

RETAIL

Secondhand shopping grows rapidly as sustainability becomes an integral element of fashion

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The Consumers Behind Fashion's Growing Secondhand Market. Image credit: Vestiaire Collective

By NORA HOWE

Despite a decrease in fashion purchasing during the COVID-19 crisis, consumers are realizing they can find high-quality exclusive items in a more affordable and sustainable way: secondhand shopping.

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According to a new study by **Boston Consulting Group** (BCG) sponsored by **Vestiaire Collective**, the global secondhand market will likely grow 15 to 20 percent over the next five years. The thriving pre-owned market encourages hopes of consumers to own fewer, higher-quality items, to reduce overconsumption and to take better care of what they own.

BCG conducted a survey of 7,000 individuals from six countries, uncovering insights into the new fashion trend.

Vintage is vital

The study identified segments representing the variation of participants' engagement with the secondhand market, including their motivations, the frequency with which they buy or sell items and their preferred marketplaces. Luxury brands should consider these segments as a way to determine how these consumers may evolve over time.

The secondhand market is on the rise as consumers are increasingly filling their closets with secondhand items. According to the survey, 10 million more shoppers purchased a secondhand product in 2019 than did in 2018.

Secondhand consumption is increasingly driven by sustainability and affordability as 77 percent of survey participants agreed that purchase power and affordability was a motivating factor for secondhand consumption while 70 percent agreed that the sustainable aspect of purchasing secondhand items was a motivator.



Calling All Fashion Activists. Image Credit: Vestiaire Collective

According to the study, the secondhand market comprises six consumer profiles: secondhand trialists, uniqueness seekers, impulsive sophisticates, trendy millennials, sustainability adepts and amateur merchants.

Secondhand trialists and uniqueness seekers make up the buyers only group; impulsive sophisticates, trendy millennials and sustainability adepts make up the buyers and sellers group; amateur merchants make up the sellers only group.

The COVID-19 crisis has also had a large impact on how consumer trends in sustainability and fashion consumption have evolved.

According to the study, 82 percent of participants plan to purchase more quality items to keep for a long time once things return to normal post-pandemic. Additionally, 72 percent plan to make fewer impulse purchases.

Luxury brands have a lot to learn from the growing secondhand market, and can benefit from a healthy market.



Calling All Fashion Activists! Image Credit: Vestiaire Collective

According to BCG, 62 percent of consumers would be more willing to buy from fashion brands that partner with secondhand platforms, 48 percent of consumers purchased a pre-owned item from a newly discovered brand in the past year and 31 percent of secondhand sellers bought new luxury goods with the money they made selling pre-owned items.

Not your sister's hand-me-downs

As the world begins seeking sustainable and responsible fashion in the secondhand market, luxury brands should explore selling secondhand themselves, instituting buy-back programs or partnering with existing platforms to leverage industry knowledge.

The consumer landscape has undergone a number of fundamental shifts over the last five to 10 years this has already put the retail industry under a lot of pressure to respond, driving businesses to be more innovative and flexible in the way they function.

The COVID-19 crisis further drives the need for the retail industry to be dynamic and responsive to customer needs as they will continue to change dramatically, especially after a crisis like this one. People will step out of this crisis with a different mindset than before, potentially reconsidering their priorities and the way they consume ([see story](#)).

A complete re-tune and an innovative problem-solving approach is what may guarantee the highest level of success

for brands willing to move forward. The future of achievements in fashion and luxury deeply depend not on dictating what is good and what is bad, what is in and what is out, but rather on emphasizing people's needs and offering inspiring solutions in a new way ([see story](#)).

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