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Consumer Engagement in Fashion Circularity in China: Exploring Consumer Online Fashion Resale through the Lens of Social Practice Theory

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Abstract: Fashion resale has emerged as a notable strategy for the fashion industry to reduce its environmental footprint by promoting fashion circularity. Despite extensive research on consumer awareness of resale and the purchase of pre-owned items, there remains a gap in understanding the factors that influence consumers' participation in resale markets, encompassing both selling and buying practices. Drawing on social practice theory (SPT), this qualitative study examines the nuanced factors influencing consumers' online resale practices and investigates how online fashion resale practices (OFRPs) have become integrated into their daily consumption patterns. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirty experienced Chinese consumers engaged in both the selling and buying practices of secondhand fashion. Initially, the study identified eight nuanced motivations and seven challenges influencing consumers' OFRPs. Subsequently, the research uncovered two types of materials and seven core skills necessary for successful OFRP transactions, along with six associated meanings of OFRPs. Specifically, we found that participants seamlessly integrated OFRP into their daily routines through nurtured sociality, and OFRP only fostered sustainable consumption behaviors in one-third of participants, suggesting significant room for improvement. This study provides empirical insights into the existing literature and offers actionable recommendations to key stakeholders for advancing fashion circularity—a critical objective for the sustainability of the fashion industry.



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Keywords: consumer engagement; circular fashion; online fashion resale practice (OFRP); the social practice theory (SPT); China

1. Introduction

The fashion industry is facing ongoing criticism due to its significant environmental footprint throughout the entire value chain [1,2]. Global garment production has doubled, and clothing purchases per capita have increased by sixty percent in the past two decades [3], exacerbating environmental concerns. The criticism has been aggravated by the rise of fast fashion, which features low prices, poor quality, and fast-updated styles. This has led to increased garment waste and a shortened product life cycle. To address these issues, circular fashion has gained prominent attention, aiming to create a closed loop by reusing and recycling fashion products and materials to reduce waste and decrease demand for new products [4,5]. Beyond environmental benefits, circular fashion offers significant economic opportunities, with the potential to unlock a USD 560 billion economic opportunity in the fashion industry [6].

Fashion resale, a core component of circularity in fashion, significantly extends product lifespans by reintroducing pre-owned fashion items into the market, reducing waste, and increasing utilization [7,8]. This practice not only holds environmental value but also contributes economic and social benefits to consumers [2,9]. For instance, a US resale company, ThredUp [10], reported that the fashion resale market prevented nearly one billion

new clothing purchases in 2021, showcasing its substantial impact. Academic studies also indicate that consumers, particularly those prioritizing maximum value and environmental consciousness, greatly recognize the benefits of participating in the resale market [11,12]. Furthermore, the post-COVID-19 landscape, marked by global economic inflation and rising retail prices, has further propelled the resale market by easing consumers' financial pressures [13]. Enhanced by advanced logistics and technology, the online fashion resale realm has experienced significant growth, aligning with the shift toward sustainable consumption [14]. What was once a niche space for fashion resale has now evolved into a mainstream norm [15].

Although China is the world's leading apparel market, valued at USD 326 billion in 2022 [16], it faces significant challenges in developing its fashion resale market, which lags behind its Western counterparts [10]. This underdevelopment is attributed to limited consumer acceptance, finite business models, and market challenges [17]. However, with increasing environmental awareness, growing acceptance of secondhand items, and the rise of online resale platforms, the Chinese resale market shows significant growth potential [18,19], and it is critical to gain a deeper understanding of consumers online resale practices for advancing sustainability goals across the entire industry.

Despite extensive research on consumer engagement in fashion resale, no study, to date, has examined consumers' participation in online fashion resale practices (OFRPs) from combined yet distinct selling and buying perspectives. Instead, past studies are constrained to consumer awareness or acceptance [20,21], providing a limited view of the resale market dynamics. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing fashion sustainability because the factors influencing consumers' participation as sellers or buyers in the resale market could be distinctively different. Unlike primary markets, resale markets consist of individuals who are also consumers of the primary market. The dynamic of consumer interaction in the resale market is essential, as Cannon et al. [22] emphasize that a positive synergy between sellers and buyers is crucial for market success. Therefore, the role of resale consumers is crucial for initiating circularity, and understanding how they navigate OFRPs is essential for establishing a healthy and sustainable resale market environment, particularly when such research is scarce. Hence, this study aims to fill this essential research gap by examining both selling and buying practices to better comprehend the consumer dynamics in the fashion resale market.

Drawing on the social practice theory (SPT), which posits that people's behaviors are motivated by everyday concerns in life [23,24], this qualitative study inquiry has a dual purpose. It aims to examine the nuanced motivations and challenges that prompt Chinese consumers' selling and buying practices. Additionally, it seeks to examine how OFRPs have become integrated into Chinese consumers' everyday consumption patterns and to assess the degree to which OFRPs have influenced their sustainable consumption behaviors. By investigating from the perspective of the Chinese market—a key player in global fashion sustainability—this study offers a microcosm for understanding the transition towards a more circular fashion system from the dual vantage points of selling and buying practices. As such, it provides valuable insights for stakeholders within the circular fashion ecosystem, encompassing platforms, consumers, and regulators. This collective endeavor is poised to significantly enhance sustainability within the fashion industry.

2. Literature Review and Research Questions

2.1. Consumer Engagement in OFRPs: Motivations and Challenges

Consumer engagement is a well-known and vital concept in marketing because it influences consumer behavior. Since emerging, scholars have defined consumer engagement from different perspectives, including customers' psychological connection, participation, and actual behavior [25–27]. Strong consumer engagement is desired to promote favorable customer behavior [28]. Fashion resale, defined as the buying and selling of pre-owned clothing and accessories, has garnered scholarly attention due to its potential to benefit the environment and surpass primary market sales [10,14]. The literature on consumer

engagement in fashion resale extensively examines various aspects, utilizing approaches such as surveys, interviews, and text mining across diverse demographics and market sectors [21,29]. These studies unveiled multifaceted motivations and challenges influencing consumer involvement in OFRP. Motivations and challenges from different perspectives (e.g., secondhand items, platforms, and the resale industry) were explored. Firstly, in terms of the characteristics of secondhand items, consumers are motivated to participate in OFRPs by financial gains, unique styles, and the utility of buying or selling pre-owned items [8,30], while the challenges include functional risks, health concerns, and stigmas [21,31]. Secondly, platform-related motivations involve diverse product choices, fast acquisition, and ease of use; challenges include information accuracy, inefficient services, and trust issues with sellers [14,32]. Thirdly, industry-related challenges include regulation issues, authenticity, and internet fraud concerns [17]. Lastly, consumer acquisition activities are motivated by hedonic, emotional, and environmental values [18,33]. Challenges involve self-perceived social status risks like low acceptance and associations with poverty [31].

In addition, the existing literature underscores the complex interplay of factors influencing consumers' involvement in fashion resale activities, considering roles and cultural backgrounds. Motivations and barriers for both buying and selling often overlap but present nuanced differences. Some factors act as both encouragements and deterrents to acquiring secondhand clothing [34]. For instance, social acceptance encourages young consumers because resale has become a social norm but deters older consumers due to social risks. When selling, consumers are more motivated to declutter, reduce ownership pressure, and feel a sense of achievement [29]. Moreover, Chinese consumers, influenced by cultural factors, face reluctance due to process complexity, minimal revenue, and stigma linked to secondhand items. Traditional beliefs contribute to concerns about poverty associations, bad spirit transmission, and low social status [18,33].

2.2. The Social Practice Theory and Chinese Consumers' Resale Practices

The social practice theory (SPT), pioneered by sociologists Bourdieu [35] and Giddens [36], provides insight into social phenomena by emphasizing the role of practices in shaping social structures. Scholars have developed various interpretations of SPT, each focusing on different aspects. For example, Warde [37] emphasizes how people perceive and interpret their surroundings through active engagement. Rouse [38] states that people's practices range from ephemeral actions to stable patterns, extending the concept to daily life. Furthermore, Hargreaves [39] and Moraes et al. [40] suggest that people's practices encompass habits, customs, and everyday routines. With a growing interest in understanding consumer practices, SPT has been applied to various research areas [24]. For instance, Uriarte-Ruiz [41] used SPT to analyze consumers' mobile phone disposal behaviors to improve secondhand mobile devices' circularity. Philip et al. [23] applied the aspects of materials, skills, and meanings within SPT to examine consumers' online swapping practices, focusing on understanding the emergence, maintenance, and development of such practices. Additionally, Joyner Armstrong and Park [14] employed the aspects of material, competence, and meaning within SPT to investigate consumers' actual behaviors in online clothing resale, aiming to ascertain whether such practices can form a sustainable consumption model.

As this study aims to initially comprehend the initiation of consumers' OFRPs and subsequently investigate the continuity and progression of these practices to promote more sustainable consumption behaviors, it applies Philip et al.'s [23] approach of utilizing SPT. This analysis focuses on Chinese consumers engaged in both selling and buying OFRPs, with a particular emphasis on materials, skills, and meanings. In the context of online fashion resale, consumers are often referred to as practitioners or skilled actors who interact, negotiate, and enact selling and buying practices of pre-owned fashion products online into their daily lives [37,39]. They play a crucial role as carriers of social practice, engaging in both physical and cognitive dimensions and shaping their identities within the circular fashion ecosystem [41]. Understanding how individuals engage in fashion resale as a social

practice helps us to understand resale practice dynamics and encourages more consumers to act as resale practitioners, who are vital for improving fashion circularity. Given the large population of Chinese consumers and their relatively low participation in resale practices [17], they possess significant potential to contribute to circularity efforts.

OFRP's popularity among Chinese consumers burgeons with advancements in e-commerce technology and a growing embrace of secondhand goods. Advanced e-commerce technologies in China have spurred the emergence of numerous resale platforms such as Idle Fish, Poizon, and Plum reducing information asymmetry [17]. Further, these platforms harness political advantages to encourage sustainability initiatives and leverage e-commerce tools to break geographical restrictions and consolidate fragmented supply and demand information, connecting individual resale consumers effectively [32]. These platforms specialize in reselling various fashion products, including clothing, bags, shoes, and accessories, spanning luxury, designer, and mass-market brands, similar to their Western counterparts like ThredUp and The RealReal, which are US-based resale platforms. Comprehending the materials, skills, and meanings underlying Chinese consumers' engagement with OFRPs is pivotal for fostering the market's sustainable growth trajectory. While the Chinese market exhibits substantial growth potential, its sustainable development faces notable challenges. These hurdles include persistent issues such as counterfeiting, user trust concerns, and the absence of standardized industry practices [42,43]. Consequently, despite the nation's vast population, there exists a low level of consumer engagement with these platforms [32], attributed to the requisite high skill level demanded from participants in navigating these challenges. Moreover, delving into the underlying meanings of resale transactions holds promise for enhancing the Chinese market. This entails encouraging more participation in both selling and buying practices to actively circulate consumers' idle wardrobes. Given the pronounced proneness of Chinese consumers, particularly the younger demographic, to lifestyle transformations and sustainable trends [29], it is imperative to elucidate the integration of OFRPs into their daily consumption routines and assess the impact of these practices on sustainable consumption behaviors. This entails a comprehensive exploration of the motivations, challenges, and social practices associated with OFRPs. Based on the above literature review and discussion, we propose the following research questions:

- (1) What are the primary motivations and challenges driving Chinese consumers' participation in both selling and buying activities within OFRPs?
- (2) What patterns emerge among resale consumers engaged in both selling and buying practices, regarding materials, skills, and meanings within OFRPs?

3. Research Method

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

A qualitative approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews to facilitate an in-depth exploration of Chinese consumers' resale practices. This approach allows for the collection of detailed insights and contextual data. The method involves predetermined questions, enabling participants to recall information effectively [44]. Potential interviewees were reached out to on a popular Chinese resale platform, Idle Fish, and the social platform WeChat [45]. Initially, an online survey setup on Wenjuanxing (an online survey platform) gathered demographic data and filtered experienced resale participants for interviews. Questions covered platform usage duration, the number of items bought and sold, and so forth. Only participants with at least one year of experience using fashion resale platforms, engaging in both selling and buying, were eligible for further in-depth interviews.

Initially, thirty-five potential participants responded to the request and completed the screening survey online. After applying the filtered criteria to the collected sample, five participants were excluded. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with the remaining thirty experienced Chinese female fashion resale consumers, as females constitute the primary consumer group of fashion resale platforms [46]. Among the participants, the younger group, aged 18–35, comprised the majority, with nineteen participants (63%).

The older group, aged above 35, accounted for 37%, with eleven participants. In terms of annual individual income, eight participants (26%) fell into the lower group (under USD 15,000), eleven (37%) into the middle group (USD 15,000–USD 30,000), and eleven (37%) into the higher group (above USD 30,000). Additionally, regarding education, five participants (17%) were in the lower group (under college), sixteen (53%) in the middle group (college), and nine (30%) in the higher group (graduate and above).

All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese from February to August 2023 via WeChat, with each lasting thirty to sixty-five minutes. Interview questions encompassed elements of the SPT, addressing what secondhand items have been involved and platforms used (materials), knowledge for successful transactions (skills), and meanings derived from the resale practices (values). Additional questions covered motivations, encountered challenges, and changes in consumption behavior resulting from practices. Sample questions included “What information is necessary when posting products?” and “How has buying or selling secondhand clothes changed your consumption behaviors?” All data were translated into English for coding.

3.2. Data Coding and Content Analysis

Both screening survey and interview transcripts were analyzed. Online survey results were summarized using descriptive statistics [14]. Interview transcripts were coded for content analysis using NVivo 14 to discern themes and subthemes [47]. Participants were grouped by age, income, and education, enabling exploration of potential interactions with identified factors. In response to the scarcity of literature on consumers who participate in both selling and buying, a hybrid deductive and inductive coding approach was employed to develop themes, ensuring unbiased exploration and the emergence of novel themes [48]. As highlighted by Shove and Pantzar [49], the practice is influenced by factors facilitating or hindering associated elements—materials, skills, and meanings. Therefore, relevant motivation and challenge themes were deductively extracted from previous studies. The principles of inductive coding were then applied to verify, refine, and broaden themes and subthemes, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of factors influencing practices. To ensure validity, all researchers participated in data collection, coding, and analysis. After initial coding, a second researcher verified the analysis for consistency [50]. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen’s kappa (k), resulting in a satisfactory coefficient of 0.87, affirming result reliability [51].

4. Findings and Discussion

This section offers a comprehensive analysis of Chinese consumers’ engagement in OFRPs, encompassing both selling and buying dimensions. It summarizes practices, explores motivations and challenges, and examines aspects of SPT. Additionally, the interaction between these factors and participants’ demographics is scrutinized, alongside a discussion of their connections with prior research studies.

4.1. Descriptive Analysis of Participants’ OFRPs

All participants have a minimum of one year of resale experience, with nineteen (63%) possessing over three years of experience. All participants engage in weekly resale activities on multiple platforms, represented by Idle Fish and WeChat Market. They all engaged in both selling and buying practices, with 43% being inclined towards either selling or buying. In addition, 90% of participants reported monthly fashion expenditures within USD 450, including new and secondhand purchases. Overall, participants’ expenditures correlate with their generated sales from resale: the more products they purchase, the more they resell in the future. Though seven (23%) participants reported successfully reselling more than five pieces of fashion items and seventeen (57%) participants reported selling between one to four pieces in the last six months, six (20%) participants reported no sales activity during this period, indicating room for improvement in practice frequency. Overall, participants tend to buy from the resale market rather than sell, with all participants having

bought at least one item in the last six months, and 30% of participants having bought more than five pieces. The average purchase price of secondhand items is responsive to participants' income and monthly fashion expenditure level. Consistent with previous research, 83% of participants reported less than 25% of secondhand items in their wardrobe, a comparatively lower adoption rate than other national markets [52], suggesting significant room for improvement in OFRP adoption in the Chinese market. Table 1 shows a summary of details about participants' resale practices.

4.2. Motivations and Challenges Influencing Consumer OFRPs

This section answers, explains, and discusses the first research question about the primary factors influencing Chinese consumers' participation in both selling and buying activities within OFRPs.

4.2.1. Motivations

The analysis revealed motivations that exclusively influence selling, buying, and both selling and buying practices (Table 2). Differentiating from previous studies that identified financial benefit and environmental consciousness as factors influencing general consumers [11,32], our study provides a more nuanced explanation of selling and buying motivations.

Financial benefit. Financial gain consistently motivates consumers in both second-hand buying and selling. When buying, consumers seek products with high financial performance [8], whereas they aim to recoup costs, gain cash back, and generate additional income from selling idle products to alleviate financial burdens, particularly under post-COVID-19 economic pressure. In this study, over three-quarters of participants emphasized financial benefit, reinforcing its role in driving resale consumers' engagement. This motivation is notably strong among the lower-income and education groups, with a unanimous agreement.

I believe revenue forms the foundation of all transactions, even in secondhand trade... during the pandemic, almost all my friends experienced a significant income decrease... Who doesn't want to get extra money? (INT 1)

Online transaction convenience. The convenience of online transactions drives the development of platforms and consumers' involvement, facilitated by ease of use, acquisition immediacy, and fast delivery [32]. Resale platforms, notably Idle Fish, break China's geographical restrictions and provide seamless connections between resale consumers nationwide. This convenience enhances the value of secondhand products by expanding their reach to a diverse pool of buyers, granting consumers seeking to make a purchase access to a variety of products.

Idle Fish is particularly convenient for me to sell my stuff. There is an old saying: "Even the fragrance of wine fears the depth of the alley." Without these apps, no one knows I have such good products. These platforms provide great convenience in handling my idle items. (INT 4)

Self-management. The convergence of style upgrading and lifestyle evolution reveals a novel motivation. This strong influence highlights Chinese consumers' enhanced self-management from both interior and exterior perspectives. Acknowledging the evolving nature of consumers' fashion tastes [53], it was heightened that self-awareness played a pivotal role for resale consumers, especially selling practices. The dynamic nature of consumers' dress size, style, and perceived quality prompts a deliberate effort to upgrade their dressing styles. Consumers' selling practices prompt them to upgrade their wardrobes to better align with their evolving style preferences, while their buying practices aim to find fashion items that offer optimal performance within their budget constraints.

Table 1. Profile of interviewees’ OFRPs.

Code	Practice Years	Platform Experience	Selling or Buying	Monthly Fashion Expenditures	Pieces Sold (within Six Months)	Generated Sales (within Six Months)	Pieces Bought (within Six Months)	Secondhand Expenses (within Six Months)	Secondhand in Wardrobe
INT 1	>3	Idle Fish	Both	USD 500–1000	>5	USD 1500	>5	USD 1000	<10%
INT 2	>3	WeChat Market	Both	USD 150–300	None	0	1	USD 30	10–25%
INT 3	>3	Idle Fish, WeChat Market	Both	>USD 450	>5	USD 150	4–5	USD 150	<10%
INT 4	>3	Idle Fish	Both; mostly buying	USD 150–300	None	0	>5	USD 450	25–40%
INT 5	1–2	Idle Fish	Both; mostly buying	USD 150–300	2–3	USD 30	>5	USD 150	10–25%
INT 6	2–3	WeChat Market	Both; mostly selling	<USD 150	4–5	USD 150	1	USD 50	10–25%
INT 7	>3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	2–3	USD 150	4–5	USD 180	<10%
INT 8	1–2	Idle Fish	Both; mostly buying	USD 150–300	None	0	2–3	USD 30	<10%
INT 9	>3	Idle Fish	Both; mostly buying	USD 150	1	USD 20	>5	USD 200	<10%
INT 10	>3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	1	USD 30	2–3	USD 120	<10%
INT 11	>3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	None	0	1	USD 30	<10%
INT 12	>3	Idle Fish, WeChat Market	Both	USD 150–300	>5	USD 150	>5	USD 220	25–40%
INT 13	>3	Poizon, WeChat Market	Both; mostly buying	USD 150–300	None	0	2–3	USD 80	60–80%
INT 14	>3	Idle Fish	Both	USD 300–500	2–3	USD 1200	1	USD 120	10–25%
INT 15	2–3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	None	0	1	USD 50	<10%
INT 16	2–3	Idle Fish, Poizon	Both; mostly selling	USD 150–300	4–5	USD 150	1	USD 80	10–25%
INT 17	2–3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	2–3	USD 70	2–3	USD 100	<10%
INT 18	2–3	Idle Fish	Both	<USD 150	2–3	USD 70	2–3	USD 80	<10%
INT 19	>3	Idle Fish, Poizon, Plum	Both	USD 300–450	4–5	USD 750	>5	USD 900	25–40%
INT 20	1–2	Idle Fish	Both; mostly buying	<USD 150	1	USD 30	>5	USD 180	<10%

Table 1. Cont.

Code	Practice Years	Platform Experience	Selling or Buying	Monthly Fashion Expenditures	Pieces Sold (within Six Months)	Generated Sales (within Six Months)	Pieces Bought (within Six Months)	Secondhand Expenses (within Six Months)	Secondhand in Wardrobe
INT 21	>3	Idle Fish	Both	USD 150–300	4–5	USD 1300	4–5	USD 500	<10%
INT 22	>3	Idle Fish, Poizon	Both	<USD 150	2–3	USD 180	1	USD 30	10–25%
INT 23	2–3	Idle Fish	Both; mostly selling	USD 300–450	>5	USD 1500	2–3	USD 300	<10%
INT 24	>3	Idle Fish, WeChat Market	Both; mostly buying	USD 150–300	2–3	USD 120	>5	USD 200	25–40%
INT 25	>3	Idle Fish, Poizon	Both; mostly selling	USD 300–450	>5	USD 580	2–3	USD 150	<10%
INT 26	>3	Idle Fish, WeChat Market	Both	<USD 150	1	USD 30	2–3	USD 120	10–25%
INT 27	>3	Idle Fish	Both; mostly selling	USD 150–300	>5	USD 1200	2–3	USD 180	<10%
INT 28	2–3	Idle Fish	Both	USD 150–300	>5	USD 180	4–5	USD 80	10–25%
INT 29	>3	Idle Fish, WeChat Market	Both; mostly buying	<USD 150	1	USD 30	>5	USD 300	10–25%
INT 30	2–3	Idle Fish, Poizon	Both	USD 300–450	2–3	USD 120	4–5	USD 450	10–25%

Table 2. Frequencies of motivations.

Themes of Motivations	Sub-Themes	Frequency (Percentage)
Financial benefit (both)		25 (83%)
Online transaction convenience (both)		18 (60%)
Self-management (both)	Dressing style upgradation	18 (60%)
	Lifestyle evolution	13 (43%)
Wardrobe management (selling)	Declutter space	16 (53%)
	Lack of usefulness	12 (40%)
	Out-of-size	9 (30%)
Environmental consciousness (both)	Maximizing utility	15 (50%)
	Reducing wastefulness	14 (47%)
Bargain or treasure hunting (buying)		11 (37%)
Social trend influence (both)		5 (17%)
Emotional detachment (selling)		3 (10%)

As my self-awareness increased, I became more aware of my dressing style. I realized that many of the clothes I had purchased earlier were no longer suitable. Moreover, my increasing income can afford me to seek more comfortable and higher-quality clothing. (INT 3)

Wardrobe management. Effective wardrobe management is a key factor prompting selling practice adoption, with over 50% of participants citing the need for decluttering and maximizing space. Participants acknowledged the need to sell outdated, ill-fitting, or unwanted clothes. Style evolution motivated the younger group, while the older age group emphasized dealing with out-of-size items, including children’s clothes, due to rapid growth. Such awareness led them to regularly organize and update their wardrobes, aligning with studies emphasizing seasonal wardrobe evaluations for a curated, functional, and upgraded wardrobe [25,54].

At least every other year, I will organize and update my wardrobe. I will find a way to dispose of the ones that I no longer like, those that are out of date, those that are not the right size, or those that I wear very little. (INT 22)

Environmental consciousness. Environmental awareness drives participants to sell and buy secondhand fashion items online, aiming to maximize utility and minimize waste, aligning with findings from multiple studies [18,34]. In our study, the younger group demonstrated stronger environmental consciousness than the older group, expressing a desire to give items a second life, reduce wastefulness, and acknowledge the residual value of secondhand items. Participants, overall, were reluctant to discard items in good condition and found fulfillment in seeing them being reused.

I think selling my secondhand idle items is economical and environmentally friendly because I helped circulate them to increase their use. (INT 23)

Bargain or treasure hunting. One of the primary motivations for consumers to engage with buying practices is the thrill of finding unique and valuable pieces at discounted prices. This practice not only satisfies their desire for affordable fashion but also offers the excitement of finding rare styles or designer items at a fraction of their original cost within the vast array of available items.

I’ve developed a habit of browsing the app every day with a treasure hunt mentality. You can always find pieces that you love at a good price as long as you’re patient enough to look through the variety of postings. For me, it’s like a treasure hunting journey. (INT 13)

Social trend influence. Some participants highlighted the influence of social trends, particularly peer influence from celebrities and social media bloggers engaged in resale practices [55]; in China, it gradually became mainstream. Observing others participating in secondhand selling and buying, especially among younger and higher-income groups, served as a motivation for socializing and stimulating their practices.

Many celebrities and famous bloggers will resell their belongings, shop for secondhand vintage clothes, and then share them on social media. It has become a trend. (INT 19)

Emotional Detachment. Emotional detachment emerged as a unique motivator, driving consumers to engage in selling within the resale market. In contrast to buying practices that often evoke positive emotions from vintage purchases [21], selling is driven by negative associations or memories, compelling consumers to let go of items and move forward emotionally.

Sometimes it may be an emotional parting. For example, a piece of clothing may be related to a particular memory of my past ... If that memory is not very pleasant, I want to dispose of it out of sight in order to move on. (INT 16)

4.2.2. Challenges

The challenges hindering consumers' OFRPs were identified (Table 3). Consistent with previous studies, these challenges are consumer- and platform-related [31,32]. Our study provides a more nuanced discussion of selling and buying challenges.

Table 3. Frequencies of challenges.

Themes of Challenges	Sub-Themes	Frequency (Percentage)
Communication challenges (both)		15 (50%)
Buyer-related issues (selling)	Price bargaining	15 (50%)
	Unethical buying behaviors	14 (47%)
Seller-related issues (buying)	Unethical selling behaviors	14 (47%)
	Insufficient product information	12 (40%)
Inventory management issues (selling)	Time and effort-consuming	14 (47%)
	Product posting complexity	11 (37%)
	Lack of marketing skills	11 (37%)
	Lack of product competitiveness	4 (13%)
Platform concerns (both)	Unsound mechanism	10 (33%)
	Rules unfamiliarity	7 (23%)
	Insufficient user service	9 (30%)
Security concerns (both)	Internet scam	7 (23%)
	Personal information leakage	4 (13%)
Logistics concerns (both)		4 (13%)

Communication challenges. Smooth communication is crucial for successful resale transactions, particularly considering that many consumers engaging in selling are non-professional salespeople. Half of the participants reported facing communication challenges for both selling and buying. Buying-side consumers often complained about selling-side consumers' arrogant attitudes and delayed responses. Conversely, selling-side consumers often perceive buying-side consumers as overly demanding and picky, especially considering the limited revenue from selling. This highlights the difficulties of negotiation inherent in OFRPs.

If you are buying from a resale app, somehow sellers think they are superior to you, especially when you try to negotiate the price for a luxury product. Such sellers will definitely discourage my purchase interest. (INT 6)

Buyer-related issues. Aligned with Gu et al. [56], we discovered that buying-related issues significantly deter consumers' selling practices, particularly those involving price bargaining and unethical behaviors. Price bargaining may occur both before and after the purchase, especially when buying-side consumers fail to recognize the product's value and engage in excessive bargaining. Moreover, some buying consumers may scrutinize for minor defects after receiving goods, aiming to negotiate discounts. Further, unethical behaviors, such as dishonest returns, purposeful negative reviews, and false accusations of selling counterfeit items, also impact resale consumers' interactions.

Some buyers can be pretty greedy. Even though I already sell items at a low price, they still want to negotiate even further. . . Once, I sold a bag to a girl. She claimed some minor flaws that I hadn't clearly described in the listing and asked for a big discount. . . She was aware that I preferred not to deal with returns and likely accepted her requirement. (INT 13)

Seller-related issues. Unethical selling behaviors, such as providing deceptive information, deliberately concealing flaws, and misrepresenting products in online images, undermine the trust of buying consumers. Also, insufficient product information, such as a lack of sizing or measurement details, adds to the issue, leaving buying-side consumers uncertain about item fit and quality. These challenges emphasize the need for selling-side consumers to provide accurate details to foster trust in the resale market.

My biggest concern when buying secondhand is that the received product may not match the described newness or condition. Some sellers intentionally conceal flaws. When you receive the product and confront them with discrepancies, they simply claim they didn't notice it. (INT 12)

Inventory management issues. Online resale also challenges consumers' selling practices with inventory management, which involves time- and effort-consuming processes, product posting complexity, and a lack of relative marketing skills and product competitiveness. The process of cleaning, photographing, and posting items and communicating with buying-side consumers demands significant effort, raising concerns about the worthiness of time invested without guaranteed success. Furthermore, consumers who sell their pre-owned fashion items are not professional retailers and thus lack selling and service skills. This may lead to their products' online presence lacking competitiveness in terms of visual appeal and product information comprehensiveness, particularly for participants with lower education levels.

My main worry is the lack of a proportional return on my investment of time and effort because there is no guarantee to sell out. (INT 4)

Platform concerns. Platforms with unsound mechanisms pose challenges for both selling and buying practices but pose more concerns for selling. These concerns primarily manifest in platform rules, unfamiliarity, and insufficient user services. For instance, concerns arise for both selling and buying practices regarding platforms' insufficient, untrustworthy, or unfair user services [32], such as the sensitive word detection systems of chatting and rejecting legitimate messages. Moreover, as a review study highlights the need for Chinese resale platforms to improve user policies and usability [17], participants, especially those with lower education, find navigating algorithms and promotional mechanisms challenging for their selling practices. Consumers who practice selling also perceive a bias from platforms favoring buying-side consumers in conflicts, potentially resulting in unjust outcomes.

The platform is more biased towards buyers in dealing with conflicts. I remember one time a buyer was not satisfied with the received product and required a return. I disagreed because secondhand trade usually does not have a return service, and there is nothing wrong with my item. However, the platform eventually got in and made me agree to the return. But when I received my item, it had been worn. The whole experience is quite unpleasant. (INT 19)

Security concerns. Consumers encountered security challenges, such as personal information leakage and internet scams [21], which could potentially pose financial risks for both selling and buying practices. Participants expressed concerns when buying that their sensitive personal information, such as address and phone number, may be leaked or collected illegally. Participants who practice selling expressed concerns regarding online fraud schemes targeting high-value luxury goods transactions.

There are many professional scammers on secondhand platforms, mainly aiming at high-value luxury transactions and creating scams to cheat you of items or money. (INT 16)

Logistics concerns. Though rarely discussed, logistics challenges are significant in online transactions [17], especially in the resale market, which lacks sound regulations for responsibility determination. These concerns mainly include potential package damage or loss during long-distance shipping. Selling-side consumers worry that their products might get damaged during transportation and face financial losses because buying-side consumers will hold no responsibility for it. On the other hand, buying-side consumers worry about the risk of their desired items getting lost in transit.

For buyers who aren't in the same city as me, the delivery can be a bit of a hassle. Especially when the receiving address is very remote, and the delivery takes longer, the package is more prone to damage or missing. (INT 8)

4.3. Materials, Skills, and Meanings Aspects of OFRPs

This section addresses the second research question regarding the patterns that emerge among resale consumers engaged within OFRPs from the SPT perspective, as depicted in Figure 1. It illustrates the manifest patterns of materials, skills, and meanings in Chinese consumers' OFRPs, examining the nuanced perspectives of both selling and buying practices.



Figure 1. The social practice model in the context of OFRP.

4.3.1. Materials

Resale consumers' selling practices involve both the use of resale platforms and unwanted fashion items, while only platforms are needed for buying practices. Among the platforms utilized by participants, Idle Fish, WeChat Market, and niche resale platforms like Poizon and Plum are prominent choices (Table 1). The most sold idled fashion products

include clothes, bags, shoes, and accessories based on popularity. Coats emerged as the top-selling clothing item due to their higher value and non-intimate nature, followed by dresses, sweaters, T-shirts, pants, and skirts. Additionally, luxury bags also exhibit significant demand. However, intimate clothing such as underwear, unless brand new and meeting high hygiene standards, and items with strict hygiene requirements such as shoes, unless brand new or nearly new, were not intended for sale due to privacy and sanitary concerns.

4.3.2. Skills

Both selling and buying engaged in OFRPs require essential skills for smooth communication and successful transactions, notably negotiating ability and product knowledge. Effective negotiation is crucial between resale consumers when interacting; both require patience and timely responses. When selling, consumers faced challenges in monitoring platforms consistently due to limited energy and time, causing difficulties in seizing potential sales opportunities. Similarly, consumers could benefit from effective negotiating skills to secure favorable deals when buying.

The selling process requires various skills compared with buying, including product posting, marketing, packaging, shipping, and after-sale services. When deciding to post an idled product on the platform, participants need to recall product purchase time, brand, and prices. Then, they need to create appealing content, such as descriptions, photos, and videos, showcasing the products with knowledge about fashion-related content, such as styles, fabrics, and sizing. Additionally, marketing requires understanding platform algorithms, further posing a challenge for the selling process. Concerning packing and shipping, participants emphasized careful packaging to avoid damage and often offered small gifts for buyer satisfaction and positive feedback. Besides, after-sale services are also required when selling to avoid unnecessary returns and negative reviews.

Product comparison and identification are essential skills for buying in the resale market. With a plethora of listings available on platforms, consumers must adeptly evaluate product descriptions, images, and details to assess quality, authenticity, and value, enabling them to make informed purchasing decisions. Additionally, comparing similar products from various selling sources to find the best option in terms of price, condition, and suitability to consumers' buying preferences is crucial.

4.3.3. Meanings

Whether the resale market will replace the purchase of new products has long been debated in academia [57]. Our findings revealed diverse changes in resale consumers' sustainable consumption behaviors, both selling and buying, after engaging in OFRPs. Participants reported increased, moderate change, and decreased consumption simultaneously. Twelve (40%) participants reported moderate changes in new product consumption. Reasons include a limited number of items being sold or purchased and low awareness of the environmental impact of the fashion industry. Ten (33%) reported reduced new product consumption, primarily through selling, attributed to heightened consciousness and caution in new purchases. After evaluating wardrobes and clearing out unsuitable items, they developed a more accurate self-style evaluation, emphasizing quality over quantity. The selling practices made consumers realize that higher-quality products could last longer and be sold for better value in the resale market. In addition, awareness of complex procedures in online resale influenced considerations for new purchases, ensuring they would be worth the effort for potential resale. Surprisingly, eight (27%) participants reported an increased frequency of new product consumption, challenging the widely acknowledged positive environmental impact of the fashion resale market. This phenomenon is attributed to regained wardrobe space, the money reflex allows investment in new styles and online resale convenience. Interestingly, our results align with Turunen and Pöyry's [12] findings, indicating that future selling success rate and item value influence consumers' decisions when purchasing new products, especially luxury items.

Nurturing sociality is one of the primary meanings of OFRPs. The interview analysis revealed the spontaneous formation of social communities among resale market practitioners, notably on WeChat and the Idle Fish platform. These diverse communities include resale groups that support collectors in refreshing their fashion collections. For instance, Idle Fish's "pond circle" caters to individuals who share similar attributes, fostering connections among like-minded collectors such as INT 23, who collects Lolita dresses. WeChat users form groups for various purposes, from community-based transactions to specialized groups for mothers buying and selling children's clothing. What distinguishes these groups is their spontaneous formation, often initiated by consumers sharing geographical proximity or similar styles and collection hobbies. Furthermore, consumers' OFRPs foster connections and cultivate friendships, especially evident among the younger demographic [8]. Resale platforms with social features enable interaction beyond daily circles, leading to friendships that may extend offline [7]. The review and follower systems can build trust, encourage repeat purchases, and strengthen connections. Participants find joy in establishing friendships with those who share similar fashion tastes and lifestyles, extending beyond fashion-related discussions.

OFRP also provides emotional satisfaction for consumers when selling and buying. When selling, the act of decluttering and giving a new purpose to their items can evoke a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. Moreover, receiving positive feedback and gratitude from buyers can further enhance consumers' emotional well-being, validating their decision to further sell. Similarly, obtaining desired items at a discounted price while contributing to the circular economy provides emotional satisfaction during the buying process.

Moreover, when selling, OFRP provides consumers with guilt alleviation in disposal, self-empowerment, and business-like experiences. Participants expressed guilt alleviation when disposing of their items through resale. By selling well-functioning goods to buyers who need them, participants find fulfillment in extending the lifecycle of their unwanted items and alleviating the guilt associated with discarding them. Moreover, the selling process empowers consumers by validating their taste and fostering self-enhancement [58]. Engaging in resale builds confidence and motivates lifestyle changes [7,25]. Successful sales and positive feedback enhance consumers' internal strength, confidence, and autonomy, contributing to overall well-being and satisfaction through selling. Further, research has found that hedonic fun is a crucial driver motivating consumers to adopt resale practices [25,30]. The selling practice provides a business-running vibe and fulfillment, especially for higher-income participants. For instance, participants described the second-hand market as a bustling "bazaar" (INT 1), feeling like running small businesses. INT 3 found fulfillment and productivity in organizing and selling items from her wardrobe, akin to operating her own "businesses."

5. Conclusions and Implications

While consumer behavior in fashion resale has been extensively studied, examining it from both selling and buying perspectives can lead to a deeper understanding. This study, drawing on the social practice theory (SPT), identified nuanced motivations and challenges driving consumers' selling and buying practices in the resale market. Factors such as financial benefit, online transaction convenience, self-management, environmental consciousness, and social trend influence drive both selling and buying practices. Additionally, wardrobe management and emotional detachment exclusively drive selling practices, while bargain or treasure hunting exclusively drives buying behaviors. These factors collectively contribute to shaping consumer behavior in engaging with OFRPs, underscore the importance of personal organization and detachment from possessions, and emphasize the thrill of finding valuable items at discounted prices. In addition to the identified motivations, there are also notable challenges that impact consumers. Communication challenges, platform concerns, security concerns, and logistics concerns present significant obstacles for both selling and buying practices. Moreover, buyer-related issues

and inventory management issues exclusively challenge selling practices, highlighting the complexities involved in managing inventory effectively. Conversely, seller-related issues exclusively challenge buying practices, emphasizing the crucial role of trust and reliability in the buying process. These findings illuminate the multifaceted nature of the resale market and emphasize the need for market refinement to facilitate smoother resale practices.

Furthermore, this study analyzed aspects of SPT—materials, skills, and meanings—associated with OFRPs. From the materials aspect, platforms and unwanted fashion products are required materials for selling practices, while only the platform is required for buying practices. From the skills aspect, selling practices require more skills than buying. Negotiating and product knowledge skills are needed for both selling and buying practices. Product posting, marketing, packaging and shipping, and after-sale services are needed for selling practices, while only product comparison and identification skills are needed for buying practices. Given that sellers play a pivotal role as initiators and suppliers in the resale market, their experiences and willingness to participate are crucial for fostering a healthy and sustainable development of the resale market. From the aspect of meaning, both practices of selling and buying formed participants' sustainable consumption behaviors, nurtured sociality, and provided emotional satisfaction. Moreover, selling practices alleviated consumers' disposal guilt, provided self-empowerment, and created business-like experiences. Overall, these findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of engaging in OFRPs, underscoring their positive impact on both individual consumers and the broader community.

From the findings, we can further draw the conclusion that the Chinese resale market is yet to be refined and improved. Although Chinese consumers have actively engaged in OFRPs, there remains great potential to foster more sustainable consumption behaviors, as only one-third of participants exhibited such behaviors. This study provides empirical insights into existing literature and offers actionable recommendations to key stakeholders for advancing fashion circularity—a critical objective for the sustainability of the fashion industry.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study deepens the current understanding of fashion resale by providing nuanced factors influencing consumers' OFRPs and enhancing SPT. Regarding motivation, we provide evidence supporting financial gain, environmental consciousness, and wardrobe management, as identified in previous studies [11,30,32]. We also reveal novel factors shaping resale market consumers' mindsets, such as self-management for both selling and buying, emotional detachment for selling, and bargain or treasure hunting for buying. Regarding challenges, our findings agree with previous studies that they are practitioners, platforms, and resale industry-related [14,31,32]. However, we fill academic voids by revealing challenges that exclusively exist among consumers' selling practices, inventory management issues, which include time and effort-consuming, product posting complexity, a lack of marketing skills, and product competitiveness. In addition, we provide a framework encompassing materials, skills, and meanings associated with Chinese fashion resale market consumers' OFRPs. This contributes to the development of practice theory within the context of circular fashion [14,40]. Moreover, concerning changes in sustainable consumption behavior, we stand with Thomas's [57] study and bring out the question of whether the practice of resale will decrease or increase consumers' purchase frequencies of new products, further having a positive or negative impact on the environment. Additionally, we supplement Turunen and Pöyry's [12] study by revealing that selling practices lead consumers to take future resale success rates and value into consideration when shopping for new products.

5.2. Practical Implications

As an empirical study, our findings provide practical insights for circular fashion stakeholders, especially resale platforms and resale market participants. Enhancing fashion circularity in China through resale requires addressing various motivations and challenges identified in the study. For example, enlightened by identified motivators, platforms could create compelling advertisements to educate consumers on resale benefits and attract more users to engage in resale practices. Of the identified challenges, addressing communication challenges and buyer- and seller-related issues is crucial for building trust and reliability in online transactions. Moreover, to tackle buyer concerns like price bargaining, collaboration with regulations for transparent product evaluation and pricing standards is recommended. To improve platform-related challenges, such as low product exposure and unfamiliarity with platform rules, efforts can focus on accurate product forwarding and guiding consumers' selling processes. For inventory management issues, like posting complexity and a lack of marketing skills, platforms can streamline the product publishing process and offer educational resources. Addressing security concerns and collaborating with policymakers to establish comprehensive regulations are crucial. To enhance logistics, platforms can provide packaging guides, partner with reliable shipping companies, and offer insurance options for shipped items. Finally, platforms can improve user involvement by refining social features, creating like-minded communities, and fostering a virtual business atmosphere. Tailoring business strategies based on our study's findings can attract and retain committed participants in resale practices, thereby enhancing market influence and contributing to enhanced fashion circularity.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study acknowledges the existence of limitations, which provide insights for future research. Firstly, it is qualitative and gender-restricted, focusing on a limited sample of female consumers. Future research should include male consumers, especially in the secondhand sneakers sector, exploring gender-based variations. A larger, quantitative study could validate our findings. Secondly, there are geographical restrictions, as participants are mainly from metropolises with higher incomes and educations. Research across diverse regions is needed for broader validation. Thirdly, the study doesn't differentiate between the luxury and non-luxury resale sectors. Future research can explore these sectors separately for a more detailed understanding of the underlying dynamics.

Furthermore, our study uncovers novel, nuanced findings, suggesting avenues for future research. Firstly, the concept of self-management is a previously unexplored motivating factor, providing insights into improving consumers' welfare. Secondly, buyer- and seller-related and inventory management issues, often neglected in prior studies, offer opportunities for exploring resale consumer relationships when selling and buying and enhancing consumer education in the resale market. Lastly, our study questions whether resale practices contribute to reducing or exacerbating the fashion industry's environmental impact, calling for further investigation. These aspects present opportunities for enriching our understanding of complex dynamics within the fashion resale consumer ecosystem.

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