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The Respectability Premium: Online Thrift, Stigma and Moral Economy in Pakistan's Second-hand Clothing Market

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Abstract
This paper explores the transformation of landa (second-hand clothing) from open-air bazaars to a resale pages on Instagram by young consumers in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Pakistani scholarship has framed this migration as a process of destigmatisation through which digital platforms reposition used clothing as fashionable and environmentally responsible. The accounts, however, are largely drawn from affluent, metropolitan consumers, and rely on the assumption that the meanings of second-hand clothing are uniform across social positions. Drawing on cultural theories of valuation, respectability and moral economy, the paper conceptualises online thrift as a process of requalification (Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002) in which garments already circulating within a necessity-driven circular economy (Korsunova et al. 2022) are reattributed with properties of taste, cleanliness and ethical consumption. Empirically, the study combines short-form responses from students at Government College University Faisalabad with publicly available online commentary, analysed through theoretically informed thematic

analysis. Three findings emerge. First, from a moral-economic perspective of a fair price and appropriate use, participants assess online resale and the resellers' mark-up as an illegitimate appropriation. Second, participants see that the mechanism of requalification is relabeling and understand that respectability is only given at a cost: a cost that this paper calls the respectability premium that is paid for second-hand clothing. Third, when asked directly, only one participant, from an upper-middle-class household, cited sustainability as a motive, suggesting that environmental framings of reuse are aligned with a classed eco-habitus rather than with the practice of reuse itself. The paper argues that platformisation does not dissolve the stigma attached to second-hand clothing but redistributes it, rendering "thrift" respectable by preserving "landa" as its stigmatised counterpart. It concludes that the encounter between a customary moral economy of landa and the circular economy's moral economy of waste raises fundamental questions about whose reuse is recognised as sustainable in a just circular transition.

Keywords: *landa; second-hand clothing; requalification; respectability; moral economy; necessity-driven circular economy; platformisation; Pakistan*

Introduction

Pakistan is playing a unique role in the world economy of second-hand clothing. It has become the world's biggest importer of used clothing and according to a nationally representative survey, 48 per cent of all Pakistani adults have bought clothes from a *landa* bazaar in the preceding year (Gallup Pakistan 2026). These markets, starting from Lighthouse in Karachi up to Naulakha and Mayo hospital in Lahore and weekly bazaars of Faisalabad, have garments which are separated from bales coming from Europe, North America and East Asia. For a substantial part of the population, *landa* is not a consumer preference but a material condition of being adequately clothed, particularly through the winter months. Since approximately 2020, the same category of garments has acquired a second commercial life. In Pakistan, Instagram resale pages have sourced goods from bazaars and whole sale suppliers, photographed them against neutral backdrops, described them as “pre-loved” or “thrifted” and sold them at prices above those charged by bazaar stall owners. This phenomenon has been observed by Pakistani journalists and has been labeled the “rebranding of *landa* as thrifting” (Dawn 2025b) as well as a case of cultural gentrification (The Friday Times 2026) whereby a market serving the working class has been repackaged for a more privileged clientele. Bazaar traders in Lahore have termed these new resellers “*landa* professors” (Dawn 2025a).

The existing academic works have mostly interpreted this development as the destigmatization of second-hand clothes. In a survey of 265 students in Lahore, Gujranwala and Gujrat, Qureshi and Hisham (2026) have found that second-hand clothes shopping is increasingly influenced by social media, perceived value and social influence and have concluded that social media has removed the stigma associated with thrift shopping. In a different study, Kamran, Athar and Azeem (2024) explore the same phenomenon through interviews conducted with ten female students (all from households earning more than 1 lakh rupees per month) enrolled in a private University in Lahore. Both works are valuable, but the authors observe the phenomenon from the vantage point of consumers who have the choice to buy second-hand clothes.

This standpoint generates an empirical puzzle. As discussed above, second-hand clothing is being destigmatised, but that is hard to reconcile with two other pieces of evidence: the overwhelmingly large

numbers of landa consumers who endorse consumption based on need; and recent experimental studies showing that LDCs rate second-hand products lower than their higher social class counterparts (Park 2026). The fact that these findings occurred concurrently shows that destigmatisation might not be a cultural homogenisation but a socially heterogenous one, as second-hand clothes are a means of expression for some and a necessity for others. The viewpoints of the latter have not been well captured in existing studies.

This paper aims to address that absence by examining how young consumers in Faisalabad, an industrial textile city located outside Pakistan's principal metropolitan centres, interpret the platformisation of landa. Following Poell, Nieborg and van Dijck (2019), platformisation is understood here not merely as the movement of trade onto digital infrastructures but as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginaries around them. The analysis is directed towards the following research questions:

How do youth consumers in Faisalabad assess online second-hand clothing resale's pricing and authenticity?

What meaning do they give to the renaming of landa as ‘thrift’ or ‘pre-loved’ and what do they see for its price difference when they exchange cash for the landa?

How does the notion of sustainability that is being connected to online thrift connect to the individual practices and motivations of reuse?

The paper makes the following argument. Although in recent years Landa has been materially circular, as described by Korsunova et al. (2022) as necessity-driven circular economy, its circularity is not recognised as sustainability because it is practiced under economic constraint. Re selling these garments online does not add significantly to the material circularity. Instead, it carries out a cultural act of requalification (Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002), where it assigns the same property of taste, cleanliness and ethical good of the same objects. The difference in price that is seen by participants acts as a respectability premium, a premium that is collected not on the garment itself, but on its symbolic removal from the bazaar and from classed bodies that are linked to the bazaar. Participants challenge this operation within a customary moral economy of just price and just rightful use (Thompson 1971), which is in tension with the moral economy of waste that is central to the discourse of circular economy (Gregson et al. 2015). In this account destigmatisation is not understood as a process of dissolving stigma but rather a process of redistribution of stigma (Tyler 2020).

In developing this argument, the paper makes three contributions. First, it brings the sociology of valuation and requalification to the platformisation of informal second-hand markets in the Global South, focusing on consumers, not actors, who are left out of the picture of requalification. Second, it further developed cultural analyses of respectability and stigma by showing how the process of relabelling can work as a way of distributing stigma through class. Thirdly, it plays its part in the discussion of the just circular economy by distinguishing analytically between what happens in practice and what is symbolized as something akin to sustainability, and by demonstrating the uneven distribution of the latter. Next, the paper analyzes as follows. The literature review is done in the next section which contextualizes the research in Pakistan, and builds up the conceptual vocabulary for the paper. The methodology is then explained and a joint presentation and discussion of the results are

done. The conclusion states the contributions of the paper, the limitations and directions for further research and the limitations of the work.

Literature, Context and Conceptualisation.

This section examines the existing literature, and then provides a context for the study, placing it in the Pakistani context and establishing the conceptual lexicon used in the analysis of the platformisation of *landa*. It is a convergence of four fields of learning: the sociology of valuation and requalification; cultural theories of respectability, contamination and stigma; moral economy theory; and critical studies of circularity and sustainable consumption. The operationalisation of each concept in the analysis is summarised in Table 1 at the end of the section.

Second-hand Clothing, Valuation and Requalification

The anthropology of second-hand goods starts from the assumption that the value of objects is not fixed, but comes and goes as they circulate among regimes of exchange. Kopytoff (1986) suggests that things have cultural biographies in which the process of commoditisation is not an inevitable feature, and Appadurai (1986) identifies paths and diversions by which commodities move in and out of circulation. Thompson's (1979) account of rubbish as a dynamic theory of value categories theorises transient objects of diminishing value, a category of no value – rubbish – and a durable category of increasing value, and details the social conditions that allow objects to pass from rubbish to durability.

Second-hand clothes have been an especially productive ground for these ideas. Hansen's (2000) examination of the study of the importation of saleable garments into Zambia reveals that imported garments are not mere Western refuse, but rather are actively reworked into local repertoires of proprieties, and Gregson and Crewe (2003) reveal that the resale of used goods in Britain relies on the sorting, cleaning and display work that makes objects saleable. The sociology of valuation has more recent developed these insights. For Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa (2002), *qualification* is the assignment of properties to a good so that it can be introduced into a given market and make it comparable with other goods*. Requalification* is a process of reassigning properties to a good already in circulation. In an ethnography of a second-hand mall in Sweden, Fuentes and Hedegård (2025) employ this axis to refer to interwoven systems of devaluation and revaluation, in which only some of the donated products are able to be exchanged. The luxury resale site The RealReal is discussed by Choufan and Tila-Cohen (2023) as an example of how the brand is emphasised and the preceding usage is faded. These processes are driven by naming. Veenstra and Kuipers (2013) demonstrate that the term “vintage” are able to categorise desirable used clothing from ordinary second-hand goods while Steward (2020) show that the meaning of the same practice differs among the thrift-shoppers in Portland, with a privileged subset of “creativists” turning the re-use of clothes into a form of embodied cultural capital rather than the acquiring of a bargain. These studies show that the vocabulary of second-hand products does not simply represent the objects' value, but helps to construct it, and that this construction, as an act, is performed in a classed fashion.

The present study is limited by two aspects of the literature. First, it has focused on organized retail in the Global North, from charity shops to luxury websites. Second, it has examined requalification mainly through the lens of its users (retailers, platforms, curators) or its beneficiaries. Little systematic attention

has been paid to the consumers for whom a previously accessible object became inaccessible due to its requalification, for whom a loss occurred.

Respectability, Contamination and Stigma Power

The meanings of contamination and class are attached to second-hand clothes. Consumer research revealed that people have reported that garments purchased secondhand still have their previous body odor, which caused them to feel disgusted and anxious (Roux and Korchia, 2006). Such reactions are more basic, as Douglas (1966) describes: she argues that dirt is "matter out of place", the residue of a classificatory order which differentiates between what is in place and what is polluting. Contamination issues are never only hygienic, but also judgements on social boundaries.

It is important to note that in South Asia these boundaries are closely articulated with class. Historically, wearing used clothes was a sign of poverty, and in common parlance the word *landa* has this connotation. How such associations work can be explained by Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of taste. The same practice can have different meanings depending on the attitude in which it is performed and the emotions in which it is performed: a practice that seems a constraint if it is performed by the dominated, seems a choice if it is performed by the dominant. Skeggs (1997) builds upon this insight in terms of the notion of respectability, which is a classed and gendered resource, unevenly distributed, subject to constant policing and always subject to cost. Skeggs builds on the notion in relation to persons, namely working-class women in Britain; this paper extends it to goods, on the basis that the respectability of the garments one wears helps to determine the respectability attributed to the wearer. Gender is not analysed in the present data as this is a dimension of Skeggs' account which is not possible to do with the present data. In the context of Pakistan, Maqsood's (2017) ethnography of middle class in Lahore provides a glimpse of the social visibility of competing class fractions as they strive to achieve respectability through consumption and moral discourse, thus revealing respectability as an important axis of distinction in the national sphere.

A similar sociological precision is needed for the concept of stigma. Goffman's (1963) influential account of interaction puts stigma as a discrediting attribute within the control of the individual. Link and Phelan (2014) and Tyler (2020) have rethought stigma as a form of power, as a "machinery of inequality": a classificatory practice that devalues, excludes and exploits those who are stigmatized as serving the interests of those who stigmatize. The present study is pertinent to this re-conceptualization. However, if the stigma is a relationship of power rather than an individual characteristic, then its apparent dissolution, must be considered in terms of whether it is extended to all those who carry it, or only to some. There should be a qualification here. Whereas Tyler's analysis focuses on stigma as wielded by states and elites, there is no deliberate stigma from online resellers. Instead, they are based on a pre-existing stigma that they can sell a ticket to take off. The use of the concept in this paper is thus for analysing the process of reproducing and selectively suspending an existing stigma as a market process rather than for finding stigmatising intent with resellers. The question on how second-hand clothes are now considered respectable isn't just if it is, but for whom and at what cost?

Competing Moral Economies of Reuse

E. P. Thompson (1971) used the term moral economy to describe the food riots in eighteenth-century England, through which people asserted a customary "just price" for bread to counteract the influence

of market pricing, that relied on common values regarding the proper operations of the market. Within a later re-evaluation of his critics, Thompson (1991) reiterated that his focus had been the political culture, expectations and traditions of the eighteenth-century working population, in the form of collective action. Subsequent scholarship has extended the idea to refer to the codes of justice, rights and duties that regulate and challenge economic relations (Sayer 2000). The present study considers individual evaluations, not collective action, and because the price of the bazaar is a market price, not one regulated by custom, it adopts this more general usage, in which moral economy is used to refer to moral-economic thinking about what markets should do. Moral economy has been a fruitful way of approaching second-hand clothing in the Global South. In Tanzania, discussions around mitumba are rooted in the country-specific contestations of distribution, redistribution, and economic justice, which are being articulated through issues of nation-building and citizenship, as Kuiper (2024) demonstrates.

This paper builds upon this concept in two ways. First, the moral-economic discussions about second-hand clothing have focused largely towards the outside, that is, the international market and the state. A new configuration has emerged as domestic, platform-based resellers can perceive injustice by taking the value of the already circulating resource. Secondly, the paper acknowledges that the concept of circular economy is a moral economy. Gregson et al. (2015) show that the European circular economy is based on a moral discourse against waste and a moralized material flow, which defines what flows of materials can be considered legitimate. Online thrift, often manifested as sustainable consumption, thus activates one moral economy (the economy of waste avoidance, ethical reuse) in a market previously dominated by another (the economy of affordability, rightful access). The analysis is directed at the interaction of these two moral economics.

Necessity-driven Circularity, Eco-habitus and the Recognition of Reuse

The circular economy is now a policy paradigm for sustainable production and consumption and second-hand clothing is a regular example of one of the circular economy practices. There are several reasons that the above assertion has been called into question by critical scholarship. Criticisms of the circular economy put forward by Corvellec, Stowell and Johansson (2022) include that its boundaries are fluid and abstract, the theory is lacking and it is based on a technical and economic agenda, and it often fails to politicise issues related to sustainable growth. In the Swedish second-hand market, Persson and Hinton (2023) demonstrate that for-profit companies also pose questions about who is able to access used garments and how the profits are divided.

Another body of literature has been emerging which has also challenged the North-centric nature of the circular economy theory. Korsunova et al. (2022) propose the *necessity-driven circular economy* concept as the ability to restore and retain the value of goods and materials that is locally based; it is formal and informal; and it is based on economic necessity and opportunities for income generation. Based on low-income communities in Brazil, India and Tanzania, they claim that these practices are not often considered a part of the circular economy in academic and policy debates, despite their size. The case of *landa*, as followed by most of its Pakistani users, is an obvious example of the circular economy.

Here there are two qualifications governing the use of this concept. First, Korsunova et al's definition includes not only consumption, but also income-generating activity based on necessity, and some online resellers may be in it. At the very least, during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020, one major Pakistani thrift

page started up (Dawn 2025b), and the number of resellers will span from small and tenuous businesses to medium to large enterprises. The analysis therefore assumes that the process of requalification is a market process and that there is no intention on the part of the resellers as a whole to exploit. Secondly, the concept is applied to describe the use of *landa* in the bazaar, rather than romanticising the use of *landa*: necessity-based circularity is materially circular because it is limited.

The issue this brings up is not that there is a circularity of necessity but how it connects to the sustainability discourses that now accompany second-hand consumption. It is in this context that Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of "taste of necessity" is helpful. According to Bourdieu, the taste of the working class is formed by their proximity to material constraint, and thus the dominated groups have been made into a virtue of necessity. However, studies on ethical consumption indicate that sustainable consumption is linked to a specific class attitude. Based on the ethnographic work of Carfagna et al. (2014), a new "eco-habitus" has emerged within the group of high cultural capital consumers in the United States, in which environmental consciousness, and a focus on the local, material and manual function as a "strategy of distinction". Their definition of concept is based on cultural capital and not income, and they were developed in a North American setting, so this is explored here as a hypothesis, not a fact. But Bargain-Darrigues (2023) also demonstrates that practices of thrift among high cultural capital consumers are influenced by and sometimes conflict with their economic status. From the supply side, Mishra and Sandberg (2025) demonstrate how Instagram thrift stores in India proactively engage in the promotion of sustainable fashion via platform affordances.

These literatures collectively indicate a theoretical hypothesis that is tested in the present study. Reuse of the same material might be considered sustainable when done within an eco-habitus and become visible within a proper vocabulary, but it is not when done under constraint. This paper thus makes a distinction analytically between reuse as practice (material circulation of goods) and use as recognised sustainability (symbolic status of certain forms of reuse not others). It builds on Korsunova et al. (2022) concept and adopts the term necessity-driven circularity for the former and the term virtue-coded circularity for the latter. The transition from one to the other does not include any change in the material of the garment, but rather by requalification.

Context: *Landa* and the Platformisation of Second-hand Clothing in Pakistan

The second-hand clothing economy is well-organised in Pakistan with an extended chain of import, sorting and retail. The used garments mostly come from Europe, North America, Japan, Korea and China, and are sorted in bulk in special economic zones where exporters sift out better quality garments for re-exporting, industry sources estimate only 10-20% of the imported volumes are sold locally (ProPakistani 2025). As poverty has increased, the Pakistan Second-Hand Clothing Merchants Association believes that this is the reason for the surge in imports, which reached a new peak of 1.137 million tonnes valued at US$511 million in fiscal year 2024–25 (ProPakistani 2025). At the retail end *landa* bazaars price garments much lower than brand new garments and market surveys indicate that imported used jeans are sold for Rs 300-400 in these stores, while shirts are sold for Rs 250-300 (ProPakistani 2025).

The internet sale of such clothes is a more recent and booming phenomenon. In 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdowns and afterward, Pakistani Instagram thrift pages sprang up and some have become large businesses, one of which boasted about 29 employees and around 348,800 followers in 2025 (Dawn

2025b). There are also numerous online vendors whose sources are the same as those of ordinary *landa* customers, while some vendors are hesitant to state their source (Dawn 2025b). It is this configuration, where the same clothes circulate at the same time within a certain bazaar economy and a curated platform economy, that the current study observes.

Towards an Analytical Framework

The four strands of literature reviewed above merge into a conceptual vocabulary, summarized in Table 1 and expanded empirically in the Findings and Discussion and combined in the synthesis in Figure 2. Online thrifts are understood as a process of requalification in which the circulation of garments within a necessity-based circular economy gets endowed with the attributes of taste, cleanliness and ethical value. This difference is imagined as a 'respectability premium' - the extra added value on-line that takes into account not the material change of the garment, but its symbolic separation from the bazaar and from the classed associations of *landa*. The paper uses the term 'circular enclosure' to describe the outcomes of for-profit requalification of an already-circular informal resource which, by analogy, is akin to Thompson's (1991) description of the enclosure of customary common rights. This analysis of these processes as expressions of competing moral economies of reuse is based on consumers' evaluations.

Table 1. Key concepts and their operationalization.

Concept	Definition adopted in this paper	Principal sources	Operationalisation in the analysis
Requalification	Reattribution of properties to a good already in circulation so that it occupies a new market position	Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002; Fuentes and Hedegård 2025	Participants' accounts of relabelling, staging and presentation
Respectability	A classed and gendered resource, unevenly available and acquired at cost; extended here from persons to the goods through which they are judged	Skeggs 1997; Bourdieu 1984	Accounts of social acceptability and embarrassment
Stigma power	Stigma as a classificatory relation of power that can be reproduced or selectively suspended	Link and Phelan 2014; Tyler 2020	Persistence of *landa*'s stigma and purchasable exemption from it
Moral economy	Norms of fairness, entitlement and proper market function used to evaluate economic arrangements	Thompson 1971, 1991; Sayer 2000; Kuiper 2024	Judgements of price, purpose and legitimacy
Circular economy as moral economy	Circularity as a moral ordering that condemns waste and legitimises certain material circuits	Gregson et al. 2015	Sustainability framings of online thrift
Necessity-driven circularity	Reuse that retains value on the basis of economic necessity, materially circular but unrecognised as sustainability	Korsunova et al. 2022	Reuse practices described without environmental vocabulary
Virtue-coded circularity	Reuse framed and recognised as ethical, sustainable consumption, aligned with an eco-habitus	Carfagna et al. 2014; this paper	Sustainability as an articulated motive

Concept	Definition adopted in this paper	Principal sources	Operationalisation in the analysis
Respectability premium	The price differential attributable to symbolic detachment from *landa* rather than material change	This paper	Comparative price judgements and accounts of what the markup buys
Circular enclosure	Reduced accessibility of an already-circular informal resource following for-profit requalification	This paper, by analogy with Thompson 1991	Accounts of displacement and lost affordability

Source: Table by Fareeha Khan.

Methodology

Research Design

Study design is interpretive qualitative and with a focus on theory elaboration and not statistical generalisation. It is intended to explore the ways in which a particular population understands an emergent social and economic phenomenon and to use these understandings to become more forceful in the conceptual vocabulary used to analyse the phenomenon. It was a design process based on abductive logic (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) that involved moving back and forth between the empirical material and theory; existing concepts offered a first interpretation frame, while features of the data that the concepts failed to adequately handle were then refined and additional concepts were introduced.

Research Site

Faisalabad is the third largest city in Pakistan and also one of the major textile hubs of Pakistan. It offers an analytically fruitful alternative to research and journalism on online thrift, which have been largely limited to Lahore and Karachi. Its *landa* markets cater the needs of a huge working and lower-middle class population of the city and its main public university government college University Faisalabad (GCUF) attracts the students from the city and other nearby towns like Gojra and Sargodha. The site was chosen strategically to reach younger consumers who are accustomed to having to buy their clothes from *landa*, and who are not new to it. There is a systematic difference between the population of the present study and that of Kamran, Athar and Azeem (2024), where the former comprised of students from a private university while the latter comprised of families with monthly income of more than Rs 100000.

Data Collection

There are two datasets of empirical data, summarized in Table 2.

Dataset A: Student responses. The main data is in the form of short written answers by the GCUF students (18-24 years) on a structured response sheet, organised around five perception categories: (i) The pricing of online thrifting; (ii) The value of thrifting; (iii) Hygiene and social embarrassment; (iv) Trust and experiences of online shopping; (v) Concerns about the original purpose of *landa*. All participants were also asked if sustainability was a motive for using second-hand clothing. The participants were recruited by convenience sampling and snowball sampling technique in university. Data were collected through a structured response sheet completed by 25 GCUF students aged 18 to 24, of whom 18 were

women and 7 were men. Their household backgrounds spanned lower-middle-class, middle-class and upper-middle-class positions, and, where recorded, their hometowns included Faisalabad, Gojra, Sheikhupura, and other nearby cities. The responses yielded 25 records, identified as PR-01 to PR-25.

Dataset B: Internet commentaries. To contextualize student responses in public debates, a few publicly available comments, culled from Pakistani discussion threads on Reddit (r/PakistaniiConfessions and r/karachi) about online thrift and *landa* prices are included with Dataset A. These comments are considered as naturally occurring cultural texts, following netnographic principles (Kozinets 2015). They are used to provide context, not support, interpretations of Dataset A and are indicated as online comments (OC) across. The demographic characteristics of the authors are not known, so no claims about the class position are made based on Dataset B.

Table 2. The data corpus is composed of texts from the following sources:

Dataset	Source	Form	Identifier	Analytical role
A	GCUF students, aged 18–24	Structured short-form written responses across five perception categories, plus a sustainability question	PR-01 to PR-25 (student records only)	Primary evidence
B	Public Reddit threads on online thrift and *landa* pricing	Naturally occurring online comments	OC	Contextualisation of public discourse

Source: Table by Fareeha Khan.

Ethical Considerations

The student participants were told the purpose of the study, they volunteered to participate, and they are listed only by their record number, and, when they gave permission, by hometown. No names or other institutional identifiers other than the university are reported. In addition, for Dataset B, an analysis of publicly available comments was used, with no mention of the usernames, and comments that could be found via verbatim search were summarised, following the guidance given by Kozinets (2015) for research using publicly available online material.

Analysis

Data have been analysed using thematic analysis in its reflexive form the authors of the method later described (Braun and Clarke 2019) – this form of thematic analysis treats themes as interpretive constructions that the researcher builds up from the data, and does not regard them as objects that come from the data. The analysis took place in three steps. During the first phase all responses were read multiple times and descriptively coded for common evaluative categories such as: price, comparison, purpose, entitlement, cleanliness, naming, trust, sustainability. Second order concepts grouped into concepts close to participants' own words and themes were developed from the descriptive codes in the second stage. In the third stage, the themes were interpreted in terms of the conceptual vocabulary elaborated in the previous section, which resulted in aggregate theoretical dimensions. However, the analysis was theoretically informed and not inductive, given the categories were predetermined, and the abductive design enabled the identification of patterns that were beyond the original categories, such as the naming discussion and the comparison of prices in the bazaar and

online, which led to the concepts of the respectability premium and virtue-coded circularity. The final data structure resulting is shown in figure 1.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

There were several ways in which the trustworthiness of the analysis was sought (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Before comparing datasets A and B, each was analysed separately so that public discussion of the data online is not claimed as the students'. Interpretations were examined against disconfirming material and responses that conveyed positive views of online thrift were analysed as a separate theme, and not set aside. When information is only available in paraphrase, they are reported as summaries and not in direct quotes. Provide a short reflection on the researcher's own positionality to *landa*, the university and the participants.

Data Structure

The structure of the data in which the findings are organised is outlined in Figure 1. It uses the presentational format of Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) to ensure that its analytical development is evident, but it does not mean that it embraces the entire Gioia methodology, which requires inductive inquiry. The 20 first-order concepts, expressed as closely as possible in participants' own words, were categorized into six second-order themes, then as three aggregate theoretical dimensions. This is a six-theme book, with each theme reflecting the subsections of the Findings and Discussion.

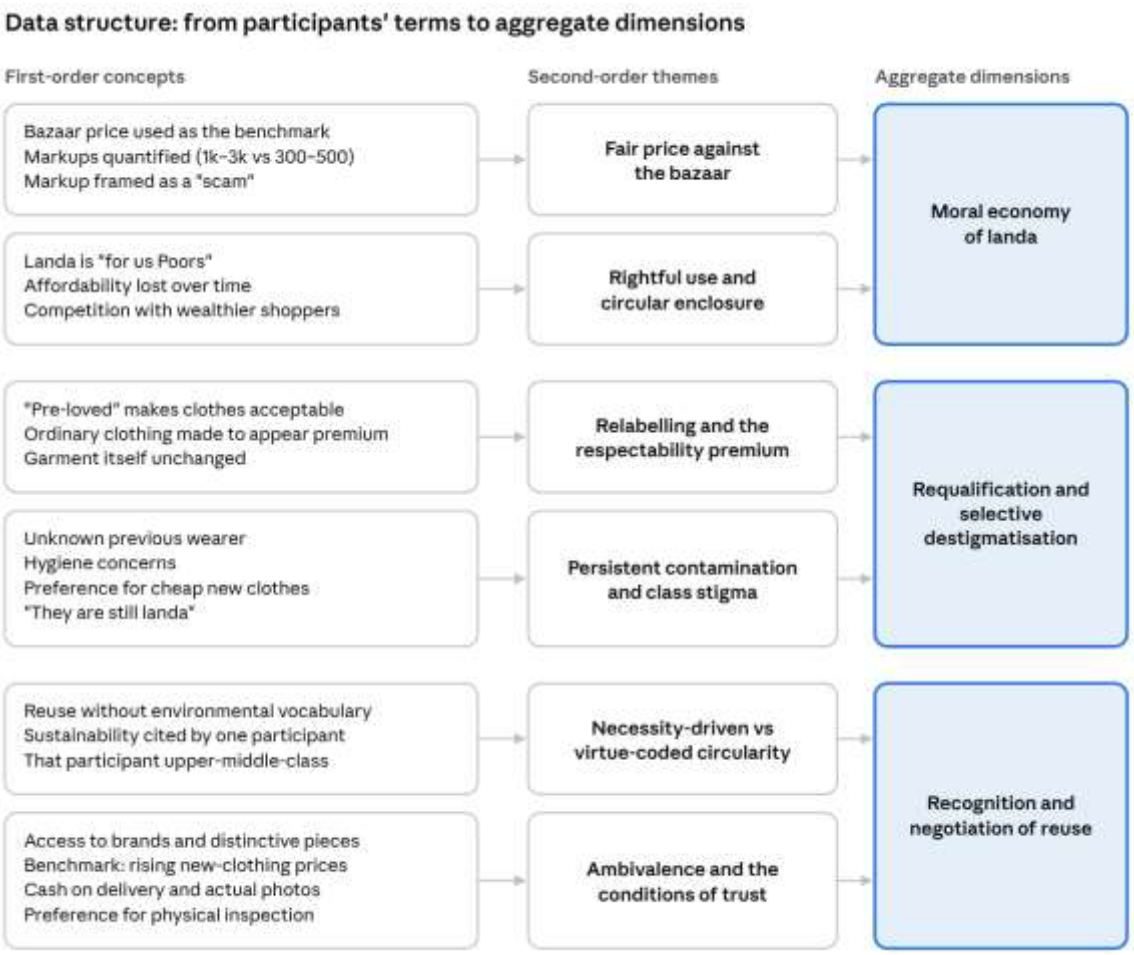

Figure 1. Data structure: first-order concepts, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented along three aggregate dimensions representing two second-order themes in each (Figure 1). The moral economy of *landa* has to do with the standards of 'fair price' and 'rightful use' that participants used to assess online resale. The second, requalification and selective destigmatisation, applies to participants' knowledge about relabelling, and its connection to the ongoing stigma of *landa*. The third relates to the recognition and negotiation of reuse, as well as the ambiguous and conditions attached to the use of online resale. In the joint format followed here, interpretation follows the presentation of evidence throughout and a summarising and concluding section brings the themes together into an analytical framework (Figure 2).

Fair Price against the Bazaar

The common thread in the data is that the criteria used for assessing the online resale are fairness criteria rather than style or quality. Absolute affordability was rarely mentioned when it came to Price. It was discussed relation to the bazaar, online price was measured against the bazaar price.

> *"Thrift pages are a scam atp. They charge around 1k-3k for clothing items that you can get for 300-500 in landa." (PR-03, Faisalabad)*
> *"I would rather visit a physical Landa market than pay around three times as much for similar clothing on Instagram." (PR-02, Gojra)*
> *"Even ordinary sweaters are being sold for around Rs. 2,000 on thrift pages." (PR-04, Faisalabad)*

There are three aspects of these responses that are analytically relevant. The comparisons are quantified in the first place: participants indicate the price of the bazaar and the price of the internet service, as well as in PR-02, the ratio between these two prices. This accuracy suggests that participants have a fixed idea about the price of *landa* garments and they use this price to compare with the price they see online. Second, the terms used to evaluate are moral in nature, not economic. Thrift pages is a "scam" as described by PR-03 does not refer to high price, but rather a price that is not legitimate, hence deceptive. Third, by focusing on the "ordinary" sweater, PR-04 establishes the material continuity of the product. There's no mention of the garment in the participant's story, just the price.

This evaluative structure is similar to the moral economy that Thompson (1971) described of eighteenth-century English crowds, who protested against market pricing on the basis of a customary definition of the just price of bread. The analogy has clear boundaries: participants did not act collectively and the price of the bazaar is not a customarily regulated price but a market price. What they have in common with Thompson's crowd is that they are using a price that is based on the norm or fairness, which they have determined over the course of many years of shopping in the bazaar, against which the increase they got from the online vendor is judged to be unfair rather than a "fair" market rate. This is moral-economic thinking about what markets should be doing, in Sayer's (2000) words. The logic in public online commentary is encapsulated in the sense that it states that it is the distinctive feature of *landa* that it is second-hand and cheap (OC, summarised).

Rightful Use, Displacement and Circular Enclosure

Price was not the only consideration of the moral economy expressed by participants; it was also about who *landa* is for. The second group of responses focused on the right purpose of the bazaar and its implications in online resale.

> *"The whole POINT of thrifted clothes is for us Poors to be able to afford quality products at throwaway prices." (PR-21)*
> *"Online thrift sellers are making affordable second-hand fashion inaccessible to people who originally relied on it." (PR-05)*
> *"People who previously depended on affordable Landa markets now have to compete with wealthier, fashion-conscious shoppers." (PR-23)*
> *"It used to be affordable." (PR-24)*

These are responses that involve a claim of entitlement based on need. By using capitalised "POINT" and positioning itself as "us Poors," PR-21 places the speaker in the community where *landa* is defined as a resource, and as an intruder to that resource by those who purchase it online. The PR-05 and PR-23 types of displacement indicate a displacement process that occurs when the "original" purchaser, or "original" users, are priced out by the reseller, or excluded by a richer buyer. PR-24 finds it difficult to accept the

affordability in the past tense and records a loss, which is blamed on the market being platformed. Similarly, public feedback categorises Instagram resellers as buying clothes at low price and selling them at much higher price (OC, summarised).

The implications of these findings relate to the positioning of injustice. Moral opposition to second-hand clothing is both at the global trade and at the state's regulation of it in Kuiper (2024) analysis of Tanzania. By contrast, evaluative talk lacks transnational origins of *landa* in Faisalabad participants. Domestic intermediaries that capture the value of garments already in the national economy are the ones where the picture of injustice lies. Circular enclosure is an idea that captures this configuration. *Landa* is a longstanding resource in a need-based circular economy, where garments are requalified by private-sector resellers, but not taken out of the economy but rather redistributed through other mechanisms, such as price, so that a resource that was available previously on bazaar terms becomes available under new terms to a new public. A comparison to enclosure is not meant to be exhaustive but only limited. Rights to land are not common property, nor are any rights extinguished, as Thompson (1991) has analyzed enclosure as the transfer of customary common rights to exclusive property. The analogy is in terms of effect rather than mechanism: a resource that has been serving the poor becomes preferentially available to those who can afford to pay more by being requalified as the clothing provision of the rich.

Relabelling and the Respectability Premium

When focusing on what participants felt online resale added, the answers considered are those in the first two themes. Participants had an explicit understanding that much of the process of *landa*'s transformation into ‘thrift' was achieved through language.

> *"Calling used clothes 'pre-loved' or 'thrift' rather than 'Landa' can make them seem more socially acceptable." (PR-15)*
>
> *"Terms such as 'pre-loved' and 'thrifted' can make ordinary used clothing appear premium." (PR-25)*

These responses reveal, in the participants' words, the mechanism of requalification, as described in the sociology of valuation (Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002), which consists of redefining the property attributes of a good in order to enable it to take on a new market role. What these accounts offer in analysis is a point of view. The studies of revaluation have tended to focus on the revaluation activities of the retailers and platforms that revalue (Fuentes and Hedegård 2025; Choufan and Tila-Cohen 2023). Here, it is described by consumers, who witness it being performed on goods that they are already familiar with. The continuity of the object through its requalification is again emphasized by PR-25's phrase "ordinary used clothing". The nature of the change is not the garment itself, but its name, and with its name, two additional properties: social acceptability (PR-15), and the price (PR-25).

It is the combination of these two properties that lies at the heart of the paper's argument. Participants did not see relabelling as marketing; they saw it as how second-hand clothing gets respectability, and they saw that this respectability is sold. The idea of the respectability premium is to capture this conjunction. The premium is that part of the price which is not the cost of material change of the garment, but the symbolic removal of the garment from the bazaar and from the classed connotations of the term "*landa*". With regard to the category to which the garment is brought, in this reading, the

re-enters the realm of the proper through the process of requalification, and then the profit of the reseller is derived from the commercial organisation of that process.

This is a process that is part of the platform. Nieborg and van Dijck (2019) follow Poell, who used the concept of platformisation to describe more than just a change of trading location, but a reorganisation of cultural practice in relation to platform infrastructures. The image-centred feed structure of Instagram naturally encourages just those kinds of operations, supporting the very operations that the participants engage in: neutral backgrounds, fashioned images and carefully crafted captions, where the garment is the focus of assessment, not its origin, as Mishra and Sandberg (2025) have found, with Indian thrift stores communicating sustainable fashion through such affordances. The platform provides a setting that allows objects that have been thrown out as waste to be offered as possible contenders for greater value.The platform provides a context in which objects that have been discarded as waste can be presented as possible contenders for greater value, according to Thompson's (1979) Rubbish Theory. The current information does not provide any indication of the extent to which individual sellers engage in such strategies, but rather shows that platform presentation is a place where the value of *landa* is remade.

Persistent Contamination, Class Stigma and Selective Destigmatisation

The participants' awareness of requalification needs to be analysed in the context of the evidence of the stigma associated with *landa* continuing.

"They are still landa." (PR-11)

"I do not know who wore these clothes before or how they were used." (PR-12)

"I would rather buy inexpensive new local clothes than wear used clothing." (PR-13)

"I have concerns about hygiene and the previous condition of second-hand garments." (PR-14)

The case of contamination concerns expressed by PR-12 and PR-14 focuses on the lack of information about the previous body that wore the garment, as described by Roux and Korchia (2006). The statement of PR-13's preference for inexpensive new clothing over used clothing suggests that, for some participants, second-hand clothing is still seen as a sign of lower status that they would avoid if possible, as experimental evidence also indicates that the lower the class of consumer, the more he or she would be likely to rate a second-hand item lower than a new one (Park 2026). PR-11 is the most theoretically significant answer in the data set. It is not about to be requalified in four words: whatever the clothes are called and how they're sold, they're still *landa*.

The answers give a particular twist to the destigmatisation narrative. What they are saying is not that the stigma of second-hand clothing is gone; rather, they are saying that when it is sold online, it is sold by the commercial process. This exemption has a corollary, however, that operates through market mechanisms and not deliberate stigmatisation, as described by Tyler (2020) as a relation of classification of power. The respectability of "thrift" is gained at the expense of the latter, "*landa*": If the former is given respectability, then the latter is continuing to be stigmatised. No stigma to the field of second-hand clothing. It clung to the bazaar, the unqualified garment and by implication to those who remain unwitting customers of the bazaar. The destigmatisation therefore is not considered as a general cultural shift but rather selective as it is limited to consumers of a particular class, and is not a cultural possession to everyone, but rather a resource learned at a price, as described by Skeggs (1997).

Necessity-driven and Virtue-coded Circularity

For all participants, direct questioning was used to determine the reasons for their use of second-hand clothing in terms of sustainability. One participant referred to sustainability as a motivation and this was a participant from an upper-middle class home.

"I wear landa, because I don't want to consume new things. I want to be sustainable." (PR-25)

The rest of the data set did not include any environmental words. Participants talked about price, purpose, hygiene, naming and trust but did not mention waste, emissions or the circular economy. This lack shouldn't be interpreted as a lack of interest in sustainability. The majority of the participants already use materials in a circular manner; they don't throw away anything that has passed through another person's hands, in most cases multiple hands, and that was purchased abroad. Their practice is very similar to the one Korsunova et al. (2022) call the necessity-driven circular economy: value-retaining reuse based on economic necessity, often not considered as circularity in academic and policy debates.

Analytically, the contrast between this broad unarticulated circularity and one sustainability-driven account is revealing, but not, of course, substantiating, as it is based on a single case. It is still similar to findings of studies that indicate sustainability-oriented consumption is part of an eco-habitus of high cultural capital (Carfagna et al. 2014), but in the present case the data record the situation of the participant's household class position and not her cultural capital, so the correspondence is only suggested. It is also consistent with evidence that high cultural capital consumers engage in thrift within the structures that are defined by their economic status (Bargain-Darrigues 2023). The information thus confirms the analytical distinction suggested in the conceptual discussion above. Circularity with *landa* is necessity-driven circularity in form of material circularity but not experienced by participants and not described as sustainability. The practice of online resale – as it is actively marketed as sustainable fashion in South Asia (Mishra and Sandberg 2025) – is a virtue-coded practice of circularity, where the same material practice takes on ethical and social value.

This discovery can be viewed as a welcome extension to Bourdieu's (1984) description of the taste of necessity. According to Bourdieu, dominated classes end up making a virtue of necessity, conforming to the necessity of their situation by adapting their tastes. In the case discussed here, the movement is in the other direction, and through the market – a necessity-based practice becomes a virtue to those free from need. The discovery also directly informs the discussion about the just circular economy. When and how do new actors come into contact with used clothing, as for-profit actors enter into second-hand markets, as Persson and Hinton (2023) ask in the Swedish case. However, as in the Faisalabad case, material circularity can be circular much before it is platformised and platformisation can reallocate material circularity's symbolic recognition and access. The environmental benefit is negligible because the clothes were already out there; the symbolic benefit is high and goes to those who can pay a 'respectability premium'. This observation also provides empirical substantiation for critiques that circular-economy discourse can depoliticise questions of distribution (Corvellec, Stowell and Johansson 2022) and Gregson et al.'s (2015) argument that the circular economy is a moral economy that legitimises some material circuits over others.

Ambivalence and the Conditions of Trust

The above analysis is not intended to suggest that rejection of the online resale is uniform. Some people appreciated it and some of their comments add an important ambivalence.

> *"I have found good-quality pieces at affordable prices through online thrift pages." (PR-08)*
>
> *"Rising prices at local brands have pushed me to look for affordable winter clothing through thrift pages." (PR-09)*
>
> *"Second-hand shopping makes it possible to find distinctive pieces that are difficult to find in conventional clothing stores." (PR-10)*
>
> *"And there is no shame." (PR-06)*

Public opinion also suggests that an alternative to high expenditure is a viable option to gain access to international brands that are not available in Pakistan (OC, summarised). Two observations follow. First, the participants use a different metric to measure online resale. The prices of the critical responses discussed under the first two themes are compared to the bazaar; PR-09 compares prices to new local brands, whose increasing prices make even the marked-up second-hand clothing appear quite reasonable. Second, the predominance of "there is no shame" although absent from existing accounts, suggests for some participants that destigmatisation is a meaningful concept.

This ambivalence does not undermine the moral-economic explanation, but identifies the perspective of the evaluator of online resale. The participants lie between the two price lines, the bazaar and the new goods market, and between the two regimes of meaning, necessity and virtue. Online resale is lambasted when compared with the *landa* it has been and appreciated when compared to the new clothing it is. The presence of both assessments in the same population suggests that the moral economy of *landa* is not simply an opposition to the market, but rather a framework of values and standards by which certain market structures are deemed legitimate or illegitimate.

This position is further confirmed by the willingness of the participants to deal with online sellers.

> *"biggest turnoff is when they dont have COD(cash on delivery) available" (PR-16)*
>
> *"I prefer sellers who use actual photographs of the clothing rather than misleading promotional pictures." (PR-17)*
>
> *"Before ordering, I check customer reviews, sizing details and feedback about the seller." (PR-18)*
>
> *"I prefer physical shopping because I can inspect the garment's quality and condition before paying." (PR-20)*

Under cash on delivery (PR-16) the financial risk is shifted from the buyer to the seller, and this is an important factor for customers who have little extra money to spend, in the presence of weak consumer protection. The need for ‘actual photographs' rather than ‘misleading promotional pictures' (PR-17) is especially important, given the above analysis. Players are judicious about how the garment gets "requalified" and want to see the garment and not the presentation. PR-20's focus on tangible inspection brings back the contact with the actual object the bazaar offers and the platform takes away. In these accounts, trust relies upon minimizing the distance between the garment and its representation, that is, partially reversing the operations which make the online resale so premium.

Synthesis: An Analytical Framework

Figure 2 brings together the six themes (in one analysis). Virtue-coded circularity is done without changing the garments themselves, but by means of the re-labelling, the curation and the language of ethical consumption of garments that circulate within a necessity-driven circular economy. The difference in price that goes with this requalification is the respectability premium. Participants analyse the process using a moral economy of fair price and rightful use, that enters into a tension with the circular economy's moral economy of waste avoidance. Two outcomes follow. Destigmatisation is selective, not general: the stigma of *landa* remains for the bazaar and its customers, but not the ones paying the premium; and access to *landa* is reallocated by price, which is also an aspect of the circular enclosure. The presence of 'critique' and 'conditional use' in the final theme suggests that the framework records a contested process, rather than a definitive conclusion.

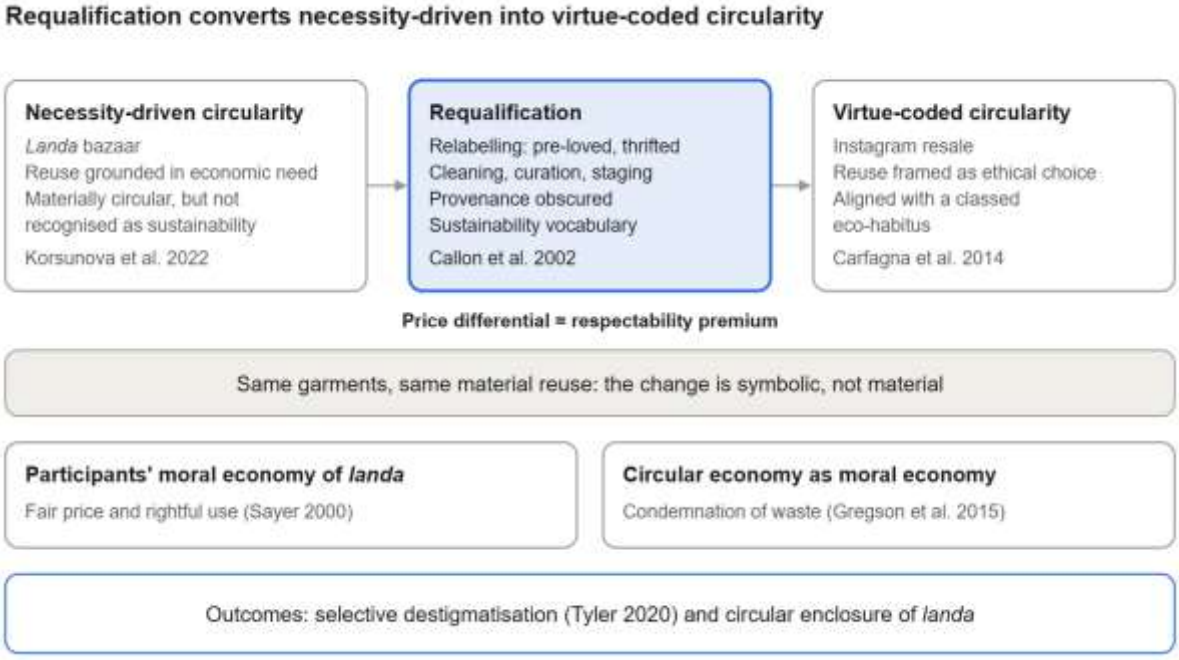

Figure 2. Analytical framework: requalification, competing moral economies and their outcomes

Conclusion, Implications and Areas for Future Research

The aim of this paper was to investigate young people's understanding of the platformisation of *landa* in Faisalabad. It discovers that online resale is experienced morally and economically as a moral-economic practice focused on fair price and rightful use; that the sign of respectability to second-hand clothing is its relabelling; and that this is not a cheap process, but rather a process of costing. Based on this, this paper argues that destigmatisation of second-hand clothes from existing Pakistani research is socially differentiated and it is better understood as selective destigmatisation – achieved via requalification and mediated through the price – rather than an overall cultural shift.

The paper has three main contributions.

Firstly, it takes the sociology of valuation and requalification to the platformisation of the second-hand economy in the Global South. Retailers and platforms requalify used goods in organised Northern markets as described in existing studies (Fuentes and Hedegård 2025; Choufan and Tila-Cohen 2023). The results of this study reveal the phenomenon of "requalification" as it is perceived by the consumers of the object that had been previously accessible, and the fact that the process of requalification can be perceived simultaneously as a process of value creation as well as exclusion. The idea of the respectability premium identifies the added value from the process of requalification that is grounded in symbolic, rather than material, change and provides a way to examine the ways in which symbolic and economic value are linked in second-hand market.

Second, it helps to make cultural commentaries on respectability and stigma. Drawing on Skeggs's (1997) account of respectability as a classed resource and Tyler's (2020) reconceptualisation of stigma as a relation of power, this paper illustrates how the relabelling process constitutes a process of selective destigmatisation, whereby the exemption from an existing stigma is available for purchase while the stigma is reproduced. The stigmatisation of "thrift" in one register and its finding respectability in another is found in other areas of destigmatisation, where practices linked to poverty are "thrifted up" and "lifestyled down," and the relevance of this finding to such areas is suggested.

Third, it plays a role in discussions around circularity and the just circular economy. The paper builds upon the necessity-driven circular economy proposed by Korsunova et al. (2022), and on research that defines a high level of cultural capital as an eco-habitus (Carfagna et al. 2014), to analytically differentiate between two types of re-use: material re-use and recognised sustainability re-use, which is termed virtue-coded circularity. It also introduces the new term "circular enclosure" for the diminished informal resource access after the for-profit requalification of an already circular informal resource. These ideas challenge the central question of just transition discourses, not just how to boost reuse but which reusers are seen as sustainable, by whom, and at what price to those whose reuse is not considered sustainable.

The findings have implications for a number of constituencies. Sustainability advocates and policy makers in Pakistan warn that online second-hand resale should not be encouraged without considering affordability and access, and without examining the broader implications of introducing circular-economy interventions. Markets themselves claim to be traditional and legitimate markets and not informal markets waiting for modernization, which could offer a more equitable basis for the circular-economy policy. For online sellers, actual photos and cash on delivery / clear pricing reason hints at that trust is best gained by not enlarging but reducing the gap between the garment and its representation; disclosure of where the garment comes from, its condition, and the reason of its pricing can help to alleviate some of the moral concerns mentioned here. The results suggest that in the classroom, the dimensions of reuse must be discussed with the students in fashion, design and sustainability and that second-hand consumption is not always a good thing.

There are some limitations that qualify these conclusions. The main data set are brief written answers, which allow for breadth within the perception categories, but less depth relating to participants' reasoning and biographies. The supplementary use of public online commentary, while supportive of the student data, is used to provide context for student data, but is evidence from material whose authors' social position is not known; for this reason it has been reported separately and is not used to support claims about class. The response sheet was designed with categories beforehand and therefore some themes were emphasised at the expense of others, but the abductive approach allowed some themes to be uncovered that were more than the pre-specified categories. The sustainability finding is based on a contrast with one case, and should therefore be seen as indicative and not definitive, and moreover is based on a measure of household class and not of cultural capital, which is the variable that defines the concept of eco-habitus. Lastly, the gendered concept of 'respectability' which Skeggs (1997) highlights was not explored with the current data and is worthy of specific research.

The extent of these limitations indicates four areas of further research. Firstly, in-depth interviews with young consumers in a carefully selected socio-economic strata, combined with photo-elicitation using pairs of photos of the bazaar and Instagram advertisements, would allow for the respectability premium to be explored in more detail and the sustainability result to be replicated with a wider sample. Second, a systematic price audit can be done and the premium paid by participants can be measured with difference between Instagram and bazaar price of garment categories. Third, a content analysis of the reseller captions (which would involve examining the use of words like "pre-loved", "thrifted" and "vintage" and the revealing or hiding of reseller history) would reveal the "requalification" practices that the participants report. Fourth, the study would compare the research findings across Pakistani cities and with comparable markets in other regions of the world, including mitumba in East Africa and ukay-ukay in the Philippines, where similar controversies over the online resale of second-hand clothing have surfaced, to see if the circular enclosure of second-hand economies is a global trend.

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