of online SH clothing platforms.

These studies also revealed differences in attitudes based on location, with buyers in larger cities such as Dublin showing greater awareness of SHC shopping options (EPA, 2022).

These studies suggest that the literature is scant, as older people have not been included. There is also another gap in the literature demonstrating that the two younger demographics are not aligned in consumption behaviours, and the older demographics have not been explored. What has been omitted from these studies provides a scope and validation for a novel study, such as this, with Gen X.

The study additionally posited negative attitudinal connotations as to why some women avoid SH shopping. This underscores the need for increased awareness among women in this age group. For those managing SH shops, the study offers valuable insights into how to increase

revenue by shifting attitudes through more positive marketing strategies. Specifically, focusing on improving perceptions of an individual's self-concept, as some people feel there is a 'type' of person who only shops in SH stores, or the quality and hygiene of SH products and the shops themselves could be key to changing consumer behaviours. (EPA, 2022).

Downsides to both buying in-store and online were highlighted in these studies, as well. Key findings from this study highlight the need to reinvigorate the whole experience for consumers of SHC to redefine the values; this is imperative for change management. This author's research will delve deeper into this area of study, where knowledge gaps have been identified at the research proposal stage. The author's research aims to examine whether there is a need to transform the perception and attitudes towards SHC. And to ascertain motivations and perceptions towards SH shopping, having or lacking a consumption value.

#### **2.4.1 Limitations, conflicts, and gaps in the literature.**

Two notable shortcomings of both EPA studies were, firstly, a gender imbalance and secondly, an age limitation; the aim of a follow-up study that includes both genders and differing age ranges could provide deeper insights into behaviours and attitudes. (EPA, 2022) Generation X, those born between 1965 and 1980, who are now aged 45 to 60 years old, have not been explored in either of these Irish studies; therefore, this warrants greater exploration.

The literature provides conflicting findings regarding the motivating factors behind the purchase of SHC. For instance, a study by Da Silva Almeida (2020) suggests that consumption intentions are positively influenced by attitude, which, in turn, is directly shaped by both environmental knowledge and concern. However, the EPA study (2022) considered why people continue to buy new clothing despite it contradicting their beliefs and environmental concerns. These findings suggest that the drivers for purchasing new clothing

are much stronger than those for eco-friendly consumption behaviours, and this issue warrants deeper analysis, as literature suggests it is not just enough to be environmentally aware; you have to take responsibility for your consumption actions.

The literature also suggests that marketing and awareness campaigns need to be bolder and more provocative to try change behaviours because whilst the number of eco-conscious consumers is rising, numerous studies (Bernardo et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2012; Sorensen & Jorgensen, 2019) have shown that this green attitude does not always translate into behaviours, and this may be why Irish consumers continually choose to buy new over buying SHC, and are buying significantly higher levels to our European partners (EPA, 2021).

In other Australian studies by Ferraro, Sands and Govan, they state that there is a huge emphasis placed on ‘fashionability’ and that the vast majority (83%) of SH shoppers are driven by fashion when shopping in SH stores.

In this Australian study, they emphasise that although there are discernible differences between countries, there is a great deal of similarity among Australian, UK, and USA charity shoppers. (Govan et al 2016)

This concept of ‘fashionability’ has not come up in Irish studies but may have implications for Irish SH retailers. Trends are sometimes driven by market shifts and the potential value for customers when faced with economic depressions ( Guiot & Roux, 2010; Tuttle, 2014). However, the concept of SH clothing being fashionable in its own right is increasing even in places like China, where people usually dislike wearing used clothing ( Cervellon et al., 2012). The topic of fashionability will feature in this research.

This has resulted in the meaning of SH being redefined and offering a real alternative to conventional shopping, yet we still don't know what exactly drives this growth in the sector, and if fashionability is an actual factor for Irish consumers.

The growth within the sector has not gone unnoticed by the big names in fashion, and Ferraro et al., are quoted as saying in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services as far back as 2016, that even luxury brand leaders like Ralph Lauren are seeking SH vintage pieces to sell alongside new collections in their flagship shops (Ferraro et al., 2016)

We understood from very early on that SH consumption relates directly to consumption theory in that objects consumed are a medium for cultural meaning and messages in society (McCracken, 1986), And can relate to one's identity, so understandably fashion has to play a huge part in consumption and is worthy of further investigation from an Irish perspective as motivations may have changed or evolved. This is another reason, fashion will be explored in this writer's study.

Outside of Ireland, findings published in 2021 report that having previous experience in purchasing SHC influences consumers' perception of the barriers and indicate that social embarrassment is the factor that most negatively influences the purchase of SHC, as well as the consumer's lack of knowledge. (Silva et al, 2021)

However, later studies such as (Valor et al, 2022) and (Taylor et al, 2023) contradict these reported issues around embarrassment in Silva's study. As SH shopping becomes more the norm and is no longer confined to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, it is also no longer confined to charity shops. Consumers are moving away from charity shops and going to peer-to-peer platforms. Scholars like Taylor and Valor report that the negative stigma of

embarrassment is no more and that factors now relate to sustainability, trust issues, hygiene, or poor quality.

In Malaysia students reported through an online quantitative study that, influencing factors were firstly condition, followed by price, then brand, and the negative influencers were concerned with hygiene and quality, and less about stigma or embarrassment. (Manan, 2025) Perceived inferiority was the biggest negative influencer. It will be interesting to see what changes negatively impact now in 2025, from an Irish perspective.

Whilst the two EPA studies are recent and relevant, there have been recent shifts that suggest that SH is replacing new in wardrobes across Europe, according to Vinted's latest impact report. Although it has only been three years since the last EPA report was published, Vinted has taken off!

Vinted is a peer-to-peer online platform marketplace where users can buy, sell, and swap SH clothing. It concentrates on pre-owned fashion but also allows some listings for homewares, cosmetics, and new books in some regions. Its most popular use is through an app on one's phone, free and easy to use. The convenience continues through its facility to generate digital or printed labels with drop-off points locally. It is based in Lithuania, and users can trade across Europe as it is European-based, and growth is expected to continue.

Vinted reports that:

- 65% of Vinted members have a quarter or more of their wardrobes made up of SH items
- 84% of Vinted buyers find the quality of SH items bought on Vinted as good or even better than new items
- Vinted members helped avoid 679 kilo tonnes of CO2 emissions in 2023 by buying SH instead of new

This is the current trend within the SH clothing markets, driven by, as we have already discussed, affordability, quality, and environmental factors. However, what's more important is that there is a protective measure in place that addresses social pressures, because with Vinted, you are, to some extent, an anonymous buyer or seller, as certain information is inaccessible, and there is limited public information available. For buyers, typically only first names and cities are shared. Shipping details are not publicly displayed, and all communication is conducted through Vinted's internal messaging system. Sellers are told to be mindful of the information they include on their profiles.

As with all new industries, there are teething problems, and Vinted has been fined 2.4 million for GDPR violations. It is now working on GDPR, encouraging the use of Pseudonyms and selective information sharing, and more secure transactions (Vinted, 2024).

This approach can only be seen as increasing motivations to buy and sell SHC, as much of the literature suggests; some consumers feel shame and are affected by social pressures. Stigma impacts perceptions and demotivates consumers, being seen as a barrier to engaging in SH shopping. However, with Vinted, quality assurance is guaranteed, or payment will not be made to the seller if buyers are not pleased with the purchase. (Vinted, 2024) Although

Vinted's report has certain limitations due to it being a survey of just Vinted customers, it makes for remarkable reading and a clear indication that the SH markets are shifting again, and this time it's in favour of our planet, or is it ?.

There are, of course, criticisms of reports by Vinted, in that there are uncertainties around the methodology used, as impulse purchasing may overstate environmental benefits. Self-reporting is also criticised as consumer biased, as it is a subjective survey of their consumers. Vogue Business questioned the validity of reports such as these, especially regarding the displacement rate. The displacement rate is a key metric used in sustainability assessments of SH shopping. It represents the percentage of SH purchases that replace the purchase of a new item. They criticise Vinted in quantifying their impact by asking: Are resale and repair really that beneficial for sustainability? (Vogue Business, 2025)

And other scholars, such as Arrigo in 2021, state that the literature on this topic is fragmented with no clear systemisation to prove the environmental impact, and it remains so today (Arrigo, 2021)

Vinted is not without sustainability criticism either, as some writers have cited that platforms such as Vinted and Depop are mimicking fast fashion's high churn trend-obsessed culture, inciting more consumption by their users. As recently as March 2024, within an article by Ella Van Leuven in the Arbiter, which is a student newsletter, she states that ' although buying clothes SH is certainly a step towards more sustainable consumption, purchasing clothes from thrift stores or SH sites doesn't guarantee that you're having a positive impact on the environment' (Van Leuven, 2024)

She continues by stating that the rise in popularity of SH fashion, largely thought of as a sustainable alternative to the fast fashion industry, has paradoxically begun to show signs of

unsustainability due to a culture of overconsumption (Van Leuven, 2024). Therefore, the critical question that needs to be asked is: Are we getting the solutions right when it comes to trends taking off? And is more research needed? As more often than not, pitfalls often relate to waste colonialism, distribution issues, and can drive up and normalise consumption, which in turn produces fast fashion problems.

In France there was an academic study published in the Journal of Cleaner Production in December 2024, which found that when they investigated sites like Vinted, they discovered that lower prices and delivery convenience led to higher demands for clothing consumption and in some cases triggered over consumption and impulse buying, which had a rebound effect and was seen as weakening ecological benefits (Dekhili et al., 2024)

Therefore, it's important to fully examine solutions such as resale sites and peer-to-peer platforms like Vinted. Although they provide environmental benefits on the surface, they can foster individualistic behaviours that contradict sustainability. And this concept was discussed in this study, in which one participant had a fear of Vinted as she had heard it was "quite addictive" and 'open 24hrs'; for these reasons, she steered away from it for fear her spending may become uncontrollable.

## **2.5 Trends in consumer behaviour**

SH consumption has evolved over three distinct periods: emergence and expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; decline and stigmatisation in the twentieth century; and de-stigmatisation and renewed popularity since the 2000s (Weinstein, 2014).

Accordingly to Evans et al in the Journal of Retail and Consumer Services, their studies of consumer orientations of SHC fashion shoppers went into a deeper analysis of issues relating

to frugality, ecological-consciousness, materialism, nostalgia-proneness, style, and fashion-consciousness. Themes that are explored again and again in most related literature. (Evans et al, 2022).

Although the literature shows that female consumers purchase more SH or thrifted fashion items per month than their male counterparts (Markova and Grajeda 2024). There also seems to be more females studied, and typically this study concentrates yet again on females; however, it is outside of Europe and the USA, where most studies are conducted, and focuses on Australian consumers and compares frequent and less frequent shoppers of SHC, so it has some diversity.

Markova and Grajeda's study begins by emphasising the harmful environmental impact of fast fashion, citing major retailers like H&M, Zara, and Uniqlo as key contributors. These companies are responsible for producing new, inexpensive fashion collections every two to three weeks, exacerbating the problem (Evans et al, 2022). Although background information surrounding the problem is important, Evans et al go deeper into the issue and explore why people don't buy SHC.

Both studies by Evans (2022) and Markova & Grajeda (2024) discuss similar themes, citing eco-friendly values not reflecting purchasing behaviours, and they explore the reasoning behind this as psychological. Guiot and Roux (2010) also define motivations as the 'determinants of a person's actions, including wishes, needs, emotions, feelings, opinions, and aspirations'.

Outcomes in the studies above supported the hypothesis that having an eco-conscious mind was a driver to purchase and not just an intention to purchase, and that barriers placed in the way before purchase would not affect the final act of purchase. An interesting result of this study, but it predominantly relates to frequent shoppers of SHC stores only, which may be the reason for the difference of opinion between the two studies.

The results of these studies were aligned with previous research by Bae and Yan (2018), Ferraro et al. (2016), Yan et al. (2015), and Zaman et al. (2019), confirming the connection between ecological consciousness and SH shopping frequency. These themes keep occurring in different studies, but specifically relate to well-established and consistent shoppers of SH clothes.

While there are clear motivations for SHC consumption, significant barriers remain that deter many potential consumers. Hur (2020), through two semi-structured qualitative studies involving 134 SHC consumers and 138 non-consumers in the UK, highlights the importance of understanding both groups to fully grasp the perceptions and motivations surrounding SHC consumption. The study revealed that non-consumers raised concerns about hygiene and store cleanliness, doubts regarding the quality of available items, and limitations on self-expression due to restricted product variety. Additionally, many expressed discomfort with the social stigma often associated with wearing SH clothing. Hur (2020) suggests that addressing these four key concerns—hygiene, quality, self-expression, and social perception—could be crucial in converting non-consumers into consumers.

To respond to these concerns, managers should focus on improving the perceived quality and cleanliness of both products and retail spaces, maintaining high standards throughout the shopping experience. Store design and visual merchandising can be leveraged to create a

boutique or contemporary aesthetic that repositions SHC as fashionable and desirable. Furthermore, targeted marketing campaigns that portray SHC as a trendy and socially responsible choice, especially in light of current environmental challenges, can help shift public perception. Education also remains vital; clear, concise, and accessible information about the environmental benefits of SH fashion can empower consumers to make more sustainable choices.

The study finds five key values driving SHC consumption and these are recurring in most of the literature, cost saving associated with purchasing SH items and the economic value it presents, secondly the value that comes from self-expression, in that consumers by buying SH clothing have the chance to express individuality and personal style buying items that may no longer be available to buy in retail stores.

The obvious one is the environmental value, knowing that after purchase, you contribute to sustainability through the extension of the life of the reused clothing. And lastly, you enjoy the experience of rummaging and get some hedonic satisfaction from the whole experience, with the added social contribution value knowing you are supporting a great charitable cause. (Hur, 2020).

More up-to-date studies by Koay et al (2023) found similar outcomes to Hur; however, there were additional concerns that surfaced, such as the quality of information and the quality of service provided in SH stores being an issue for consumers. The study posited that if these areas were lacking it could interrupt the values felt or perceived by consumers, regarding hedonism, utilitarianism, and environmentalism. And if service quality is high, it can reduce the perceived risks related to functionality, aesthetics, and sanitation. (Koay et al, 2023).

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure: sensual self-indulgence, and in many studies, this is documented as a motivator, because there is a certain thrill in treasure hunting with emotional rewards, and shoppers are described as nostalgic hedonists Guiot & Roux, 2010).

These are all factors that positively enhance purchasing behaviour. Reputational damage can occur through word of mouth, especially if service and communication are poor. Conversely, positive endorsement can occur if service and communication are good; therefore, these areas are relevant and important to drive consumption in SH stores.

The most up-to-date study read was a 2024 paper by Sueda and Seo, which shows that cultural factors can also influence consumers. As this was a Japanese study, it aligned with most other studies that consumer perceptions of social responsibility and environmental values significantly impact purchasing intentions, which is the trend in most studies. However, there was one difference for Japanese consumers in that perceived value was heightened when a sense of uniqueness was found in SH products, which played a key role in shaping purchase decisions for SHC consumers.

The landscape of SH clothing consumption is evolving and quite varied across regions, giving rise to the need for localised studies such as this Irish study to provide valuable insights into risk factors alongside motivating factors so that strategies can drive consumption higher in each region, and in this case, in Ireland ( Suedo & Seo 2024).

## **2.6 Trends in Ireland**

So, what is the position in Ireland, and what are the experts saying about fast fashion and SH clothes, and the implications for the Irish environment? Claire Downey, CEO of the Rediscovery Centre, and Arran Murphy, who is the Program Manager of Rediscover Fashion, spoke to Arron McElroy from RTE One Morning Ireland in May 2025 about the impact of

fast fashion on our environment. Ms Downey stated that, as fast fashion has a business model of producing clothes in bulk to meet changing trends, this has stimulated more purchasing behaviour. However, Ms Downey continued ‘We want to help people think about why we need to reduce how many textiles we’re buying in the first place and then help show what you can do to keep them going for longer, and there is a huge lack of awareness as to what to do with old clothing (RTE, 2025).

The article continues with a focus on looking for other solutions. In New Zealand and Australia, clothes have been turned into pellets to repair roads, while in mainland Europe, they are used to make furniture and building materials. Mr Sweeney, who is Oxfam’s strategy Manager, stated that ‘what is needed is investment in recycling infrastructure, and this will be a key part of dealing with textile waste in the future, where end-of-life clothes can be repurposed’ (RTE, 2024).

Ireland has started to look at what we can do as a nation, in our response, and as a first step, has launched a public consultation and a roadmap to tackle the problem of textile waste. Minister with responsibility for the CE, Alan Dillon, states that the textile industry operators work to a linear model, which is a take, make, and waste textiles model, and in Ireland, there is great potential for a textile CE element (Dillon,2024).

In 2025, Rediscovery Centre, in conjunction with the Government of Ireland, published a CE report with key insights on trends through an evidence-based approach, to public engagement and communications for the CE.

This study included a targeted review of existing research carried out in an Irish context. With a thematic review of 159 studies and a subsequent analysis and comparison of 23 Irish-specific studies. Although the study covered all aspects of the CE, textiles were a feature. The results determined variations across socio-demographic groups such as age, gender, and

economic status, reporting that people in higher social grades are more likely to report frequently purchasing textiles. There was also a clear shift towards youth-centric and digital-first approaches, particularly within sustainability-focused efforts such as those targeting textile consumption and waste ( Rediscovery Centre, 2025)

They completed a second report entitled ‘Synthesis report 2025, which was concerning CE behaviours and attitudes and was funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

The overall objective of the study was to establish key insights for future effective communication strategies, strategies that may better engage audiences with the CE. Another objective was to identify current gaps in the research.

Findings related to this author's study concerning clothing were :

- **Men and Older people** are more likely to value the durability of clothes and wear them until they wear out.
- **Women** are more likely to be frequent purchasers of textiles, with 1 in 3 women under the age of 50 buying clothes often (every week), both in stores and online.
- **Women** are more likely to buy clothes that they never end up wearing or only wear a few times.
- **Young people** are more likely to buy clothes online, and 45% of 16-34-year-olds send back products that they bought online.
- **Low re-users** cite the availability and cost of SH items as barriers
- **People with greater trust** in SH products are more likely to reuse.
- **Women** are more likely to trust the quality of SH products, and are more likely to cite cost as a motivator for reuse.
- **Young people** are more likely to report engaging with reuse, particularly through online platforms, and are more likely to trust the quality of SH products.
- **Men** are more likely to see clothes shopping as a chore that they do not enjoy, perhaps partly explaining lower baseline consumption.

A varied and interesting mix of findings, especially related to gender and age, as consumer motivation is multifaceted and not entirely driven by price. Also, younger demographics drive sustainable trends as mentioned above through personal branding and the use of online platforms to make purchases, making them key segments for SH clothing markets. Rediscovery Centre (2025).

These findings have directly informed the development of the sampling frame for this study. The intention is to interview a balanced mix of male and female participants, to avoid bias with a particular focus on individuals from Generation X. Notably, one of the key findings indicates that men and older individuals are more likely to prioritise the durability of clothing and tend to wear items until they are no longer usable.

This behaviour raises questions about how such values might influence or potentially discourage engagement with SH clothing markets. Additionally, the study seeks to explore whether there are trust-related concerns among older individuals when it comes to purchasing SH items, and whether women may generally exhibit greater trust in this context.

Furthermore, while existing literature suggests that younger people are more inclined to reuse clothing, it remains to be explored academically whether older generations, particularly Gen X, may also demonstrate strong reuse behaviours. This research will also consider gendered perspectives on SH shopping to better understand how men's attitudes compare to those of women. To uncover these themes, participants will be selected to ensure an equal gender split within the Gen X age cohort.

There are many reasons for the need to change consumers' minds around SH shopping, and it is very much a Global Citizen issue on the agenda, which is well-documented in the 17

Sustainable Goals. Goal 12 of the 17 sustainable goals regards responsible consumption and production, which relates to SH clothes shopping; many of the other goals may also be affected by the practice of buying SH , such as good health and wellbeing, clean water and sanitation, sustainable cities and communities, climate action, life below water, and life on land as there are interdependencies and many correlations.

However, criticisms from scholars and journalists pertain, who argue that buying SHC is not a straightforward win, nor as effective as it may be presented in a study such as this. They state that much of the donated clothes/textiles and textile waste, which are exported, are not managed properly, and they put this figure as high as 40-70% which are burned or dumped in wetlands or countries such as Ghana (Apnews.com, 2024).

ABC Journalists such as Fitton and Payson (2024) are also critical, stating that the global south communities are the ones affected, with 80-90 % of donated clothes being burned and causing huge pollution to waterways by this waste, resulting in toxic chemicals and microplastics contamination.

## **2.7 The role of the media towards good global citizenship**

Global citizenship is the idea that, as a collective community, we all have responsibilities and roles in addressing global challenges and enabling positive change. Therefore, there is an interconnectedness and commitment that goes beyond traditional borders or local communities. According to CE stakeholders, the media plays a big part in promoting this

concept. Understanding the perception of CE drivers is crucial for communicating efforts aimed at persuading citizens to change their habits (Carbonell-Alcocer et al., 2025).

They go on to explain that if we are to transition to a CE, strategies targeting society fully should be segmented by population groups, as aspects such as area, age, etc., matter in delivering the message. Social marketing in the media promotes actions and behaviours rather than selling products and can be a powerful tool to engage citizens, influence social attitudes, and overcome psychological barriers (Gonella et al., 2024).

Furthermore, digital platforms, particularly social media, are increasingly essential in driving the shift alongside segmentation for different audiences, but also consider from a local perspective, it should be a bottom-up approach an approach but include the political and social perspective to achieve that effective transition (Voukkali et al. 2023) Considerable attention needs to be placed on the fact that diverse actor groups have diverse needs.

## **2.8 Concluding remarks**

The literature suggests, firstly, that buying SHC reduces textile waste and mitigates pollution from clothing production ( Pearson & Hinton, 2023; Han et al., 2022). However, there are not enough studies dedicated to this area, and what currently exists is scant; more research to assist the CE is an area worthy of examination. The chosen cohort in this study has been less studied, so research on Generation X can add value and is worthy of examination.

Drivers are well-documented and cover areas such as affordability, bargain hunting, sustainability, and anti-consumerism. There is also a desire to find something unique with a

relevance given to SH shopping, adding to a sense of community connection or doing good. Some of the barriers documented are around hygiene and poor quality (Guiot & Roux, 2010).

On further reading, there are still deeper concerns related to cultural norms, risks, and inconveniences, above just looking at economic motivations as documented in consumer journals from ethnographic studies like Bardhi's in 2005, which challenges the traditional frugality perspective (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005).

### **3. Developing the research question**

During the research proposal stage, it was found that the Rediscovery Center conducted a study that covered all aspects of the CE, including textiles. The results determined variations across socio-demographic groups such as age, gender, and economic status, reporting that people in higher social grades are more likely to report frequently purchasing textiles. ( Rediscovery Centre, 2025).

This novel detection provided an impetus and created a roadmap for this study: Perceptions and motivations influencing SHC consumption by Generation X in Ireland. On completing the study, it was found that the eight participants who took part were professionals with education ranging from Leaving Certificate standard to postgraduate, and reported that they did not, in fact, frequently purchase textiles but approached consumption on a needs-only basis and were very mindful of impulsive and compulsive consumption.

Furthermore, the research found there was also a clear shift towards youth-centric and digital-first approaches, particularly within sustainability-focused efforts, such as those targeting textile consumption and waste.

Therefore, academically, there was a golden opportunity missed, and worth exploring on the consumption patterns of Generation X..

## **Overall research objective or topic**

What are the key perceptions and motivations influencing the consumption of SHC by Gen X people living in Ireland?

### **Research objective 2**

To investigate perceptions of consumers and their beliefs and attitudes regarding the CE

### **Research objective 3**

To determine awareness of the subjects of sustainability, fashionability, the environment, and the connection with SHC shopping

### **Research objective 4**

To explore if and how people engage online and/or in-store, and whether there are concerns or barriers to shopping for SHC

### **Research objective 5**

To ascertain if there are differences between Ireland and abroad

Considering the recurring themes, recent studies, and the available literature were a guide for this author to move towards developing a worthy research question, which would create a dissertation of academic value to expand on the knowledge that already exists.

The overall research objective or topic research question is:

**What are the key Perceptions and motivations influencing second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption by Generation X in Ireland?**

This research is from an Irish perspective and aims to explore attitudes and understanding from the viewpoint of the participants who will be interviewed online or in person. It will explore their perceptions and motivations towards SH shopping in Ireland. The aim will be to see if it reflects current literature or to ascertain if new learning can be gained for use in Circular Economy (CE) management.

There have been numerous gaps identified in CE management research relating to the present state and future directions in CE business management. In 2023, Ahmad et al completed a study exploring research trends and found gaps in this area. They also highlighted that research relating to CE management is fragmented and lacks a holistic perspective.

Ahmad goes on to state that overall, a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions at the societal level is needed (Ahmad et al, 2023).

Therefore, a study such as this one relating to consumer perceptions is important and relevant, and the literature and scholarly articles such as the ones mentioned above contributed to the development of the research question.

### **3.1 Sub Questions**

Some of the questions in the interview process were developed from the pilot study and were refined as follows:

- Have your habits changed lately?
- Have you noticed more SH shops?
- What do you think of the digital platforms?
- Tell me about retro style and vintage fashion?
- What are your views on fast fashion?
- What are your thoughts on the subjects?
- What do you feel others think or know about the subject?

There were also prompts throughout the interview process to elicit richer data

### 3.2 Aims of the study

The study aims to look at key motivations and perceptions, and detriments influencing consumer decisions around purchasing SHC. The study aims to get a better understanding of this topic but also to mine deeper into attitudes towards fashion, sustainability, and how people in Ireland perceive the SH stores and platforms offering pre-loved or pre-owned clothing.

### 3.3 Theoretical frameworks

Theoretical frameworks are important to review alongside the literature, and two significant theories are the **theory of planned behaviour** and the **consumer culture theory**. There is no doubt that there is a need for promotion to consumers of the need to adapt behaviours and take up more sustainable lifestyles because of the continued economic growth alongside environmental degradation. (Zhang et al., 2019)

Although planned behavior is important to understand, there are few studies relating this theory to SH shopping (Rodrigues et al., 2023). And the theory is more used in studies related to the area of sustainability and the sustainable behaviour of consumers. However, we do

know there are three variables at play when we try to establish intentions, when it comes to 'green shopping'.

Those variables are all associated with one's belief system, and they are behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. The idea is that the stronger the intention of someone to engage in the performance of a behaviour (in this case, SH shopping), it is documented the more likely it is to occur. However, there can be influencing factors at play also, such as attitude, and effects from different factors and behavioural variables, such as for example, ease of performing the behaviour (the purchase) or social pressures related to the performance. It is interesting to note that Rodrigues' study finds that the attitudes of young people are superior and which converts into the concept that they have more positive positions on SH buying, and this in turn supports the assertion that the predisposition to purchase is greater in young people. His study reflects what will be discussed later, which is the imperative need for segmentation related to communication in the CE space, promoting such things as SHC shopping (Rodrigues et al., 2023). This theory will assist in explaining this study in that we can ask: Why do people shop for SHC ?

What are their motivations?

What are the participants' perceptions relating to their own beliefs?

The answer to these questions in turn, will demonstrate whether belief systems impact on intention and the actual performance of buying from an Irish perspective, which is the research question in a nutshell.

Culture has been defined as a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede, 1980), and is also an important dimension for explaining consumer behavior when it comes to purchasing green products (Sreen et al., 2018).

The consumer culture theory examines consumption not just as an economic transaction but more as complex social practices that have meanings and power dynamics. There is a dynamic relationship between culture and consumer actions, a relationship that is not static but evolves in flux.

It is known that consumption reflects and shapes an individual's identity and social values and vice versa (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). And we know that over time, consumption patterns change, and so too does culture, so the theory of consumer culture may assist in answering the research question at this point, as cultural ideals and beliefs have been explored in great detail in this study.

In this study, culture will be explored in a snapshot due to resource limitations and time constraints to assist in answering the research question; however, it is thought that a long-term study may better answer this research question, and this is a limitation of sorts.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Research design: Quantitative V Qualitative**

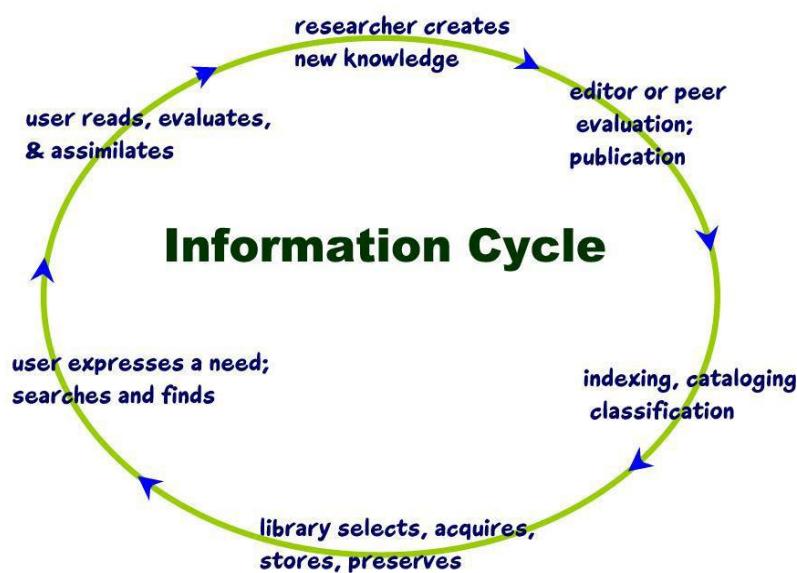
For the research, it is essential to examine the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches to ascertain which method best suits the study. As this study is a small-scale study with just 8 participants, using open-ended questions that aim to analyze through subjectivity and interpretation, it is deemed that a qualitative approach is best suited to this study.

Below is a table that shows the reasoning behind this choice and the differences between the two methods. This study is small-scale with a small sample size of eight participants, and although questions are not probing, if rich and detailed data are not forthcoming, the use of prompts will prompt further discussion on the topics. Transcription and recording were used with open-ended structured questions; therefore, the ability to replicate the study is lower than if a survey or questionnaire were used in a Quantitative research study.

## Quantitative Research v Qualitative Research

Comparing variable	Qualitative	Quantitative
Question types	Probing	Non-probing
Sample Size	Small	Large
Information per respondent	Much	Can Vary
Administration	Specialist skills requirements	Fewer specialist skills requirements
Type of Analysis	Interpretive and subjective	Statistical, summarization
Hardware	Recording devices or apps. Possible to use open-ended structured interview questionnaires.	Survey/questionnaires
Ability to replicate	Low	High
Type of research	Exploratory/thematic	Descriptive, causal

Regardless of which approach is chosen, the Information cycle (shown in figure 1) shows the journey that all academic researchers take.



**Figure 1: The Information Cycle**

Considering that the design of this study employs a qualitative method, specifically using semi-structured interviews, we can gather in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards SH shopping.

Semi-structured interviews are well-suited for exploring complex topics where open-ended questions allow for rich, detailed responses from the eight participants taking part (Kallio et al., 2016).

The research onion model was developed by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill in 2007 and this is also a useful construct to follow as it facilitates what logic and direction the research methodology will take as each layer or level is peeled away. Using this model as the interview progresses, each layer is influenced by the preceding layer, and this affects in turn the next level of conversation, with an interdependence (Saunders et al, 2007).

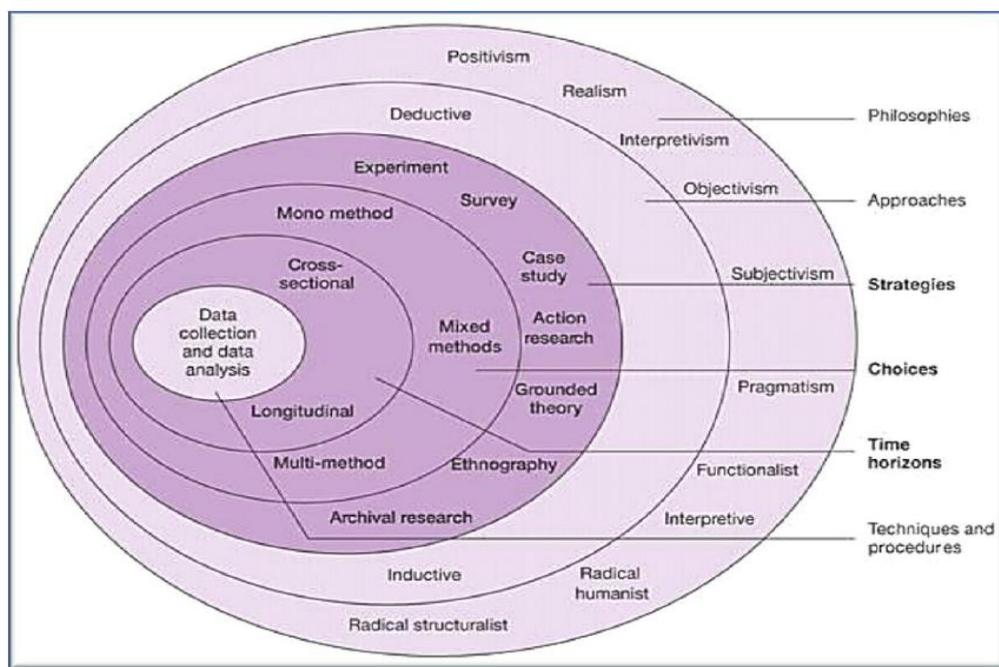
This theory by Saunders gives a deeper understanding when following the six layers. From the first layer, which is the outer layer that defines the 'worldview or assumptions' behind the research, aligning with human interpretation, and goes right through to the sixth layer at the core, which is the actual method of data collection and analysis (Saunders et al, 2007).

Research in practice does not always fit neatly into a single philosophical category, contrary to the depiction offered by Saunders' research onion; therefore, it must be carefully considered in shaping one's approach to all studies.

As the research intends to observe social realities, the philosophy here would align with positivism; however, there is a recognition that there are complexities in dealing with different cohorts that may not be fully captured through a positivist lens. Looking at Remenyi et al. (1998), there is an argument here for Interpretivism, as people interact with their environment but actively seek to make sense of that environment, and it also acknowledges

the role of realism, which is rooted in social constructivism. Participants will usually share experiences of their socially constructed world by communicating and interpreting these shared realities during the interview process, and the aspects will centre on human-centred understanding, by exploring the experiences of each individual.

Social constructivism is the idea that reality is constructed through social interaction and language. It is also important to understand that the researcher's role is not as a detached observer but is involved in the co-construction of meaning. Therefore, remaining open-minded and having empathy ( Remenyi et al.,1998).



**Above: The Research Onion ( Saunders et al, 2012).**

**4.2** Research philosophy – approaches will be through Positivism, Interpretivism, Realism, and Pragmatism, which will guide the global aspect.

**4.3** Research Approach - can be either Deductive, stating your theory and testing it through empirical data collection. Or Inductive: building the theory grounded in observed data

collection, which will be this researcher's approach. The reasoning behind this is that in qualitative research, the approach surrounds the exploration of social phenomena, and seeks to uncover patterns in the narrative data before a research focus can be formed (Flick, 2011)

This framework is better used when interpreting human experiences, and one's perceptions, but also explaining the complexities of human experiences relating to behaviours around SHC consumption.

**4.4** Research strategy – can be through experiments, surveys, case studies, action research, or ethnography, depending on the research questions and resources; in this case, it was completed through narrative semi-structured interviews. This method of data collection was chosen over questionnaires, observation, sampling, and secondary data collection, although this study does reference some secondary studies.

**4.5** Choices – as I have mentioned previously, Quantitative or Qualitative or mixed methods. This study will primarily be qualitative. From an academic slant, it is imperative for the researcher to acknowledge her potential position as an outlier and to take deliberate steps to mitigate personal bias.

Maintaining objectivity is a fundamental ethical obligation in qualitative research, particularly to prevent the researcher's perspective from unduly influencing the data collection or interpretation process (Cresswell and Poth, 2018).

Any such influence could compromise the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, potentially distorting the contribution to the broader literature ( Lincoln and Guba 1985)

Ensuring the integrity of the data involves preserving its authenticity and minimizing research interference. This is particularly crucial in semi-structured interviews where participants are placed in a position of vulnerability.

Here, the goal is to elicit responses that reflect the participants' genuine perspective, free from coercion or guidance by the interviewer (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015).

The researcher therefore undertook rigorous planning and the development of an ethically sound and sensitively worded interview protocol. This approach aimed to both maximize data quality and minimize discomfort, fostering an environment in which participants could contribute meaningfully and voluntarily to the interview process.

**4.6** Time horizon – can be longitudinal across an extended period or cross-sectional, which can be a snapshot in time; the latter is the method applied here in this study, however the study was born out of a research proposal in March 2025 following that consideration was given to the method chosen and there was a change from quantitative to qualitative.

**4.7** Techniques and procedures, which is the innermost layer of the research onion, and this covers the actual data collection: in this case, it will be through the interview process, then afterwards, analysing the data through thematic coding. TA has been extensively used in analysing qualitative data to describe or summarize key patterns in the data, or to tell an interpretative story about the data concerning a research question. ( Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Using this method, it is hoped the research design is clear and evolves coherently, from the start at the outside layer working inward, ensuring each layer aligns with the one before. ( Saunders et al, 2007)

A pilot study was undertaken where participants gave their viewpoints on '**what are the perceptions and motivations influencing SHC consumption by Generation X in Ireland'**

Due to time constraints, this pilot was intended for just two participants; however, only one participant took part in the pilot, so it was a small-scale pilot and was crucial to designing a robust study. It was also conducted to see if flaws existed or any corrections needed to be made before investing significant resources. It also determined if the research design was practical and achievable. and after the pilot, the interview was changed significantly. ( Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

#### **4.8 Rationale for using Semi-Structured Interviews**

The research methodology is a qualitative attitudinal study consisting of 8 participants, and ethical considerations decree that all human subjects will participate voluntarily and give informed consent. A study such as this will have more than academic value in that its findings are practical and can be applied by management in the CE space. This suggests that research to assist the CE is an area worthy of examination.

Semi-structured interviews balance structure and flexibility. They follow a predetermined interview guide but allow for probing and follow-up questions based on the participant's responses, which allows greater insight into the topic. This method facilitates the discovery of new themes and the exploration of participants' subjective meanings (Gill et al., 2008).

Qualitative research is the approach taken for this particular study as it is exploring a social phenomenon, unlike the deductive approach, which is used in a quantitative study, which seeks patterns in the narrative data before a research focus can be uncovered. (Flick, 2011)

It can also draw out how the participants interpret their reality and human experiences towards SHC shopping.

Many other Authors have chosen qualitative studies to answer similar questions to this study, and most are very recent studies. For example, Ho (2024) is a Finnish study exploring consumers' motivations in the SH arena and has uncovered many drivers documented in this research, such as how different factors affect choices and decisions. Topics such as economics, recreational and fashion/brand incentives, and the study were similarly small-scale and current. Ho's study aligns with broader and prior studies on SH consumer behaviour and reflects the shift towards sustainable consumption preferences. ( Ho, 2024)

Another study by Oona Saanio, also in 2024, and also Finnish, she has used semi-structured interviews similar to this study, but concentrated on peer-to-peer or consumer-to-consumer platforms, a topic also explored in some detail in this study, as digitalisation evolves in the SH markets, it is current and also a changing trend. The study asks what the motivations are to shop SH, and what drives consumer purchase intentions and if there are differences because the platforms are peer-to-peer as opposed to buying from businesses? The guiding theoretical frameworks are also similar: the theory of planned behaviour. Her sample size was just seven women, and although this study does not concentrate on one gender, it is very relevant in size. The motivational findings were primarily due to environmental and economic reasons. ( Saanio, 2024)

From an Irish perspective, there were also the previous studies by the EPA, and although a focus group was used, the studies were qualitative and the topics were similar to this study. There are consistent results as well as similar results for drivers and barriers; however, some results related to motivations have varied over the years.

Below is a table of qualitative studies and some outcomes ranging from 2016 to 2014, which indicates that there are a robust collection of previous research studies that have engaged a

qualitative approach, and in particular, many of them through narrative interviews with small samples of participants.

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Year & Country & reference	Sample size & Method	Drivers	Barries/challenges
2016 Australia (Ferraro, 2016)	N=340 Segment Analyses	Fashionability or style	Did not report on barriers
2020 United Kingdom (Hur, 2020)	N= 134 134 consumers 138 non-consumers Semi-qualitative and Mapping	Economic, self-expression, Eco, social	Quality, Hygiene, and Stigma
2021 Pakistan (Sajjad et al 2021)	N= 50 Narrative Interviews	Price, quality, influence, brands	Hygiene and stigma
2022 Romania (Nistor, 2022)	N=26 Narrative interviews	Economic, ethical, and hedonistic	Did not document barriers
2024 Finland (Ho, 2024) 2024 Finland (Saanio, 2024 )	N-18 Narrative interviews	Economic, environment, recreational, Fashionability, and brand trust	Did not report on barriers but cited other studies on Hygiene, social stigma, and identity concerns

## **4.9. Participant sample selection**

This writer had a sampling strategy that employed a combination of both convenience and purposive sampling to recruit participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research objectives and also related to the topic of SH shopping. This approach enabled the selection of participants who could provide rich, meaningful insights into the topic under investigation. As Palinkas et al. (2015) note, purposive sampling is particularly valuable in qualitative research, as it allows researchers to “select participants who are most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse data” (Palinkas et al. 2015, P. 534).

Participants consisted of two people who volunteer in SH shops, one participant who previously owned a SH book store, and the remaining participants identified themselves as frequent shoppers or previously were shoppers in SH stores.

In addition to this, convenience sampling was utilized to recruit participants who were easily accessible and available during the data collection period because of time constraints. Convenience sampling is a practical method when there are time or resource limitations, and it allows researchers to collect data quickly from willing participants (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

While this method carries the risk of selection bias, its use alongside purposive sampling helps to ensure that participants not only meet the inclusion criteria but are also logistically practicable to engage.

The combination of purposive and convenience sampling provided a pragmatic balance between methodological rigor and feasibility. As Etikan et al. (2016) suggest, combining these strategies can be appropriate in qualitative research when limitations are acknowledged

and when the primary aim is to explore participants' perspectives rather than to generalize findings to a larger population, and this researcher intended to use just eight participants, and one other who participated in the pilot study, therefore this was deemed as the best approach to selecting the sample.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling through LinkedIn, social media and email contact, and this researcher ensured they had relevant experience or knowledge related to the research topic. "Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are 'convenient' sources of data for researchers."( Etikan et al., 2016) The age cohort was also a factor, and successful screening enabled 8 participants to engage overall (discounting the pilot study)

#### **4.10 Interview Guide**

An interview guide was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature. The guide included open-ended questions and prompts to encourage elaboration, and the interview itself was the important instrument to collect the rich and textual data. Questions were piloted with one individual, which ensured clarity and relevance throughout the remaining interviews, as some changes were made. (Kallio et al., 2016).

#### **4.11. Conducting the Interviews**

Interviews were conducted in person or via the video conferencing platform MS, which has a transcription facility, to collect the raw data, depending on participant availability and logistical considerations. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was audio/visually recorded with prior participant consent, and after transcription, was segmented and coded to employ measurements.

## **5. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board at the National College of Ireland. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. All data was then securely stored during and after processing and will be retained and stored or destroyed under GDPR. As with most surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, there are sensitivities, particularly regarding the privacy of the participants, and it was important to keep participants informed about those issues. It was conveyed that participation was voluntary and based on an open invitation. The researcher maintained discretion and ensured that no individual was identified in the results. The interview was carefully designed to encourage honest, complete, and accurate responses (Henning, 2004, & Mason 2002)

### **5.1 Ethical concerns**

In all academic studies, there are ethical considerations to protect human subjects who participate in the research process. Qualitative studies are considerably more in-depth and personal; therefore, participants must partake voluntarily and do so by informed consent, which can be withdrawn at any time during the study timeline. (Orb et al, 2001)

An ethical researcher must give full disclosure of the research aims, and also rigorous design must ensure that the survey is not skewed towards achieving a desired result from the study. Research must ensure that the key ethical principles of informed consent, deception, anonymity, and confidentiality are suitably addressed. (Connolly, 2007)

In Ireland, there are strict regulations surrounding data protection 1998, which is regulated by the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act, and the data receives further protection through the EU and GDPR ( Government of Ireland, 2014 )

## **6. Data Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun & Clarke's six-step approach: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

### **6.1 Data Analyses: Implications and suppositions**

Mauthner et al (1998) state that there are more fundamental issues in interpreting research paradigms where qualitative data exists. They consider conditions where data is created, and this is relative to the recreation of future studies for comparative reasons. In other words, robust design is important, particularly from an ethnographic slant, and it must be stated that this author is employed in the CE space and wants to separate her views from the research.

Thematic analysis was used on all 8 interviews through the six-step process of familiarisation, coding, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally writing up.

This research shows the required logic to successfully research and present the findings of an academic study. It shows the movement from initial literature review to the development of a

research design development of a robust and rigorous study, which can be replicated or redone at yearly intervals so that changes in attitudes can be gauged.

It shows the determination in utilising the correct study methodologies, and how to analyse the findings and how to interpret and present in the academic sphere.

Following this logic allows for recommendations to be made with the ultimate aim of adding to the literature.

## 6.2 Findings and Analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research findings from the interview process that was conducted with the 8 respondents. I specifically targeted those in the Generation X era, which is all those born between 1965 and 1980. This study has been based on a small sample size (8), and therefore, the results should be noted according to the survey's limitations.

Section #1 of my interview consisted of one question only: Were you born between 1965 and 1980? This was a screening question explaining that this survey is intended for those born between those years. Respondents who answered that they were not born between those years found themselves restricted from continuing with the interview process. These negative responders (20%) were subject to an explanation as to why they could not continue with the research and were duly thanked for their time.

**Table 2: Please indicate if you were born between the years 1965 and 1980**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80%	8
No	20%	2
<i>answered question</i>		
<i>100%</i>		<b>100%</b>
<i>skipped question 0%</i>		<b>0%</b>

The eight participants were then used in the study

My interviews covered the topics around the following issues ;

- **Shopping in stores**
- **Shopping online**
- **Awareness of online platforms**
- **Positives of SH shopping**
- **Concerns around SH shopping**
- **Beliefs and attitudes around shopping in Ireland and globally**
- **Beliefs and attitudes regarding sustainability**
- **Fashion and sustainability**
- **Engaging people to choose SH**
- **Fashion relating to SH**
- **Challenges and influencing factors**
- **Demographics**

## **Demographics:**

There were eight participants in this qualitative study

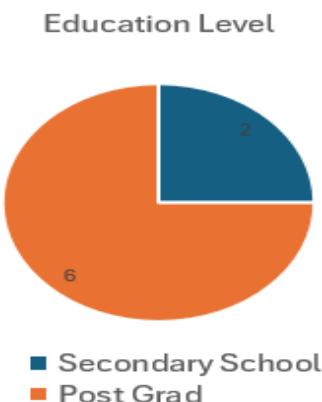
100 % were from the Generation X era, and there was an equal division of males and females. Of the eight participants, the majority, 62.5% (5), were employed full time, 25% (2) were part-time, and 12.5% (1) were retired.



Of the eight participants, their highest level of education was asked, and the findings were as follows:

Secondary education 37.5 % (3)

Post Grad 62.5 % (5)



The results documented perceptions, motivations, beliefs, and attitudes under eight different headings and were as follows:

## 1. Sustainability and the environment

Participant motivations aligned with existing literature, in that sustainability was a primary concern, with many expressing environmental anxieties and the impact on the planet of fast fashion. All had strong beliefs in reducing, reusing, and recycling waste. They further expressed the concept of SH shopping as a meaningful contributor to the CE.

**A quote from participant 'Deirdre' reads as follows:**

*"I am very conscious now of especially the women that are working in these factories that are producing these (fast fashion), you know, and it is affecting the way people are thinking, I'm finding it very hard to accept, yeah, I'm going, how can I go into that store when I know that, It could be child labour, I'm aware of that too, and also the fact that it is all disposable, what does it do to the planet "*

**A second quote by Gary is as follows:**

*"The only thing that would discourage me probably is that I've seen on the news that they (charity shops) sell stuff that can't be sold here in the shops to other companies and they ship them everywhere like Africa and India, and things like that. And then they are paid, but it doesn't get reused, it goes to landfill. "*

Although these quotes reflected that participants acknowledge that both the fast fashion industry and charity shops operating within the CE space are guilty of contributing to

environmental damage, interestingly, there are few media documentaries and even fewer academic studies that show that SH markets may not always translate into sustainable shopping.

Some participants also stated they were very aware of the environment and how SH shopping is a solution, but still admitted they shopped at their convenience in fast fashion outlets for work clothes. This reflects Bernado's (2018) and Jorgensen's (2019) position that there is still an attitude/behaviour gap in that it is not enough to have awareness, but one must take action and responsibility.

Similarly, some participants expressed that platforms such as Vinted may drive consumerism. They expressed an 'addictive dilemma' because of the increased availability of Vinted and such sites that may encourage more and more buying. Resulting in it doing the opposite for the environment because of packaging, transport, impulsive buying, etc. And this is consistent with the literature by Van Leuven, who has documented a culture of overconsumption (Van Leuven, 2024). Thus, SH circularity presents a delicate balancing act for all stakeholders.

Although SH shops were generally viewed positively, there were concerns around how charities use funds and how they transfer items that cannot be sold through distribution channels overseas. Sustainability remained a prominent theme, particularly because of media attention around global textile waste and dumping into landfills which in turn pollutes the environment. Other academics even go as far as to say that thrift shopping encourages people to shop even more, and it may even be 'an environmental and ethical trap' by creating a false sense of guiltlessness, and doing the complete opposite by reinforcing fast fashion habits. ( Watson, 2021). This was reflected in the interviews, where all participants were encouraged to shop because it was a 'charity shop ' doing good for the cause and the environment.

In summary, this is typical of Generation X, as the era was characterized by a difficult social period, exacerbated by existing environmental problems and events that occurred from 1963 to the mid-1970s, during the decade in which Generation X was formed ( Dobrescu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, they are reported as understanding these events were significant for the environment, events such as the banning of Nuclear weapons testing and emplacement, and various conventions related to pollution and protection of world culture and natural heritage, therefore, Generation X demonstrates more sustainable attitudes when compared to Gen Y and Z ( Pinho & Gomes, 2024).

## **2. Economy and Frugality**

Although many expressed in their interviews that shops were cheap, this was not a dominant motivation for the participants themselves. Many highlighted that affordability is a key driver for others, which is a paradox, because many who may rely most on SH shopping for financial reasons often do not engage with it. This aspect of the study warrants further exploration.

There was a realisation that " those who need to shop in SH shops don't " and this intersected with the feeling by participants that although they don't feel shame, themselves, others may do, such as young image conscious millennials, or those who are uneducated or those from lower economic backgrounds" who have not been exposed to how chronic the environmental situation is.

On the contrary, participants expressed that some shops were expensive in certain areas, conveying the fact that some proprietors used 'Vintage' and 'Retro' as labels to justify higher prices. But on the whole, the motivations expressed were for economic reasons in that SH

shops are ‘Cheap’ or cheaper than high street shops selling new clothes. This discussion may have been one-sided because of the age cohort involved in the study and their education levels, in that those surveyed were older and the majority had postgraduate educations, which suggested money was not an issue for them, but at the same time, they did not want to see waste.

They also valued ecological frugality, knowing that reducing waste is a social good. The overall consensus was that all of the participants avoid excessive and compulsive shopping for various reasons and even go as far as evaluating different price levels within the SH shops, although money worries were not a factor for most, due to them having higher discretionary disposable funds.

One specific aspect that shone through was that the males who participated and one female stated they had needs-based purchasing behaviour and were cautious financially, and this may be an age-related factor also, as most referred back to their age and experience when making decisions around spending.

#### **A quote from participant, ‘Colette’, comparing:**

Online shopping on fast fashion and SH sites such as Vinted  
to

Shopping in person in SH stores

She highlighted how online platforms that are accessible 24 hours a day can energise consumption :

*“ And on the other, these sites, it’s: this is cheap and that’s cheap, and then, but before I know it, I’ve spent a mint. So I don’t want to do that, buy stuff I don’t need just because it’s cheap, I want more control over my spending. “*

### **3. Hedonism/sense of nostalgia**

Other important motivations expressed by 42.5% of participants were the feel-good factors that result from bargain or treasure hunting, the thought of finding something unique or the aspect of leisure, and browsing at one's leisure, but interestingly, this process-oriented enjoyment was mostly expressed by the female participants.

The males, on the other hand, gave answers consistent with Irish studies by The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications who stated that ' Men are more likely to see clothes shopping as a chore that they do not enjoy, perhaps partly explaining lower baseline consumption' (DECC, 2025) Participant males expressed they shopped when they needed something and didn't express any hedonistic factors related to shopping as opposed to literature by Hur who states hedonistic factors are major drivers and provide hedonic contribution values for people, however Hur's study's participants were 84% females: thus, in this study and other studies the hedonistic factor is more real for females and the literature is consistent on this (Hur, 2020).

25% of participants expressed views on SH shops, enabling and fostering community connectedness. They noted that these spaces offer much more than affordable goods and SH items, with one participant stating that most SH shops present as having a great atmosphere inside them. They serve as social hubs that contribute to alleviating loneliness within the community, and give options to people with a social dimension, a feature that is not well documented in existing literature but has emerged as important and a sometimes overlooked benefit.

***Below is a quote from Sylvia which illustrates her enthusiasm for SH shopping, highlighting that sense of excitement and discovery that the activity evokes in her :***

*“Charity shops are starting to really, really take off again. I think I can see it. There's so many charity shops that sell really, really nice SH clothes. And for me it's not about that, it's about finding something that's a little bit quirky. Do you know what I mean? That's a little bit unique. That's the main reason I would go into a SH shop. I love rooting through and finding something different, something that's a bit special. “*

This quote reflects studies from abroad, such as from Suedo & Seo with uniqueness being a major influencing factor.

However, there were changes in behaviors cited by most participants. Changes from when they were younger, they stated they were trend-driven. And today, they are more conscious buyers with a mindset inspired by Marie Kondo – buying less and letting go of unused items to be reused again.

Lastly, many participants referred to retro/vintage items and were attracted to nostalgic items such as Band T-shirts and classic clothing, and this would be the main reason to purchase.

#### **4. Technology/online purchases or sales**

87.5% of participants were aware of online platforms; however did not engage with them. Many cited bad experiences, digital mistrust, addictive nature, and the need to see items before purchase or to try them on. This is consistent with studies by the Rediscovery Centre, which stated that younger generations are more aware of shopping online and are more adept in the use of digitalisation and digital payment systems to make purchases. The reasoning behind this, they have stated, is that there is a clear shift towards youth-centric and digital-

first approaches, particularly within sustainability-focused efforts such as those targeting textile consumption and waste ( Rediscovery Centre, 2025)

This signifies the need for further segmented approaches to build trust amongst Generation X and older generations, where we see a clear digital divide, so they too can contribute in circular efforts, with ease and confidence.

Many stated that barriers to buying online were related to the preference to physically try on or feel the garments before purchase, and one person cited mistrust of digital platforms as an issue that negatively impacted online purchasing.

However, among the cohort of Generation X participants, their preference was to buy in-store in person, and it was a mix of both new and SH stores, mostly related to generational factors, convenience, and needs-based shopping.

## 5. Ireland vs other countries

Many participants stated that SH shops have limited space, they are cluttered and sometimes unhygienic, and this is also a barrier to consumption, which concurs with much of the literature. However, when compared to other countries, Ireland's shops present as much the same to our European partners, with maybe some small price changes for Spain, where the cost of living is lower. Germany was cited as having a greater culture towards reuse, recycling, and circularity as a whole.

Many of the participants also cited meaning in their consumption practices, in that their culture plays a part in how they shop. Although they did not feel embarrassed, they were impacted by their past or cultural identification. Many shopped for, or because of cultural meaning in their lives and messages from society, like the need to do good or give back, this was well documented in studies by McCracken back in 1986 and is still very much a value today for Irish consumers and the reason these Gen X participants will shop in SH shops.

The participants were more motivated by convenience and the need for example, to buy work clothes, and this contradicts a study by Da Silva Almeida (2020) who stated that consumption intentions are positively influenced by attitude, which, in turn, is directly shaped by both environmental knowledge and concern, but this yet again identified that attitude-behaviour gap. Comments during the interview stage were sometimes tinged with a sense of regret in that consumers knew the right to do but didn't do it, and often used the words 'to be honest ' Lastly, the participants spoke about other concerns relating to the professionalism of the shop or the communication that Irish shops pass to consumers, which was somewhat lacking. This concept has been well documented, for example, reflecting studies by Koay et al. (2023) around quality of information and quality of service, and that if felt and perceived values were improved, this in turn may improve consumption.

## **6. Concerns and barriers**

An interesting mix of conversations occurred under this heading, and most reflected the literature citing preferences for SH over new. However, although there were concerns on a micro level, related to hygiene, low-grade clothing, and warranty issues of trading within SH shops and some negative sensory experiences from smells and poor presentation. On a grander scale, attitudes and motivations were around ethical consumerism and reflected Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1991) in that attitudes, beliefs, and subjective norms were of the utmost importance to the Irish participants in this study.

On a macro scale, some participants cited global matters as barriers to shopping locally in charity shops, which aligns with Kantian ethics in purchasing SH clothing for the overall common good (Kant, xxxx) . Those ethical considerations were concerned with both the fast fashion industry and the charity sector: child/women labour conditions, animal

experimentation, textile waste, the church, and the big one: the environment, were all concerns and barriers.

Below is a quote from one participant who has strong ethical beliefs around animal liberation and choice for women, and his subjective norms take precedence when intending to buy in SH shops:

*“I'd always check now what charities they were, when I go into a charity shop, there are a couple that I wouldn't support. There are a couple of ones in England, cancer ones, who spend the money on research on animals, which I still wouldn't go into. I wouldn't go into a mad Catholic anti-abortion kind of charity shop either. There's one of them in Knock And, and I wouldn't go in there, I don't support their beliefs. “*

## 7. Stigma, embarrassment, or social pressures

The study found that the majority of participants do not have any issues related to stigma when it comes to SH shopping; however, they did admit it still exists, especially for young people.

This reflects that Irish consumers, especially of this age cohort, do not care about social stigma or the perceived embarrassment of SH shopping, and this may be due to age factors. Only one out of the eight participants interviewed cited stigma for themselves, and she was from a small town outside of the capital, Dublin. She stated that when she was younger, she often heard her uncles saying, “She is poor, she shops in SH shops,” And this is something she carries with her to this day, and because of this, she is sometimes reluctant to share her consumer habits with others.

However, the remaining seven people interviewed all had no problems discussing their SH consumer habits, which goes against earlier studies in 2021 by Silva et al that embarrassment was a major factor, negatively impacting purchase behavior. However, it seems society is changing with later studies in 2022 by Valor et al and 2023 by Taylor that there is no longer

embarrassment and that SHC shopping is now the norm. One participant stated that “ once SH shops were stigmatised, but are now more accepted, especially among young people. “ This study recognises this societal shift.

Whilst due in no small part to the influence of opinion leaders like Greta Thunberg, millennials, although arguably the most environmentally aware demographic, appear to hold a negative and possibly a cognitive dissonance towards SH clothing purchasing. This researcher suggests there is an educational gap readily available to be explored.

## **8. Fashion**

Many participants were conflicted on their attitudes towards fashion, some felt there has to be a place for fast fashion as young people need trends because of cultural identity, and for economic reasons, as younger people don't have a lot of disposable income, however there was a recognition that fast fashion is harmful and that fashion is fleeting and style is more enduring. There was an emphasis by most participants that you can be fashionable when dressed from SH shops, and there may even be a product that can be marketed for unique fashion and individual expression. Furthermore, the media can influence shopping behaviour and normalise SH shopping.

### **Negatives and Positives of SH shopping/shops**

Finally, participants were asked to sum up their perceptions in three positive and three negative words regarding SH shopping

Below are the positives expressed by participants of SH shopping



Below are the negatives expressed by participants of SH shopping



## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The research question, ‘**What are the key perceptions and motivations influencing consumer behavior in SH clothing shopping**,’ and explored beliefs and attitudes also of Gen X through in-depth interviews with eight participants. Despite the limitations of such a small study, rich data were gathered, and insights emerged of a strong environmental consciousness amongst the cohort, emphasizing an awareness of the effects of fast fashion and the ecological consequences of its continued growth.

However, many participants still acknowledged the attitude-behavior gap and were mindful that convenience and habit sometimes overshadowed ethical considerations or intentions. SH clothing shopping was associated with frugality to a small extent, but more about expression and nostalgia; however, sustainability was a core value for all participants, and a sustainable option

Barriers expressed were due to online mistrust, concerns over hygiene, and limited professionalism and store presentation. It was also noted that stigma for this group was practically non-existent and in wider society is seen as fading, especially amongst older people. However, they acknowledged that subtle social pressures remain for some and may impact some demographics more than others.

Ultimately, Generation X participants demonstrated a complex relationship with consumption based on their lived experiences, some past and present, their values, and a growing sense of awareness for the planet and those who live on it.

## **Recommendations:**

In Ireland, the statistics are particularly alarming regarding textile waste, and consumers have a predisposition to engaging with the CE, particularly in SHC stores. In the future, this research itself may add value to the small but growing academic literature on this topic. Particular use would be for those managing charity shops.

The study is designed so it can be replicated and undertaken yearly in Ireland or in other countries, which allows for a movement in public opinion to be tracked over time.

The study is built on gaps identified in previous studies, such as demographics of age and gender, and recommendations are that segmentation is needed in research to better understand diverse social actors. And beyond demographics, segmentation should consider people's values, perceptions, motivations, and perceived barriers when encouraging audiences to change habits consistent with McKenzie Mohr (2000)

It is hoped this study, whilst becoming part of the literature, can also be used as a template for an audio or visual documentary, which is seen as more effective than reading alone in educating young people about environmental issues, particularly enhancing engagement, understanding, and retention of information, and could increase visibility of this research.

Interactive audio or visual methods can enhance environmental science literacy (Dwi Lestari et al, 2024)

The research lays the foundation for future studies to deepen the understanding of perceptions and motivating factors related to SH shopping in Ireland. The insights suggest opportunities not only for future research but also for targeted educational campaigns and inclusive access models of sustainable consumption for all.

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## **Appendix One: Consent Form**

**National College of Ireland  
Master's Degree MSC Management MSCMGMT2  
Consent to Participate in a Recorded Interview**

**Title of Study: Perceptions and motivations influencing second-hand clothing (SHC)  
consumption by Generation X in Ireland. An attitudinal thematic study.**

**Researcher:** Bernie Curran

**Supervisor:** Corina Sherrin

**Program:** [e.g., Master of Science Management

**Contact Information:** [bernie@friendsoftheelderly.ie](mailto:bernie@friendsoftheelderly.ie)

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### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research interview as part of my Master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to explore *people in the Gen X category and how they perceive SH shopping in Ireland. It is hoped the study will also capture motivations influencing SHC shopping.*

### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview that will last approximately 30-40 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audio/video recorded for accurate transcription and analysis.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

### **Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential. I will only use a pseudonym, and any information that could identify you will be removed or changed in the final report. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the raw data, including recordings. Recordings will be securely stored and deleted after transcription and completion of the project.

### **Risks and Benefits**

*There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. While you may not benefit directly, your input may contribute to a better understanding of SH shopping and the CE.*

By signing below, you indicate that:

- You have read and understood the information above.
- You consent to participate in the interview.
- You agree to the recording of the interview.

If you have questions, please contact me at [bernie@friends of the elderly.ie](mailto:bernie@friends of the elderly.ie) My supervisor is Corina Sherin,

7450 at National College of Ireland

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**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio recorded and the contents transcribed and stored for use in this thesis.  
 I agree to be video recorded

## Appendix 2: Interview questions

**Participant Name/Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

### Part one:

#### Screening question

**1. Were you born between the years 1965 and 1980?**

Yes

No

### Part Two:

#### Shopping for new and SH clothes

**2. Tell me about shopping for clothes, the how when where etc**

Prompts :

- Do you shop for SH , brand new, in-store, online?
- Which do they do more of?
- How often would you shop?
- Have your habits changed recently? Tell me about that

**3. Do you shop for new or SH clothes online? Tell me about that**

Prompts :

- SH or brand new – which would you buy more of online?
- How often do you shop ?
- If the answer is no ask why you don't shop online?
- Have your habits changed? Tell me about that

**4. Do you shop for new or SH clothes in stores? Tell me about that**

Prompts:

- What do you think of SH shops in Ireland?
- Have you experienced SH shops abroad? How do we compare
- Do you notice more SH shops about ?

- What's your general view on SH shops?

**5. Are you aware of SH shopping sites online, like adverts or Vinted?  
Can you tell me about that?**

Prompts:

- What do you think of these sites?
- Are you using them
- do you know of anyone who uses these sites?

**6. What encourages you to shop for SH clothes – what's good about it ?**

**Prompts:**

- Do you ever consider cost factors as it's cheaper
- What about unusual or retro-styled clothes
- Tell me about support to local charities and good causes
- Did you consider the impact on the environment when you shop

**7. What most worries you or discourages you about shopping for SH clothes?**

**Prompts:**

- Are there certain issues of concern, or are improvements needed?
- Is there a changing trend? Are people changing their habits?
- What are your thoughts on SH shopping, particularly related to clothes?
- Are Stigma/social views of others an issue?
- Would hygiene factors or cleanliness be a worry
- What about Low-grade clothing or poor quality
- What about the Ambience or appearance of stores

**Part three:**

**8. What beliefs and attitudes do YOU have towards SH shopping in Ireland**

Prompts:

- Media and TV, fashion, social stigma, Influencers, lower socio-economic environment, do you think these are relevant or play a part?
- Do you ever sell your clothes after you have purchased them?

- Are you sometimes reluctant to share your views or habits for fear of being judged?

**9. What beliefs and attitudes do you think OTHERS have towards SH shopping in Ireland**

Prompts:

- Is there negativity towards SH shopping?
- Do shame, peer pressure, trends, and stigma affect decisions?
- Do any of these play a part in framing attitudes and perceptions?
  1. The media and TV
  2. People's negative or positive attitudes towards new and SH clothing, like say influencers for top-name brands, or SH in general?

**Part Four:**

**Beliefs and attitudes regarding fast fashion and sustainability in Ireland**

**10. What do you think of the conversation around sustainable fashion?  
What are your thoughts on this?**

Prompts:

Do you think there is a change in attitude or culture? Or direction?

**11. What beliefs and attitudes regarding fashion and sustainability do people hold in Ireland? How does this compare with other countries?**

Prompts:

What are your views on fast fashion?

**Part Five :**

**Challenges and influencing factors**

**12. What do you think would encourage more people to engage with SH shopping**

Prompts:

- What should we do in Ireland to improve the sector?
- Does the media have a part to play?
- Do we need more incentives?
- Is a policy change needed?

**13. Do you think fashion plays any part in SH shopping motivations?**

Prompts:

- Are people more aware of the environment
- What do you think the general public knows about fashion?
- What are young people's attitudes?
- What are your thoughts on fashion related to SH clothes?

**14. Can you give me three words that you think are positives about SH clothing shopping**

**15. And three words that sum up any negatives about SH clothing**

## **Part six :**

### **Demographics**

**The objective is to achieve segmentation data based on differing demographics**

**16.What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary
- Would rather not say

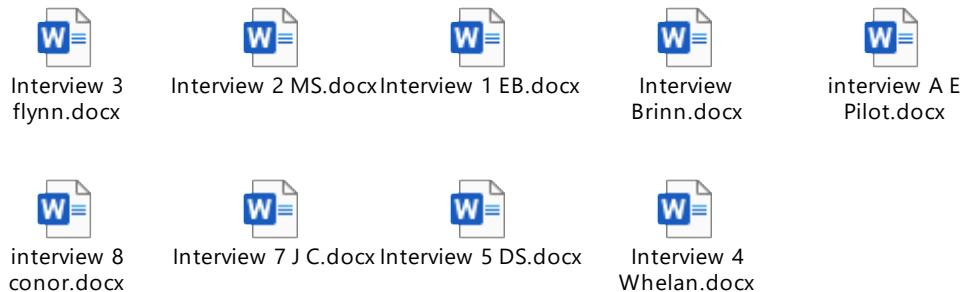
**17.What is your employment status?**

- Mature student
- Employed part-time
- Employed full time
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

**18.What is your highest level of education?**

- Primary
- Secondary
- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Other: please specify

### Appendix 3 – Transcripts



## **Appendix 4**

### **Glossary of terms**

**CE** Circular Economy

**SH** Second hand

**SHC** Second-hand Clothing