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Investigating the Customer Journey in Second-Hand Fashion Platforms: Implications for Luxury Brand Management

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ABSTRACT

Consumers' increasing environmental concerns are prompting a shift in fashion consumption, fueling the remarkable growth of the second-hand market. Over the last decade, this trend has spurred the emergence of a plethora of online platforms dedicated to the resale of pre-loved fashion items. As consumers can easily access luxury garments at affordable prices through second-hand platforms, the rapid expansion of these indirect channels holds the potential to further redefine how consumers experience and access luxury, significantly contributing to its democratization. While scholarly interest in second-hand luxury has recently surged, current research has overlooked the experience consumers live when purchasing from such channels. Our research aims to fill this gap by delving into the customers' journey within these marketplaces, unraveling their experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes when purchasing second-hand luxury. Twenty-four in-depth interviews with established luxury consumers who have recently purchased second-hand luxury items through these platforms were conducted. The customer experience and journey framework was applied as a theoretical lens to make sense of such interactions. The findings reveal that consumers are drawn by the perceived endless availability of luxury items and the opportunity to compare different listings. Still, concerns over brand dilution, counterfeiting, and the absence of a sought-after luxury experience pose significant challenges during the customer journey. This research contributes to the emerging field of second-hand luxury by shedding light on the intricacies of the customer experience within these platforms. The article concludes with managerial insights aimed at assisting luxury brand managers in developing strategies and tactics in a market environment where second-hand platforms are gaining momentum.

1 | Introduction

In today's world, sustainable and circular consumption practices are gaining ever-increasing importance (Ertekin and Atik 2020; Ertekin, Atik, and Murray 2020; Styvén and Mariani 2020), leading individuals to gradually seek alternatives to traditional fashion paradigms embedded in linear lifecycles and the rapid disposal of garments (Arrigo 2021; Koay, Cheah, and Lom 2022; Mukendi et al. 2020). As a result, the fashion industry has witnessed the emergence of a plethora of online platforms dedicated to selling second-hand fashion (Cervellon and Vigreux 2018;

Henninger et al. 2021; Hu et al. 2019; Yrjölä, Hokkanen, and Saarijärvi 2021), such as Vinted, Depop, and Grailed. Within these virtual thrift shops, consumers can find pre-loved luxury fashion goods at remarkably affordable prices (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Silva et al. 2022; Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020). To grasp the sudden growth of the second-hand luxury market, it is worth noting that it reached over €45 billion in 2023 and is estimated to grow steadily by 6% in the following years (D'Arpizio et al. 2024). Among the most popular marketplaces dedicated to selling second-hand luxury, both The RealReal and Vestiaire Collective have exceeded USD 1 billion

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in gross merchandise value sold in a year (Benissan, 2022; The RealReal 2022). The rise of these platforms holds the potential to further redefine how consumers experience and access luxury, significantly contributing to the “democratization” of this sector (Christodoulides et al. 2021).

Influenced by the growing relevance of second-hand luxury in contemporary consumption trends, academic interest in the topic has surged in recent years (Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019; Luo and Park 2024; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). The scholarly attention devoted to second-hand luxury can be divided into two research streams. The first stream delves into the meanings and perceptions consumers attribute to second-hand luxury (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022; Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015; Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020) while the second one examines the drivers influencing consumers’ intention to adopt and purchase second-hand items (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Keim and Wagner 2018; Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019; Kim-Vick and Cho 2024; Luo and Park 2024).

While offering valuable insights, current research has neglected the experiential side that consumers live when engaging with the platforms facilitating the (re)sale of second-hand luxury (Athwal et al. 2019; Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Ki et al. 2024). With the exponential growth of these marketplaces (Benissan, 2022; The RealReal 2022), investigating the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) when purchasing second-hand luxury on these indirect channels is paramount to understand whether consumers still seek the luxury experience associated with direct brand purchases or if their desires are adequately fulfilled through the use of second-hand platforms. Thus, this research aims to provide an answer to the following research question: How does the customer journey unfold in the purchasing of pre-loved luxury items on second-hand platforms?

Given the exploratory nature of our study, 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews (Berg and Lune 2012) with experienced luxury consumers who have recently purchased second-hand luxury garments through these marketplaces were conducted. Throughout the interviews, we investigated the detailed aspects of consumers’ experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes during their purchase within these platforms, categorizing emergent themes according to the theoretical framework for customer experience and journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). This research contributes to the emerging field of second-hand luxury (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Luo and Park 2024; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015) by highlighting the intricately complex nature of the customer journey within these platforms. More specifically, our study suggests that while consumers praise certain aspects offered by second-hand marketplaces that align with their overall expectations—such as the ability to compare different listings (i.e., “Comparability”), the variety and availability of unique pieces (i.e., “Availability”), and the opportunity to support business models that promote the principles of the circular economy (i.e., “Doing one’s part”) – these platforms also evoke a sense of frustration stemming from the lack of a premium luxury experience (i.e., “Missing the luxury experience”), concerns about brand dilution (i.e., “Avoiding popular luxury brands”), as well

as challenges with authenticity verification (i.e., “Concerns about counterfeits”) and inconsistent item conditions (i.e., “Items falling short of initial expectations”) especially in peer-to-peer marketplaces. Although consumers on second-hand platforms often find themselves disappointed in the post-purchase phase, they will eventually return to second-hand marketplaces due to the unique advantages they offer, which remain unmatched by official brand channels.

The paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing the existing literature on second-hand luxury, thus offering a comprehensive overview of the scholarly discourse surrounding this topic. Following this, the methodology section outlines our research approach, detailing the data collection and analysis techniques employed to analyze our qualitative data set. The findings are followed by a discussion of our results and the managerial implications. We conclude the paper by suggesting avenues for future research.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | The Rise of Second-Hand

With growing environmental awareness and concerns about the ecological footprint of the fashion industry (Ertekin and Atik 2020; Ertekin, Atik, and Murray 2020), consumers are gradually seeking alternatives to traditional fashion consumption patterns (Arrigo 2021; Koay, Cheah, and Lom 2022; Mukendi et al. 2020). In response to this shift, the appeal of second-hand fashion has soared, as it aligns with the principles of the circular economy by extending the lifespan of clothing items (Mukendi et al. 2020; Mukherjee, Datta, and Paul 2020). More recently, amidst the fashion industry’s recent transition toward digitalization (Ratchford, Soysal, and Zentner 2023), even second-hand clothing has transcended flea market stalls (Ferraro, Sands, and Brace-Govan 2016), driven by the emergence of new digital platforms that significantly contributed to the adoption of this emerging consumption practice (Arrigo 2021; Christodoulides et al. 2021; Schallehn et al. 2019; Styvén and Mariani 2020). From peer-to-peer (P2P) marketplaces (e.g., Vinted) to business-to-consumer (B2C) resale platforms (e.g., Vestiaire Collective), consumers now have access to a spectrum of second-hand fashion destinations tailored to their preferences and budgetary considerations (Arrigo 2021; Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Henninger et al. 2021; Hu et al. 2019; Yrjölä, Hokkanen, and Saarijärvi 2021). By offering a diverse range of pre-loved luxury fashion products at a more accessible price point (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023; Tangri and Yu 2023), second-hand platforms have further democratized the once exclusive luxury sector (Christodoulides et al. 2021), thereby reshaping the traditional drivers behind luxury purchases (Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019).

Luxury consumption has been historically driven by psychological factors that transcend more practical considerations. Indeed, luxury purchases have always revolved around the desire for exclusivity, status, and the social symbolism of owning prestigious brands (Kastanakis and Balabanis 2012; Shukla 2012; Zhan and He 2012). Additionally, the immersive in-store experience offered by luxury retailers, characterized by personalized

service, ambiance, and tactile engagement with luxury goods, further elevates the intention to purchase luxury items (Liu, Burns, and Hou 2013). In contrast, the drivers for consumers purchasing second-hand luxury items, while sharing some similarities with traditional luxury buyers, diverge significantly (Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019). Although a key commonality is the desire for high-quality products that convey status and sophistication (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022; Kim-Vick and Cho 2024; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023), second-hand luxury buyers usually seek the same prestige and quality at a reduced cost (Silva et al. 2022; Tangri and Yu 2023). Sustainability and ethical considerations are also prominent drivers for second-hand luxury buyers (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022; Malhotra and Shaiwalini 2023). Indeed, many consumers seem to opt for pre-owned luxury items as a way to support a more sustainable and circular economy (Keim and Wagner 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015).

Given the distinct drivers behind traditional and second-hand luxury purchases, academic interest in the consumption of these items has recently taken off (see Table 1), resulting in a growing body of literature aimed at understanding this emerging consumption practice and its broader implications for the luxury industry. In the next section, we specifically delve into the phenomenon of second-hand luxury and examine the findings from the extant literature.

2.2 | Second-Hand Luxury

Although scholarly attention on second-hand luxury is relatively recent (see Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), the increasing emphasis on circular principles in the fashion industry has led to a significant surge in studies investigating this phenomenon (see Table 1). The growing scholarly attention has sparked discussions surrounding the terminology used to describe such goods, with varying terms such as “second-hand” and “vintage” being employed interchangeably (Amatulli et al. 2018; Battle, Ryding, and Henninger 2018; Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012; Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021; Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, and Sihvonen 2018). However, it is essential to acknowledge that while “second-hand” suggests a broader category encompassing previously owned luxury items, “vintage” refers to clothes with a certain historical or aesthetic value (Amatulli et al. 2018; Silva et al. 2022; Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, and Sihvonen 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). This distinction underscores the importance of focusing on the broader concept of second-hand luxury to better capture the current state of the literature (Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, and Sihvonen 2018).

Studies on second-hand luxury can be categorized into two main streams. The first stream delves into the meanings and perceptions consumers attribute to second-hand luxury items (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022; Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015; Turunen and Pöyry 2019; Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020). Research in this area reveals that second-hand luxury items are perceived as more sustainable than new product purchasing (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022; Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, and Sihvonen 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015) while

also being regarded as treasures and real deals due to the affordable prices and character that enhance their appeal. Still, alongside these positive meanings, there is an acknowledgment of risks involved in these purchases as consumers face concerns about the reputational implications of buying previously owned luxury items (Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). In addition, when selling pre-owned luxury items, people often begin to perceive these items as mere commodities rather than retaining their original status as symbols of luxury and prestige (Turunen and Pöyry 2019; Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020).

The second stream focuses on the drivers and barriers influencing consumers' intention to adopt and purchase second-hand luxury items (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012; Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021; Keim and Wagner 2018; Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019; Kim-Vick and Cho 2024; Luo and Park 2024; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023; Tangri and Yu 2023). Existing research has identified some economic factors—such as the allure of accessing high-end products at more affordable prices (Hu et al. 2019; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023; Tangri and Yu 2023)—and perceived uniqueness and sustainability (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021; Keim and Wagner 2018; Kim-Vick and Cho 2024; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023) as pivotal drivers of choice. Indeed, consumers' purchase intention toward pre-loved luxury products is shaped by their environmental concerns (Jain and Rathi 2023; Malhotra and Shaiwalini 2023), need for self-expression (Amatulli et al. 2018), and also price-quality ratio (Ki et al. 2024; Turunen and Pöyry 2019; Yao and Bao 2022). Additionally, purchase intention is significantly influenced by the item's quality and overall state (Ki et al. 2024; Yao and Bao 2022). However, social stigmas and risk perceptions surrounding second-hand products (Tangri and Yu 2023), particularly in some cultural contexts (Luo and Park 2024; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023), may prevent consumers from adopting pre-loved luxury goods.

While existing studies provide valuable insights into second-hand luxury products (Malhotra and Shaiwalini 2023; Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), there has been a lack of research attention given to the indirect channels facilitating the (re)sale of pre-loved items. Studies focusing on the latter are only emergent and have primarily investigated the changing role of luxury consumers from buyers to sellers in P2P marketplaces (Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020) and the platforms' characteristics influencing purchase intention of pre-loved luxury items (Ki et al. 2024; Pandey, Mittal, and Chawla 2024). Yet, despite extant literature suggesting that investigating the customer journey on indirect channels is paramount for assessing whether these avenues meet consumer expectations and lead to diminished interest in direct brand purchases (Abbes, Hallem, and Taga 2020; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Shavitt and Barnes 2020), investigations focusing on consumers' lived experiences throughout their purchasing journey on second-hand platforms are still lacking (Athwal et al. 2019; Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Ki et al. 2024). With the exponential growth of second-hand marketplaces (Benissan, 2022; The RealReal 2022), investigating the customer experience on these platforms is crucial for understanding what attracts them to these indirect channels and whether they still seek the

TABLE 1 | Existing research on second-hand luxury.

Author(s)	Aim	Methodology	Context	Main findings
Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012	Exploring the drivers for purchasing vintage and second-hand luxury clothing	Online survey (103 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: France Focus: Drivers of second-hand and vintage luxury consumption 	Vintage consumption is driven by fashion involvement, nostalgia, and uniqueness, mediated by treasure hunting. Second-hand consumption is driven by frugality and eco-consciousness
Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015	Exploring the meanings attributed to second-hand luxury possessions	In-depth interviews with 10 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Finland Focus: Product (i.e., second-hand luxury) 	Five key themes characterize second-hand luxury possessions: sustainable choice, real deal, pre-loved treasure, risk investment, and unique find
Amatulli et al. 2018	Identifying the drivers of consumers' luxury vintage product purchases	Means-end chain (MEC) approach and laddering interview technique with Italian consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Italy Focus: Drivers of vintage luxury consumption 	Consumers buy luxury vintage products to enhance individual identity, self-confidence, and achieve a sense of fulfillment
Battle, Ryding, and Henninger 2018	Investigating access-based consumption in the context of second-hand luxury	Critical evaluation of various business models within the context of second-hand luxury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus: Comparing different business models (i.e., renting vs. borrowing vs. swapping) 	Consumers' desires are shifting from ownership to experience, with sustainability influencing the luxury fashion landscape
Cervellon and Vigneux 2018	Exploring the emotions experienced during the purchase of second-hand luxury items	10 semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: France Focus: Emotions experienced during second-hand luxury purchases from boutiques and online platforms (P2P and B2C) 	Emotions experienced include anxiety, impatience, nostalgia, trust issues, excitement, and disappointment
Hu et al. 2019	Exploring the drivers of participation in access-based consumption within the context of second-hand luxury fashion	In-depth interviews with 16 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: UK Focus: Drivers of access-based consumption (P2P and B2C) 	The resale value of second-hand luxury items emerges as a primary driver fostering the rise of the "micro-entrepreneur"
Keim and Wagner (2018)	Investigating the drivers behind luxury fashion vintage purchases	Study 1: Exploratory interviews (10 informants)+ Study 2: Online survey (691 respondents)+ Study 3: In-depth interviews (9 informants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countries: Italy, France, Netherlands (Study 1)+ Italy, France, Netherlands, UK, US (Study 2)+ Italy, France, Vietnam (Study 3) Focus: Drivers of vintage luxury consumption 	Five key themes characterize vintage luxury purchases: need for uniqueness, fashion involvement, need for status, no waste, and nostalgia
Turunen, Leipämaa-Leskinen, and Sihvonon 2018	Investigating the diverse terminologies used in the context of second-hand luxury	Literature review	—	The analysis reveals distinctions between "vintage" and "secondhand," emphasizing how "pre-loved" suggests care and attachment, while "pre-owned" implies less consideration for the item's history

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s)	Aim	Methodology	Context	Main findings
Kessou and Valette-Florence 2019	Exploring consumer relationships with second-hand and first-hand luxury products	Study 1: Projective technique + Study 2: Causal approach (280 participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: France Focus: Drivers behind first-hand vs. second-hand luxury purchases 	Second-hand luxury purchases are driven by social climbing, eco-consciousness, brand heritage, and windfall gains, while first-hand luxury purchases are motivated by power, social status, and product quality
Turunen and Pöyry 2019	Understanding how consumers approach the purchase of second-hand luxury products	In-depth interviews with 22 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Finland Focus: Product (i.e., second-hand luxury) 	Resale value consciousness emerged as a new dimension, emphasizing the investment-driven mentality in the context of second-hand luxury
Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020	Exploring the meanings that emerge from the act of selling second-hand luxury branded products	In-depth interviews with 18 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countries: Finland, France, Italy, UK Focus: Product (i.e., second-hand luxury). 	Selling pre-owned luxury changes how these items are perceived, reducing them to mere commodities (i.e., financial transactions)
Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021	Investigating the factors driving consumers to acquire and rent vintage and second-hand luxury products	Online survey (1317 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Italy Focus: Drivers of second-hand, vintage luxury purchases, and luxury rental choices 	Vintage and second-hand luxury consumption is motivated by product-related (anti-consumption tendencies) and experience-related (recreational motives) factors
Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022	Exploring Chinese consumers' perceptions of second-hand luxury fashion	In-depth interviews with 24 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: China Focus: Product (i.e., second-hand luxury) 	Chinese consumers perceive second-hand luxury products as viable alternatives that offer both economic value and environmental consciousness. Doubts over authenticity and hygiene lead to unfavorable attitudes
Silva et al. 2022	Investigating consumers' behavior in the context of pre-loved luxury purchases	In-depth interviews with customers and owners of second-hand boutiques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Monaco Focus: Consumer behavior when buying second-hand luxury from physical boutiques 	The authors identified three types of consumer behavior: bargain hunting combines recreational and economic motivations, treasure hunting blends nostalgic and recreational motivations, and individuality concern the need for uniqueness
Yao and Bao 2022	Investigating information disclosure and pricing effects in promoting pre-owned luxury products in the digital market	Regression analyses were conducted using a data set comprising 9936 listings of pre-owned luxury products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus: Effect of visual cues and pricing on the sales on a luxury resale platform (not mentioned) 	Visual cues reduce information asymmetry and facilitate transactions; high prices negatively impact sales, moderated by product condition and perceived prestige

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s)	Aim	Methodology	Context	Main findings
Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023	Investigating the motivations and perceived value influencing young adults' willingness to purchase from online second-hand luxury fashion retailers	Online survey (190 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: US Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Critical and fashion motivations positively impact perceived value, which in turn influences willingness to recommend and purchase intention
Jain and Rathi 2023	Investigating consumer values to engage in second-hand luxury consumption	Online survey (246 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: India Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Both egoistic and altruistic values drive purchase intention through attitudes and subjective norms
Malhotra and Shaiwalini 2023	Examining the drivers behind consumers' behaviors toward pre-loved luxury fashion products	Online survey (317 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: India Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Environmental concern influences the intention to purchase pre-loved luxury fashion products. Strong consumer attitudes toward second-hand increase the intention to purchase pre-loved luxury
Rathi, Jain, and Garg 2023	Exploring drivers and barriers to second-hand luxury fashion adoption	In-depth interviews with 26 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: India Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Status concerns, uniqueness, perceived quality, and monetary values are drivers for adopting second-hand luxury fashion. Barriers include reputational risks
Tangri and Yu 2023	Exploring the drivers and barriers of re-commerce within the context of second-hand luxury	Online survey (419 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: US Focus: Drivers behind the act of selling second-hand luxury 	Economic reasons, originality, and self-extension significantly motivate attitudes toward re-commerce. Additionally, superstitious beliefs positively influence the intention to sell
Ki et al. 2024	Investigating drivers of second-hand luxury consumption	Study 1: Thematic analysis on 247 users' generated comments on a SM platform + Study 2: Online survey (311 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: China Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption (P2P and B2C) 	Key drivers include product attributes, personal values, and online platform features, influencing positive attitudes and repurchase intention
Kim-Vick and Cho 2024	Investigating the motivations and behavioral intentions of Gen Z consumers in their consumption of second-hand luxury fashion	Online survey (452 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: US Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Both intrinsic factors such as sustainability beliefs and internalized and extrinsic factors like status signaling and taste expression significantly influence Gen Z consumers' adoption of second-hand luxury goods

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s)	Aim	Methodology	Context	Main findings
Luo and Park 2024	Investigating the barriers to second-hand luxury consumption before and after the COVID-19 pandemic	Two online surveys (i.e., before and after the COVID-19 pandemic) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: China Focus: Barriers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Before the pandemic, perceived physical and psychosocial-superstitious risks were the most important barriers. After the pandemic, the effects of perceived functional and financial risks emerged as the most critical barriers
Pandey, Mittal, and Chawla 2024	Exploring strategies for addressing consumers' uncertainty in the context of second-hand luxury purchases	Online survey (313 respondents) analyzed using structural equation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: India Focus: Drivers of second-hand luxury consumption 	Website quality enhances perceived product and seller certainty, indirectly impacting purchase intention
Our study	Investigating the customer journey during the purchase of second-hand luxury through P2P and B2C platforms	In-depth interviews with 24 informants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country: Italy Focus: Customer journey in P2P and B2C platforms 	We highlight the factors that attract consumers to these platforms while also uncovering the features that lead to frustration in their purchasing journey

luxury experience associated with direct brand purchases by the end of their purchasing journey.

2.3 | Investigating the Customer Journey

The customer journey is pivotal in contemporary marketing research, providing a structured framework to analyze the comprehensive process customers undergo when making a purchase decision (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Tueanrat, Papagiannidis, and Alamanos 2021). It places utmost importance on consumers, making it a relevant theoretical tool for assessing and evaluating customer experiences across diverse industries and contexts (Shavitt and Barnes 2020). The customer journey unfolds in three distinct phases—namely, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase—and encompasses every interaction a customer has with a product or service, from initial awareness to final evaluations (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Shavitt and Barnes 2020). The pre-purchase phase involves the initial stages of the customer journey, where the consumer identifies a need or desire for a product or service (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Shavitt and Barnes 2020). In the purchase phase, the customer makes the decision to buy. It involves the transactional aspect of the customer journey, where the consumer selects a specific product or service and completes the purchase (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Shavitt and Barnes 2020). Factors influencing purchasing decisions in this phase may include promotional offers, ease of transaction, payment options, and the perceived trustworthiness of the seller (Baxendale, Macdonald, and Wilson 2015). The post-purchase phase extends beyond the sale and focuses on the consumer's experience after making a purchase. It includes activities such as product usage and final evaluations. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are often determined during this phase

based on whether the customer journey has met the consumer's expectations (Halvorsrud, Kvale, and Følstad 2016), influencing whether the consumer chooses to start the process anew or decides to discontinue the purchase journey and look for better alternatives (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

Since adopting this theoretical framework offers the advantage of shedding light on the overall customer experience and the decision-making process involved in the purchase (Lemon and Verhoef 2016)—which may be hindered when assessed with other perspectives (Tueanrat, Papagiannidis, and Alamanos 2021)—investigating the customer journey in the context of pre-owned luxury on second-hand platforms can deepen our understanding of how well this experience aligns with consumers' expectations, potentially shaping their future decisions regarding direct purchases from luxury brands.

3 | Methodology

3.1 | Data Collection

Given the exploratory nature of our research, we conducted 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a diverse range of established luxury consumers who recently purchased second-hand luxury from these indirect marketplaces (see Table 2). We opted for in-depth interviews as they are particularly relevant when researchers need to gain a deep understanding of complex consumption phenomena, explore participants' lived experiences in detail (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Thompson 1997), and uncover rich insights that might not be accessible otherwise (Arsel 2017). Adhering to the criteria of semi-structured interviews, each interview took its unique form but followed

TABLE 2 | Interview participants.

ID.	Gender, age	Profession	Direct luxury brand purchases	P2P second-hand platform	B2C second-hand platform
1	M, late 40s	Consultant	Reports 15–20 purchases. Typically buys mid to high-end luxury clothes, mainly for work		✓
2	M, 30s	Consultant	Approximately 10–12 purchases. Prefers classic luxury accessories like leather briefcases and designer belts	✓	✓
3	M, late 20s	Fashion editor	Reports 8–10 purchases. Often selects trendy entry-level items	✓	✓
4	M, late 20s	Student	Reports 5 purchases. Focuses on entry-level luxury items, such as branded t-shirts	✓	
5	F, 30s	Fashion editor	Around 20 purchases. Frequently buys high-fashion dresses and luxury footwear	✓	✓
6	F, early 20s	Student	Around 5 purchases. Buys trendy, entry-level luxury items such as designer sunglasses	✓	
7	F, late 40s	Entrepreneur	Reports approximately 30 purchases. Prefers high-end luxury goods, including designer handbags		✓
8	M, late 30s	Accountant	Reports 5–10 purchases. Chooses mainly luxury shirts and polos	✓	✓
9	M, 20s	Student	Around 3 purchases. Mainly buys designer sneakers	✓	✓
10	M, late 20s	Fashion editor	Approximately 8–10 purchases. Opts for luxury items that make bold statements	✓	✓
11	F, 20s	Journalist	Reports 5–10 purchases. Mainly buys elegant shoes and purses		✓
12	F, late 30s	Manager	Approximately 15–20 purchases. Typically purchases sophisticated luxury items including dresses and jewelry		✓
13	F, late 20s	Consultant	Reports approximately 10 purchases. Focuses on designer blazers and high-end shoes	✓	✓
14	M, late 40s	Manager	Reports 20–25 purchases. Buys classic luxury items for work	✓	
15	M, early 20s	Student	Around 5 purchases. Engages with luxury streetwear brands	✓	
16	M, late teenager	Student	Approximately 2 purchases. Buys entry-level luxury, such as logo t-shirts		✓
17	F, late teenager	Student	Approximately 5 purchases. Shops for small luxury items like affordable designer bags	✓	✓
18	M, late teenager	Student	Around 2 purchases of entry-level luxury streetwear	✓	
19	M, late 30s	Consultant	Reports 10–15 purchases. Buys premium luxury clothes mainly for work		✓

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

ID.	Gender, age	Profession	Direct luxury brand purchases	P2P second-hand platform	B2C second-hand platform
20	M, early 40s	Manager	Few purchases from luxury brands (approximately 2) but with high spending (e.g., watches)		✓
21	F, late teenager	Student	Reports 5–10 purchases on designer sneakers and handbags	✓	
22	F, late 30s	Manager	Approximately 15 purchases on designer dresses and handbags		✓
23	M, late 20s	Designer	Few purchases (only a couple) since he focuses on one-of-a-kind luxury pieces		✓
24	F, late 40s	Designer	Approximately 10 purchases of luxury items that stand out for their creativity		✓

a specific research question centered around a series of key themes (Berg and Lune 2012). Our primary objective was to delve into the detailed aspects of their experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes throughout the different phases of the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) in the context of purchasing second-hand luxury items via second-hand marketplaces. Interview durations ranged from 45 min to 2 h and a half.

Participants for this study were selected through a purposive sampling strategy (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Suri 2011). During the selection phase, we asked potential participants to provide information about their purchases of new luxury garments and their experiences with buying pre-loved luxury from second-hand platforms, ensuring that those chosen could offer valuable insights into the research topic. We diversified the selection to include individuals with varied purchasing histories from luxury brands, aiming to explore how an extensive background in luxury purchases might influence their experiences with second-hand platforms. Although qualitative studies do not aim for generalizability, we also ensured diversity among participants in terms of gender, age, employment, and purchasing behavior (see Table 2). More specifically, we intentionally selected individuals from various generational cohorts to map their distinct perspectives and experiences in purchasing second-hand luxury through these channels. Additionally, we carefully balanced our participants based on their use of P2P and B2C platforms, given the distinct services these platforms offer. It is important to note that in qualitative sampling, the emphasis is not on generalizability or scaling; rather, the focus is on capturing a diverse range of perspectives and experiences relevant to the research question (Berg and Lune 2012; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Suri 2011).

Theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was observed after approximately 20 interviews as concepts began to converge and signal a repetitive pattern. This point was determined when no new information or themes were emerging from the interviews, indicating that the data collection had thoroughly captured the range of experiences and perspectives relevant to our research question. Discussions of the coded data between the authors confirmed that further interviews were yielding diminishing returns in terms of new insights. Although we achieved

theoretical saturation by the 20th interview, we extended the study to include four additional interviews to reach a number of informants consistent with recommendations for exploratory research (Christodoulides et al. 2021).

3.2 | Data Analysis

We adopted a grounded approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and employed thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), ensuring a deep interpretative understanding of the textual data. To maintain objectivity and rigor, the authors independently coded the interviews. More specifically, in the initial stage, we conducted an intratextual analysis, treating each interview as a stand-alone narrative (Thompson 1997). During this phase, first-order codes were generated directly from the data, reflecting the raw, descriptive insights expressed by participants. Then, the focus shifted to identifying thematic commonalities across multiple interviews through an intertextual analysis (Thompson 1997). Thematic commonalities helped in establishing second-order codes, which integrated and abstracted the initial codes into broader themes, reflecting deeper patterns and relationships within the data. After independently completing these initial coding phases, collaborative meetings were conducted to discuss and establish consensus on the overarching themes. During this last stage, we developed aggregate dimensions stemming from the second-order codes, synthesizing them into a comprehensive narrative that encapsulates the core phenomena observed across the different interviews. This collaborative effort helped to identify and resolve any discrepancies between the independent analyses, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings. The alignment between coders was deemed satisfactory, with Krippendorff's α coefficient reaching 97%, indicating a high level of agreement and reliability in the coding process. Consistent with the methodological guidelines of qualitative research (Berg and Lune 2012), data analysis and data collection iterated throughout the research process. The themes that emerged during the interviews and the subsequent analysis were organized according to the theoretical framework for customer experience and journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Table 3 outlines our coding scheme. In the following section, we shed light on the key themes derived from our analysis.

TABLE 3 | The coding scheme.

Illustrative quotes (Verbatim)	First-order codes	Second-order codes	Aggregate level
<p>“I spend hours comparing different Gucci bags to find the best deal. It’s like treasure hunting”</p> <p>“I just love digging through the listings”</p>	Extensive comparison of listings and prices; observing price variations and seeking the best deals among similar items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison shopping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for value • Using multiple platforms 	Comparability
<p>“Every time I check, new items are up, it never ends”</p> <p>“Just when you think you’ve seen it all, more pop up”</p>	Overwhelmed by the continuous influx of new listings; excited by the seemingly limitless options available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vast selection • Continuous availability 	Availability
<p>“Choosing these platforms feels like a small step toward a better environment”</p> <p>“When using [a platform] it seems you are making a positive choice for the environment”</p>	Participants express a sense of personal contribution to environmental sustainability simply by choosing second-hand platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental impact • Ethical consumption • Supporting the circular economy 	Doing one's part
<p>“When you see the prices on these sites, you start questioning why paying full price at luxury stores”</p> <p>“You decide on an item then see all the prices on the different platforms and keep looking until you find the best deal”</p>	Participants express skepticism about brand retail prices when cheaper options are available; demonstrate more thoughtful and cautious purchasing behavior on second-hand platforms compared to direct brand purchases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget-conscious buying • Cost comparison between brand and platform • Thoughtful spending 	Affordability
<p>“I steer clear of labels that are too common on these sites [...] they just don’t feel as special”</p> <p>“There’s too many of the same brand around”</p>	Consumers try to avoid brands that seem too common or overexposed on second-hand platforms to maintain a sense of exclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less brand exclusivity • Avoiding saturation • Avoiding brand dilution 	Avoiding overly popular brands
<p>“You hear stories of fakes all the time”</p> <p>“The authenticity certificates help, but you can’t be too careful”</p>	Persistent doubts about the authenticity of luxury items purchased on these platforms despite authenticity assurances (even on B2C platforms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity doubts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust issues • Authenticity checks 	Concerns about counterfeits
<p>“Shopping on [these platforms] just don’t compare to the feeling of buying from the brand”</p> <p>“I miss the personal touch and the whole experience”</p>	Noting the lack of luxury shopping experience online, missing the personal service, ambiance of physical luxury boutiques, and also immersiveness of luxury websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of luxury experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing direct brand purchases • Desire for in-store experience • Missing the immersiveness of luxury brands’ websites 	Missing the luxury experience
<p>“The item looked perfect online, but had obvious wear marks when it arrived”</p>	Disappointment and frustration when items received do not match the quality or condition shown online (mainly on P2P but also B2C platforms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrepancy between photos and product <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality concerns 	Items falling short of expectations
<p>“Love showing that I got it from [a second-hand platform] and it looks fabulous”</p>	Enthusiasm about sharing the use of these platforms and the second-hand luxury purchases with friends and peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social sharing • Pride in smart shopping • Enjoying the use of second-hand platforms 	Taking pride in using second-hand channels
<p>“I don’t share it too much. It’s more of a private pleasure for me”</p>	Preference for privacy in shopping habits, choosing not to disclose the use of second-hand platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy in consumption • Subtle shopping habits 	Being more discreet

4 | Findings

Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive customer journey across the three purchasing phases as experienced by consumers on second-hand luxury platforms. Informants emphasized the increasing influence of these platforms, now widely recognized as a primary touchpoint when fulfilling their luxury desires. Critical themes in the pre-purchase phase include aspects of *comparability*—as consumers carefully compare different listings—the perceived endless *availability*—since consumers find a constantly updated selection of second-hand luxury items—and the consideration of *doing one's part* by contributing to the circular economy. The purchase phase is heavily influenced by the *affordability* offered by such platforms, increasingly perceived as “entry-level channels” due to their competitive pricing. Given the time invested in comparing the different options, the *affordability* of some listings prompts consumers to adopt more prudent spending habits, carefully evaluating their options before finalizing the purchase. During this phase, informants recognized that the *absence of a sought-after luxurious experience* led them to constantly reconsider the choice of purchasing via these indirect channels. In the post-purchase phase, consumers who buy from P2P platforms are often confronted with *items that fall short of their expectations*. Interestingly, younger generations are more inclined to share the use of these platforms with their social circles following a purchase (i.e., “*Taking pride in using second-hand channels*”), whereas more senior generations typically prefer *being more discreet*. All of the aforementioned critical themes are reported below in *italics* and illustrated in Figure 1 throughout the customer journey.

4.1 | Pre-Purchase

As consumers embark on their journey to indulge their luxury desires, second-hand platforms often emerge as primary destinations for status-seeking consumers (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010) to explore and compare various options (Cervellon and Vigreux 2018). Given consumers' uncertainty about their intended purchases during the pre-purchase stage, informants

frequently reported navigating both P2P and B2C platforms, sometimes simultaneously, underscoring the convenience of these marketplaces in facilitating comparisons among a plethora of brands and items (i.e., “*Comparability*”). Navigating through all the listings on these marketplaces becomes akin to a “treasure hunt” (Silva et al. 2022), as informants invest considerable efforts in comparing prices, conditions, and styles to find the perfect used luxury garment to be added to their wardrobe. The growing impact of this shifting consumer behavior on luxury maisons becomes evident as several informants reported spending less time on the official luxury fashion brands' websites, instead preferring the endless possibilities (i.e., “*Availability*”) offered by such emerging platforms. Indeed, a younger informant from Gen Z noted during the interview, “When I am looking for inspiration, I barely check their (i.e., luxury brands) websites, I prefer these platforms.” The extensive and varied inventory not only caters to diverse tastes but also provides an unmatched advantage in meeting consumer preferences, particularly for brand connoisseurs who seek vintage and unique items driven by the nostalgic charm associated with timeless luxury fashion pieces (Amatulli et al. 2018). This perspective was primarily emphasized by informants specifically looking for one-of-a-kind items from older collections.

The unparalleled availability of diverse and sought-after garments, along with the possibility to compare different brands, stands in stark contrast to the scarcity and limitations consumers face when searching for specific luxury items through traditional brand channels (Kapferer and Bastien 2012).

“There are tons of luxury clothes and brands on Vinted [...]. They (i.e., these platforms) have everything! I love to scroll (i.e., the results) for hours when I want to buy something for me [...] You can easily compare different options, luxury brands, and listings” (Informant 5: Female, Millennial).

Throughout the interviews, younger informants—specifically those from Gen Z and Millennials—consistently emphasized

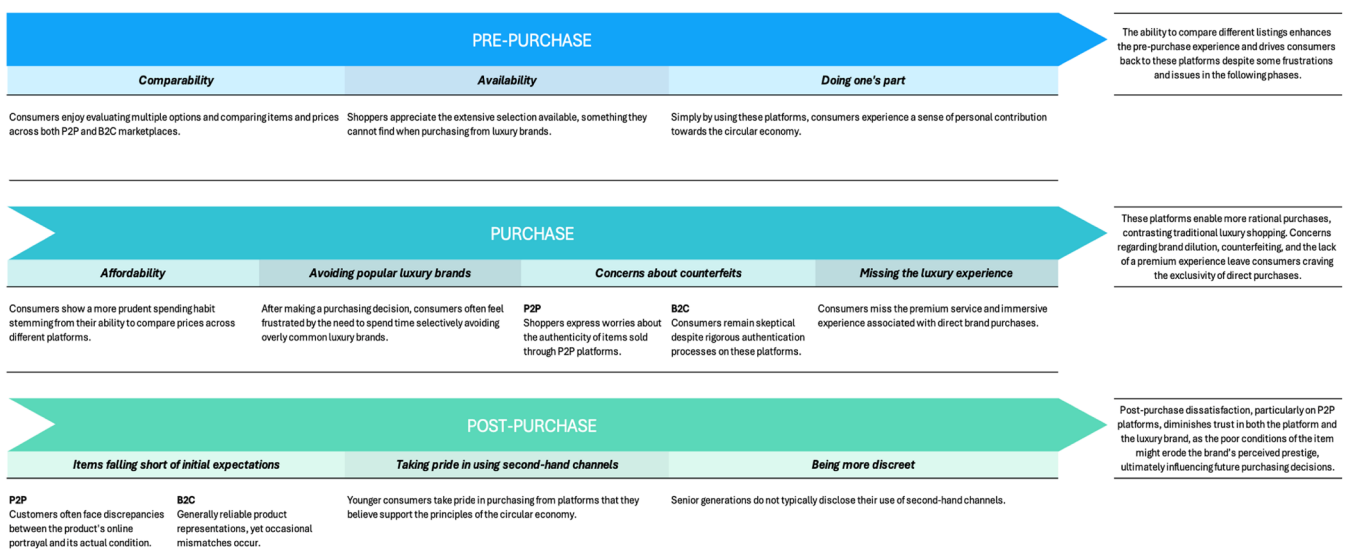


FIGURE 1 | Customer journey on second-hand platforms.

the significance of supporting innovative business models that promote the reuse of fashion items. Notably, simply by navigating second-hand channels, younger consumers feel they are making a meaningful contribution to the emerging logic of sustainability within the fashion industry (i.e., “*Doing one’s part*”). As a result, consumers are drawn not only by the perceived sustainability of the garment (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015) but also by the role second-hand platforms play in promoting product circularity and extending its lifespan. Although purchasing luxury clothes can be interpreted as a distinct approach to engaging in sustainable consumption due to the durability of high-end products (Sun, Bellezza, and Paharia 2021), some consumers perceive luxury brands as lacking in their efforts to transition to a business model that promotes circularity, leading them to explore alternative avenues that better align with their values and expectations. It is important to note that this emphasis did not necessarily stem from a genuine commitment to sustainable practices but rather emerged as a coping mechanism in response to the growing societal emphasis on environmental aspects in consumption. As a matter of fact, consumers often fail to consider that even these alternative channels contribute to environmental pollution, especially when their consumption habits lean toward excessive or unnecessary purchases.

“I will admit, I am totally addicted to shopping [...] but I think it is crucial to support businesses that prioritize sustainability [...] It feels like you are doing your part for the planet when using (these platforms)” (Informant 10: Male, Gen Z).

4.2 | Purchase

Once consumers eventually decide to satisfy their craving for luxury and transition into the purchase phase, interviewees consistently highlighted *affordability* as a pivotal factor influencing their decision to opt for second-hand platforms. Many informants specifically noted that the prices offered by these marketplaces are often similar to, if not less, the entry-level accessories of luxury fashion brands. Thus, this rational observation leads budget-constrained, status-seeking individuals (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010) to question during this phase the logic behind purchasing a small accessory directly from a luxury brand when, for a similar price, they could buy one used luxury garment. With the advent of these platforms that offer endless listings and allow quick and easy price comparison, *affordability* has become a key factor, leading aspirational consumers to adopt a more prudent spending habit in their purchases, diverging from the typical irrational mindset associated with luxury buying, which often overlooks budgetary limitations and financial prudence (Wang et al. 2020).

“You start asking yourself: why buy one accessory from the brand when I can get a beautiful used purse (for the same price)? [...] It is about being smart with my money and still enjoying the luxury brands I desire” (Informant 24: Female, Gen X).

Despite the allure of affordable prices and the unique finds offered by such indirect channels, informants consistently expressed a sense of discomfort associated with buying from these marketplaces. This feeling stems from three main aspects: (1) consumers’ efforts to avoid luxury brands overly present on these platforms, as they fear the potential dilution of the brands’ exclusivity and unique appeal (i.e., “*Avoiding popular luxury brands*”); (2) concerns about counterfeiting, especially when opting for P2P platforms (i.e., “*Concerns about counterfeits*”); and (3) the realization that these purchases do not replicate the sought-after experience of buying directly from the official brands (i.e., “*Missing the luxury experience*”). Regarding the first aspect, informants reported a deliberate tendency to avoid luxury brands that are excessively available on marketplaces where pre-loved items are sold, a behavior grounded in the belief that their widespread availability could undermine the brand’s perceived value to serve as a status symbol (Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2019). Thus, the concept of “*treasure hunt*” (Silva et al. 2022) extends beyond finding the best deal online; it also encompasses the psychological need of consumers to maintain a sense of exclusivity and prestige in their acquisition of pre-loved luxury, which serves as a form of reassurance in their purchasing decisions. This quest for exclusivity can be frustrating for consumers; once they have decided on a particular item, the additional effort required to find a less popular option can become a significant source of irritation. As one informant emphasized:

“What’s the point of having it (i.e., a luxury item) if everyone else has it? That’s why I steer clear of those brands (i.e., brands that are too common on these platforms)” (Informant 22: Female, Millennial).

In addition, this sense of discomfort is further amplified by concerns regarding counterfeiting, particularly relevant for consumers who found their favorite second-hand luxury item on P2P platforms. The decision to rely on platforms that lack authenticity verification services introduces an additional layer of risk, as the possibility of purchasing counterfeit items undermines the satisfaction of what was initially perceived as a cost-effective choice. Consequently, the initial appeal of a good deal (i.e., “*Affordability*”) is often tempered by the anxiety of potentially acquiring counterfeit luxury goods. However, even consumers who opt for B2C platforms do not feel completely safe from this risk of counterfeiting. While these platforms offer a layer of security through authenticity checks, consumers are aware that these precautions are not foolproof. This skepticism largely stems from documented instances of counterfeit products being sold on both P2P and B2C platforms (Chen 2018; Sancu 2020). In conclusion, consumers recognize that these indirect channels fall short of delivering the high-level service and immersive shopping experience that consumers receive when purchasing directly from luxury brands (i.e., “*Missing the luxury experience*”). Elements such as the aesthetic appeal of websites, which often lack the sophisticated design and interactive features of luxury brand sites, were frequently mentioned during the interviews. In addition, the lack of meticulously designed packaging and the related luxurious ritual of “*unboxing*” left a void in the overall purchasing phase. Informants acknowledge that these elements

significantly contribute to their traditional luxury purchasing experience, enhancing the perceived value and exclusivity of the product (Keller 2017). Without the latter, the purchase process feels incomplete and lacks the sensory delights that consumers have come to expect from buying luxury goods, thereby impacting their overall satisfaction with the purchase on these platforms.

“You are not 100% sure (i.e., about the authenticity) [...] Even Vestiaire Collective’s website says that their efficacy is at 99% [...] It is not like buying from the brand. [...] It is not the same experience [...] It’s like you’re missing out on the real luxury feeling” (Informant 8: Male, Millennial).

4.3 | Post-Purchase

In the post-purchase phase, consumers are often confronted with a sense of disappointment related to garments falling short of meeting their initial expectations (i.e., “Items falling short of initial expectations”), mainly due to the discrepancy between the item’s depicted condition online and its actual state upon arrival (Yao and Bao 2022). Informants that rely on P2P platforms emphasized how some sellers might (unintentionally or intentionally) misrepresent the condition of the item in their listing photos as these marketplaces lack stringent quality control measures, thereby allowing for a wider variation in the condition of the garments being sold.

“Sometimes the item looks pristine in the photos, but in reality, it is far from that [...] It is frustrating to think that some sellers upload only the images that make their items appear better than they actually are [...] It’s because they (P2P platforms) don’t have quality controls” (Informant 2: Male, Millennial).

On the other hand, B2C platforms generally adhere to higher standards of transparency regarding their listings. Detailed product descriptions, accompanied by accurate images, help mitigate the risk of misrepresentation and ensure that consumers have a clearer understanding of what to expect (Yao and Bao 2022). Indeed, the higher level of accuracy was praised by informants who experienced both platforms, indicating that the rigorous standards of B2C platforms significantly enhance customer experience on indirect channels. Despite this, consumers may still feel disappointed in this phase, particularly when unforeseen issues arise upon closer inspection, fostering feelings of betrayal or distrust toward the platform itself. While immediate post-purchase dissatisfaction is often tied to the misalignment between expectations and reality, the long-term impact of these incidents extends beyond the individual purchase. On the one hand, the negative experiences on P2P platforms led to reduced trust in these specific marketplaces for future purchases. As one informant explained, “It’s too risky when you can’t be sure of the product’s condition. I won’t trust these apps (i.e., P2P) again”. On the other, the disappointment experienced also affects how consumers perceive the luxury brands themselves. A few informants reported

that when the quality or condition of the second-hand items failed to meet their expectations, it not only eroded their trust in P2P platforms but also diminished the brand’s perceived prestige. For many, the discrepancy between the anticipated and actual condition of the product made the brand feel less special. This suggests that post-purchase experiences with second-hand products purchased through these channels can influence consumers’ perceptions of the luxury brand, potentially shaping their decisions to purchase directly from them in the future.

Interestingly, during the interviews, a significant contrast surfaced regarding the willingness to share the use of second-hand platforms between younger (i.e., Gen Z and Millennials) and more senior (i.e., Gen X) generations. Among younger consumers, there is a notable trend toward celebrating the use of such indirect channels (i.e., “Taking pride in using second-hand channels”). As previously noted, supporting businesses that promote circularity is seen as a statement of their perceived values, although their commitment to sustainability may not be considered entirely authentic. As a matter of fact, several younger informants reported taking pride in the post-purchase phase not only by showcasing their pre-loved luxury purchases but also by discussing their engagement with these platforms within their social circles. This sharing culture amplifies the impact of these platforms as consumers seek validation and recognition for their “ethical” choices. Conversely, more senior generations seem to exhibit a more reserved approach to their purchases from second-hand marketplaces (i.e., “Being more discreet”). While they recognize the environmental advantages offered by these platforms, they may not feel as comfortable openly discussing their shopping habits. This suggests a lingering stigma associated with purchasing used luxury items (Jain and Rath 2023), likely rooted in a generational mindset. As a result, senior consumers prefer to keep the use of second-hand platforms private even after their purchase, thus avoiding potential judgment or scrutiny from others who may not share their perspective on thrift shopping.

5 | Discussion

As aspirational consumers increasingly turn to second-hand platforms for affordable luxury items (Turunen and Pöyry 2019), thereby driving their exponential growth (Benissan, 2022; The RealReal 2022), our study provides valuable insights into the field of pre-loved luxury (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Luo and Park 2024; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015) by shedding light on the customer experience in purchasing from these marketplaces. Given that the literature on the customer journey suggests that consumers may avoid direct brand purchases if their expectations are met through indirect channels (Abbes, Hallem, and Taga 2020; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Shavitt and Barnes 2020), investigating the experiences consumers live on these platforms is paramount to understand what attracts them to these indirect channels and whether they still seek the luxury experience associated with direct brand purchases by the end of their purchasing journey. Building on this premise, our study offers a needed perspective to this emerging body of research, addressing recent calls for investigation in this direction (Athwal et al. 2019; Cervellon and Vigueux 2018; Ki et al. 2024). Overall,

our study suggests that second-hand marketplaces evoke mixed feelings and thoughts in consumers, as some aspects offered by these platforms align with their expectations, while others lead to some degrees of frustration and dissatisfaction. As a result, the customer journey in this context is intricately complex. Despite consumers tend to frequently reconsider their choice during the purchase and post-purchase stages, missing the luxury experience of direct brand purchases, they are consistently drawn to these platforms by the allure of different features. More specifically, our study suggests that consumers exhibit a preference for these platforms driven by (1) the perceived endless *availability* of unique and sought-after items, including vintage clothing, and the resulting (2) unparalleled advantage in terms of *comparability*, owing to the wide variety and depth of options. Younger cohorts of consumers also emphasized (3) the belief that by using these platforms and supporting their business model, they are contributing to the circular economy principles (i.e., “*Doing one’s part*”). During the pre-purchase phase, as consumers gather inspiration and decide on their purchases, the wide range of options available on these platforms, coupled with the opportunity to compare different listings, significantly enhances the overall shopping experience. The options available on these channels also encompass unique, timeless luxury fashion pieces, such as vintage clothing, which strongly resonate with brand connoisseurs in search of distinctive, one-of-a-kind items from previous collections that mirror their unique style and personality and are no longer available on official brand channels (Amatulli et al. 2018). Overall, these features align with consumer expectations, offering an advantage they cannot find when buying from luxury brands, which are characterized by limited availability (Cristini et al. 2017; Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2019) and incomparability (Kapferer and Bastien 2012). Indeed, such perceived endless availability and ease of *comparability* are features particularly appealing to aspirational consumers (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010), as they are drawn to the simplicity of comparing different listings. As a result, second-hand platforms have empowered consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions (see “*Affordability*”), diverging from their typical behavior when buying from luxury brands, which is often associated with irrational choices that may disregard budgetary constraints (Wang et al. 2020). Informants have strongly emphasized investing significant time on these platforms, likening the experience to a treasure hunt (Silva et al. 2022; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015) at the expense of browsing luxury brands’ official websites. Thus, we argue that these marketplaces have not only further democratized the luxury sector through their competitive pricing (Christodoulides et al. 2021) but also fostered consumer rationality by providing a channel for comparison. In addition, with younger consumers increasingly associating these platforms and their business models with the emerging logic of circularity (Ertekin, Atik, and Murray 2020), the findings of this study challenge the prevailing view suggesting that consumers solely perceive second-hand luxury items as sustainable (Kessous and Valette-Florence 2019; Malhotra and Shaiwalini 2023; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). Instead, we shed light on the pivotal role of the sales channels, emphasizing their importance in meeting consumers’ evolving sustainability expectations and influencing their purchasing decisions. The findings reveal an emerging trend wherein consumers are increasingly inclined to explore alternative platforms acknowledged for

their eco-friendliness during the pre-purchase stage (Cervellon and Vigreux 2018; Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020), even when their genuine commitment to sustainability might be limited. Notably, among younger consumers (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023), this tendency often stems as a coping mechanism in response to the increasing societal emphasis on environmental considerations and as a means—in the post-purchase phase—to showcase socially conscious purchasing decisions within their social circles. Indeed, although luxury items are often regarded as a sustainable option because of their quality and extended lifespan (Sun, Bellezza, and Paharia 2021), informants have stressed that luxury brands appear to capitalize on this perception without actively fostering a circularity approach in consumption.

Although these aspects align with consumer expectations and enhance their customer journey, our study shows that consumers start to face a sense of frustration from the purchase phase onward, prompted by concerns regarding (1) brand dilution, as they fear purchasing a garment of a brand that is losing its luxurious appeal by becoming overly present on second-hand channels, (2) the lack of foolproof measures against counterfeiting, (3) the conditions upon arrival of the used luxury item, as well as (4) the absence of a sought-after luxury experience. These concerns inevitably evoke a feeling of disillusionment, disrupting consumer expectations and prompting individuals to eventually reevaluate their reliance on these marketplaces for future purchases. As informants reported striving to recreate a sense of exclusivity even while shopping on these channels, our study contributes to the existing notion of a “*treasure hunt*” (Silva et al. 2022; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). The analysis of the interviews revealed that this concept extends beyond simply securing the best deal; it also encompasses the psychological need of aspirational consumers to acquire items perceived as limited, thus upholding a sense of prestige in their acquisition of pre-loved luxury garments. Despite consumers enjoying the time spent comparing different listings during the pre-purchase phase, they often experience frustration as—once a purchase decision has been made—they feel compelled to invest additional time and effort into finding unique items that are not overly popular on these platforms. This effort reflects a desire to maintain the exclusivity and distinctiveness associated with luxury purchases, even when not buying first-hand goods directly from the brand (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). Thus, when markets are flooded with easily accessible and frequently available luxury items, the sense of exclusivity diminishes, and the shopping experience becomes mundane rather than extraordinary (Christodoulides et al. 2021). By redirecting the focus onto the experience consumers live on these platforms, our findings suggest that consumers interpret the increased presence of certain luxury brands on these channels as diluting their exclusivity (Khalifa and Shukla 2021), potentially leading to luxury maisons losing their ability to serve as status symbols (Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2019). This is of utmost importance for luxury brands, as by losing control over the second-hand distribution of their items, they might inadvertently undermine their brand prestige, ultimately weakening their overall market position and appeal (Kapferer and Bastien 2012; Keller 2017). Moreover, our findings extend previous research regarding the significance of concerns surrounding counterfeiting and the perceived

conditions of pre-loved luxury items (Luo and Park 2024; Yao and Bao 2022). These concerns are particularly relevant among consumers who opt for P2P platforms, where the risk of encountering counterfeit goods and varying item conditions is higher due to less stringent verification processes. Throughout the interviews, informants emphasized that these fears significantly influence their satisfaction with P2P channels, often acting as pivotal factors in their decision to evaluate other points of sale. Still, even B2C platforms are not entirely immune to this mistrust from consumers. Although informants expressed a greater degree of confidence when using B2C platforms due to the presence of authentication services and more consistent quality checks, they also pointed out occasional lapses in item verification and inconsistencies in the described conditions. Overall, consumers highlighted a pressing need for transparency and assurance regarding product authenticity and quality (Boardman, Zhou, and Guo 2022), which these platforms cannot thoroughly deliver despite taking active measures to counteract these problems (Chen 2018; Sancu 2020).

Regarding the last point, the interviews revealed that the prevailing source of frustration with these indirect channels revolves around the unfulfilled desire for a premium, luxury experience. Although at the beginning of their purchase journey consumers believe that the sense of luxury is inherent in the item they long for, our findings suggest that this feeling is largely derived from the overall buying experience (Atwal and Williams 2017; Holmqvist, Ruiz, and Peñaloza 2020). Thus, the absence of a luxurious feeling throughout the customer journey negatively influences the experience on second-hand channels, and as the experiential gap between indirect and direct channels becomes evident, this inevitably leads consumers to question their purchase choices and long for the luxurious sensation that only official sales channels can provide (Kapferer and Bastien 2012; Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2019). As a result, consumers on second-hand platforms often find themselves disappointed in the post-purchase phase, hoping that official luxury brands will establish their own second-hand channels, offering them the sought-after experience they desire. Still, despite this hedonic disappointment, aspirational consumers will eventually return to second-hand platforms due to the features that meet their expectations, which remain unmatched by the official brand channels. This cyclical behavior underscores the persistent allure of second-hand marketplaces, even as they fall short of delivering the complete luxury experience.

6 | Managerial Implications

Based on these insights, luxury brands are advised to integrate second-hand clothing sales into their sales strategy. This strategic move aims not only to mitigate potential losses stemming from lower sales of entry-level accessories to status-seeking consumers with limited financial means but also to cultivate a strong brand image rooted in the emerging logic of sustainability. To effectively address the increasing circulation of their brands in marketplaces, thereby mitigating problems related to *comparability* and excessive availability, luxury brand managers should adopt strategies to prevent the resale of used items in indirect channels they cannot control.

For instance, luxury brands could offer incentives to customers who opt to return their previously owned items directly to the brand for resale, repair, or recycling. When marketing second-hand luxury goods, brand managers are encouraged to prioritize full transparency regarding the item's condition and to consider repairing any flaws prior to sale. This approach is essential, as consumers showed heightened sensitivity toward the condition of pre-loved items they intend to purchase. Moreover, luxury brand managers should emphasize the allure and exclusive emotional and sensory benefits associated with purchasing directly from the brand. Indeed, by stressing the distinctiveness of direct brand purchases, luxury brands can easily attract consumers seeking an exclusive branded experience from the purchase of second-hand luxury. Integrating second-hand sales into their sales strategy would also enable luxury brands to regain and exert greater control over their distribution chain, preventing the dilution of their brand image and ensuring that their products maintain their perceived value and exclusivity throughout their lifecycle. To conclude, by embracing second-hand sales as a strategic imperative, luxury brands can both safeguard their brand equity and financial performance and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and eco-consciousness. This proactive approach would hold significant value, particularly among younger consumers who actively seek sales channels and products aligned with their environmental concerns.

7 | Limitations and Future Research

While our study provides significant contributions to the thriving field dealing with pre-loved luxury (Aycock, Cho, and Kim 2023; Luo and Park 2024; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), it is not without limitations. First, although pre-loved luxury fashion has witnessed rapid growth in recent years due to the emergence of P2P and B2C platforms (Turunen, Cervellon, and Carey 2020), it is important to underline that the second-hand market extends beyond fashion into other segments of the luxury industry, namely, watches and jewelry (D'Arpizio et al. 2024). In contrast to pre-loved luxury fashion, where sustainability concerns play a pivotal role in driving consumer behavior (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), second-hand luxury watches are commonly purchased as a form of investment (Duprelle et al. 2023). Thus, delving into the customer experience when acquiring pre-loved luxury in categories other than fashion presents an intriguing avenue for future research. In addition, given the exploratory nature of this study, we employed semi-structured in-depth interviews to delve into the customer journey among individuals who have recently purchased pre-loved luxury garments through second-hand marketplaces. Although qualitative methodologies do not aim for generalizability (Berg and Lune 2012; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Suri 2011), future studies may benefit from incorporating quantitative methods to enhance the breadth of our findings. To conclude, while in-depth interviews are effective for capturing consumer lived experiences (Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011), our research could have benefited from longitudinal interviews (Press and Arnould 2011) to better grasp how consumers' perceptions and behaviors toward these indirect channels evolve and change over time.

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The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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