Why is collaborative fashion so fashion? Exploring drivers and barriers through the segmentation of Generation Z users[1]

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Abstract

Framing of the research: *The development of circular fashion, boosted by the sharing economy, has fostered the spread of collaborative fashion platforms (CFPs), which offer alternatives to the traditional buying model (e.g., second-hand, rental, vintage).*

Purpose of the paper: *This study aims to explore Generation Z actual and potential users of CFPs, focusing on the motivations that play a role in influencing them. Consistently the research aims to segment Generation Z through the development of a cluster analysis and the identification of different user profiles.*

Methodology: *An online questionnaire was administered to a sample of 387 consumers belonging to Generation Z, in order to collect data about their attitude and behavior concerning CFPs. A cluster analysis was then performed on collected data using the k-means clustering method.*

Findings: *The analysis revealed six clusters: Eco-Sceptics, Green Buyers, Experience Lovers, Digital Shoppers, Indulgent consumers, and Undigitals. The emerged groups of consumers reflect specific drivers and barriers, and the primary and contingent motivations to approach CFPs.*

Research limits: *The main limitation of the study concerns the composition of the sample which may reduce the generalizability of the results. In addition, the cluster analysis methodology might involve a degree of discretion from the researcher in defining and interpreting the emerged clusters.*

Practical implications: *The results offer practical insights for CFPs, allowing them to identify specific targets and tailor marketing strategies based on the characteristics of the different user segments. This can support users' engagement and retention.*

Originality of the paper: *The study outlines the profile of six different clusters of users, based on extrinsic and intrinsic variables, also highlighting how these variables actually act as drivers and barriers in the analyzed sample. In this sense the research goes a step further compared to extant contributions, by focusing on the way these drivers actually coexist and determine the emergence of specific subgroups of consumers. Moreover, the study sheds light on how the variables are related among each other.*

Key words: *sharing economy; cluster analysis; collaborative fashion platforms (CFPs); generation Z*

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1. Introduction

The fashion industry is among the highest impact categories in terms of material consumption, land and water use, and greenhouse gas emissions in Europe (EEA, 2019). At the same time, clothing production is constantly growing, as is the disposal of clothing that has not yet reached the end of its life (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020). In response to these worrisome trends, practices such as upcycling, reuse, repair, and rental, as well as production techniques with renewable and organic raw materials, have started to spread (Tsironis *et al.*, 2023). Taken altogether, these practices refer to the wider concept of circular fashion, where clothes, shoes, and accessories are produced with the intention to contrast the traditional "take-make-dispose" economy model, while ensuring their responsible use for as long as possible and their environmentally safe return to the biosphere right after (Kim *et al.*, 2021). In this context, the emergence of the sharing economy has been seen as a further support to the development of sustainable practices (Arrigo, 2021). Sharing economy refers to a socio-economic system enabling the exchanges of goods and services between individuals and organizations with the goal to increase efficiency and optimization of sub-utilized resources (Muñoz and Cohen, 2017). The boost that the sharing economy has given to circular fashion mostly depends on its ability to connect people through the internet, as the success of these platforms has been enabled by the development of ICT (Rojanakit *et al.*, 2022). Thus, thanks to digitalization, individuals can connect with a virtually unlimited network of other users and exchange a large pool of resources (Frenken and Schor, 2019). The development of circular fashion practices through sharing economy platforms led to the development of collaborative fashion platforms (CFPs) which offer consumers alternative options to the classic purchasing model, providing access to existing clothing and alternative opportunities to acquire individual ownership (gift, exchange, or second-hand purchase) or usage options for fashion products owned by others (sharing, renting, or leasing), (Iran and Schrader, 2017).

Focusing on consumer behavior, despite the closeness with circular fashion, empirical investigations shed light on the fact that sustainable concerns are often considered as a side effect in sharing economy usage, with extrinsic motivations, i.e., economic benefits, being more relevant in driving users towards these platforms (Böcker and Meelen, 2017). This is even more true when focusing on young consumers. Users from Generation Z have recently become the object of investigation concerning consumer behavior in the sharing economy (e.g., Fan *et al.*, 2023) also because of their digital competencies, which make the adoption of these platforms easier compared to older generational cohorts (Surmacz *et al.*, 2024; Maričić *et al.*, 2024). This consumer segment shows a particular affinity with collaborative and co-creative fashion platforms, thanks to values such as sustainability, individuality, digital literacy and active participation in online communities (McKinsey and Business of Fashion, 2020). Specific studies have investigated how individual characteristics, such as fashion leadership, the need for uniqueness and materialism,

can influence the adoption of clothing rental and exchange services, facilitating or hindering participation in collaborative consumption practices (Lang and Armstrong, 2018). Extant literature about Gen Zers' attitude towards the sharing economy stresses the extent to which they are close to sustainability concerns (Hill and Lee, 2012; Aktan and Kethüda, 2023; Surmacz *et al.*, 2024), yet it fails to adequately cover the paradoxical nature of this closeness, particularly in the fashion industry. Generation Z has been largely defined as greener compared to older generations (Anh, 2020), though the individuals it encompasses are the main buyers of fast fashion products (Zhang *et al.*, 2021; Kabaja *et al.*, 2023).

Based on this scenario, this research aims to explore which intrinsic (sustainability, quality, experience) and extrinsic (economic, uniqueness, accessibility) motivations influence actual and potential CFP users among Generation Z. Furthermore, the research aims to segment Generation Z users through the development of a cluster analysis and the identification of different user profiles. To this end, data from 387 Gen Zers have been collected through a self-administered questionnaire aimed at measuring respondents' agreement with a set of motivations related to CFPs. The data were processed using SPSS v.23.0 software and classified via k-means clustering. The six clusters that emerged shed light on specific subgroups of users, namely: *Eco-Sceptics, Green Buyers, Experience Lovers, Digital Shoppers, Indulgent Consumers and Undigitals*, where the investigated dimensions act as drivers or barriers.

From an academic perspective, the originality of this research comes from three key aspects. First, it fills a gap of investigation concerning Generation Z behavior towards the sharing economy, where most studies are focused on older generational cohorts. Moreover, the scope of investigation includes different practices within the fashion industry (i.e., rental commerce, second-hand shopping, vintage shopping) that are traditionally treated separately. Second, compared to extant contributions, the focus is not only on sustainability concerns, but also on a set of different motivations. Third, while previous studies are mostly focused on defining statistical models to assess the weight each variable might have on attitude and behavior, this research offers profiling of clusters of users. This is of great value from a managerial point of view, as the clusters outline potential segments that platforms' managers might target and consistently orient the fine-tuning of their strategies.

The remainder of the paper is as follows: the next section sums up the theoretical background, outlining CFPs typologies and the key drivers that have so far been investigated; the subsequent section describes the adopted methods and the details of the data collection and data analysis processes; the main findings are then described in quantitative and qualitative terms; discussion of the achieved results and conclusive remarks close the paper.

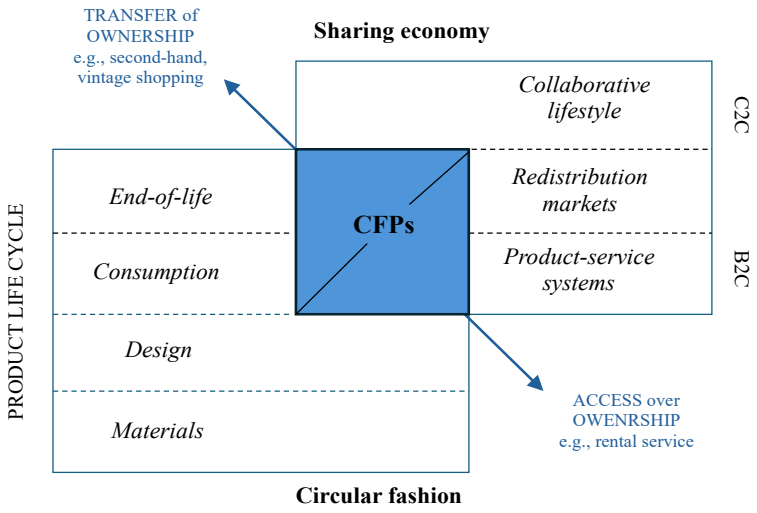
2. Relevant literature

2.1 Sharing practices in the fashion industry

Collaborative fashion platforms (CFPs) combine the concepts of circular fashion and the sharing economy. The former refers to the practices that could ensure a long life and safe disposal of fashion products (Kim *et al.*, 2021). According to Dissanayake and Weerasinghe (2022), circular fashion strategies can be implemented along the four phases of the product life cycle, namely: materials selection, product design, consumption patterns, and end-of-life.

The sharing economy, also referred to as collaborative consumption, implies sharing, swapping, trading, or renting products and services through a digital platform, which entails exchanges among peers or with companies (Botsman, 2013). Botsman (2013) identifies three practices as part of collaborative consumption: collaborative lifestyle, redistribution markets, and product-service systems. Collaborative lifestyle implies the exchange of non-product assets (e.g., space and skills); redistribution markets refer to the online resale of unused or unwanted garments; product-service systems are access-based models where business providers grant long- or short-term access to assets (Botsman, 2013).

Fig. 1: Collaborative fashion platforms typologies



Source: Authors' elaboration

As shown in Figure 1, and consistent with the studies from Park and Armstrong (2017) and Arrigo (2021), CFPs cover two main typologies of practices: (i) access over ownership, which can occur through renting or lending, and (ii) transfer of ownership, which can occur through P2P exchange, donation, and purchase of used goods. Product-service systems are an example of the former. This model involves companies on the provider

side, offering alternatives to traditional clothing purchase and ownership to reduce dependence on natural resources and redundant consumption (Dos Santos *et al.*, 2019). Through Product-service systems, firms can add new streams to their revenue models, for example, by collecting and reselling used clothes (Armstrong *et al.*, 2015). At consumption level, rental commerce is the most widespread example of product-service systems (Dos Santos *et al.*, 2019). With rental commerce, consumers use sharing platforms to access goods temporarily, paying for the experience rather than ownership (Mishra *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the same garment would be "shared" many times during its lifetime by different consumers, reducing the significant ecological consequences arising from fast fashion and its associated mass marketing activities. Fashion rentals allow for the consumption of high-end brands at discounted prices, thus allocating spending more towards services and leisure experiences (Mishra *et al.*, 2021). Given the benefits, there has been a significant growth in demand for services that offer a non-ownership consumption model (Park and Armstrong, 2017).

The second typology of CFPs implies the transfer of ownership and generally takes place through second-hand shopping to foster end-of-life circularity (Dissanayake and Weerasinghe, 2022). These exchanges have become a popular practice in many countries (Guiot and Roux, 2010; Parguel *et al.*, 2017) and refer to the commercial exchange of pre-owned garments (Kim *et al.*, 2021). This sharing process can positively contribute to counterbalance the enormous consequences emerging from fast fashion and related mass marketing activities (Pantano and Stylos, 2020). Second-hand products are goods previously owned, and their economic value is often lower than that of new products (Roux and Korchia, 2006; Roux and Guiot, 2008; Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Carrigan *et al.*, 2013). Purchasing second-hand clothing allows for a reduction in excessive garment consumption and waste, promoting the circular development of the clothing economy (Xu *et al.*, 2022). A subset of goods reselling includes the purchase of vintage products (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012). Vintage items are considered those manufactured between the 1920s and 1980s and not necessarily previously used. Vintage products represent a specific period, and their value can significantly increase over time, making them objects of adoration (Sarial-Abi *et al.*, 2017). For these reasons, the search for vintage products takes on the character of a treasure hunt (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012). Vintage enthusiasts enjoy spending time in shops searching for unique items and find the consumption experience enjoyable and thrilling (Amatulli *et al.*, 2018).

2.2 The drivers to CFPs

The sharing economy is often seen as a sustainable practice as it implies the avoidance of possession and/or of purchase with the intent to reduce natural resources (Parguel *et al.*, 2017). However, in addition to sustainability, there are other and different reasons why consumers may engage in these practices.

Focusing on the nature of motivation, extant literature largely drawn on Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-determination theory (SDT), whose postulated motivators are divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic (McArthur, 2015; Hamari *et al.*, 2016; Alzamora-Ruiz *et al.*, 2020; Minami *et al.*, 2021). Intrinsic motivations emerge from the inherent value or enjoyment derived from the activity, while extrinsic motivations are related to external pressures or outcomes that are separate from the behaviour (Hamari *et al.* 2016). Consistent with SDT, Lee *et al.* (2016) identified economic benefits, enjoyment, affordability, and accessibility of the platform as the main drivers. Hamari *et al.* (2016) identified intrinsic motivations, such as sustainability and enjoyment, and extrinsic motivations, such as economic benefits, as drivers of collaborative consumption. Kim and Yoon (2021) argue that intrinsic motivations, such as enjoyment and sustainability, are stronger than extrinsic motivations, such as economic benefits.

Focusing on the literature on second-hand products, it emerges that they are sought for experiential reasons related to the nature of the offer, such as the originality of the products and, thus, the opportunity to find unusual items that are often not available in a new goods market. The informal and playful atmosphere of some channels also drives consumers to adopt second-hand shopping. Second-hand buyers' motivations are often economic in nature as they meet the need to pay less, have a fair price, bargain hunting, and the rewarding role of price (De Jesus and Mendonca, 2018; Padmavathy *et al.*, 2019; Hinojo *et al.*,2022). Also, environmental awareness, attitudes toward sustainability, and ecological concerns such as recycling and waste reduction are also motivators for second-hand shopping (Guiot and Roux, 2010; De Jesus and Mendonca, 2018; Hamari *et al.*, 2015; Hinojo, 2022). The attraction of price and frugality proves to be two significant drivers for purchasing second-hand goods. This contrasts with vintage items since their price may increase over time and be higher than that of new products (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012). Interest in collecting and wearing vintage is growing, as its unique fabrics and styles attract consumers to shop for second-hand clothing (Palmer, 2005). Vintage consumption is driven simultaneously by psychological and functional factors (Guzzetti and Crespi, 2021). The purchase of vintage items is also motivated by an emotional attachment to an idealized past to which the product belongs, referred to as nostalgia; nostalgia entails a positive preference for the past, involving negative feelings toward the present or the future (Cassidy and Bennett, 2015). Vintage items, often unique pieces, allow individuals to build a distinctive and personal style (Kessous and Valette-Florence, 2019) and express their individuality (Tian *et al.*, 2001; Park and Armstrong, 2017). Vintage goods differ significantly from ordinary second-hand goods. Second-hand products are often perceived as environmentally friendly and economical choices, and in the past vintage clothes were sometimes associated with consumers with less money who could not afford new items (McColl *et al.*, 2013). Today, however, vintage takes on a different cultural and symbolic value defined by quality and stylistic significance. The distinction between second-hand

and vintage, therefore, highlights the need to analyse the specificities and motivations associated with each of these consumption categories.

Rental trade, which is the most widespread example of product-service systems (Dos Santos *et al.*, 2019), has different characteristics compared to the purchase of second-hand and vintage goods. Truong (2010) distinguishes between intrinsic goals, such as the individual need for autonomy, enjoyment, and sustainability, and extrinsic goals, which include economic benefits, fame, possession of luxury goods, and external appearances. The main reason that drives consumers toward short-term access to goods is the possibility of avoiding the expense of new clothes, but, at the same time, the possibility of trying on different outfits, avoiding the problems associated with ownership (Guzzetti and Crespi, 2021). Therefore, the rental concept is more suitable for a younger audience, particularly for those who wish to frequently purchase fashionable clothing to express their identity (Jain *et al.*, 2022). At a wider level, Armstrong *et al.* (2015) argue that PSSs may have environmental drivers, due to the service's ability to increase the use time of clothes by reducing premature disposal, and emotional drivers, including experientiality, satisfaction, and uniqueness that go into this type of purchase. According to the authors, economic benefits and convenience of use are also important drivers. De Jesus and Mendonça (2018) stressed the key role of socio-cultural factors in shaping rental-related collaborative consumption behavior.

As for the generational cohort under investigation, the existing literature on Gen Zers' collaborative fashion consumption does not exhaustively explore all relevant factors and tends to focus mainly on sustainability (e.g., Palomo-Dominguez *et al.*, 2023; Palanichamy *et al.*, 2024). Some studies have considered additional motivations, including economic savings (Slaton and Pookulangara, 2021), achievement of social status (Slaton and Pookulangara, 2021), collectivism and sense of community (Aktan and Kethüda, 2023), convenience and practicality (Bulin et al, 2024), experientiality (Ravikumar *et al.*, 2020; Fondevila-Gascón *et al.*, 2019), exclusivity and uniqueness of experience (McCoy *et al.*, 2021), quality standards and reliability of the garments (Gokhale *et al.*, 2020).

In light of this, the study aims to explore all the motivations that drive current and potential users of Generation Z to use CFP platforms; therefore, the study will consider both intrinsic (sustainability, quality, experience) and extrinsic (economic, uniqueness, accessibility) motivations.

3. Material and method

3.1 Data collection

The purpose of this research is to explore Generation Z motivations towards CFPs and profile them through the development of a cluster analysis. To this end, data were collected through a web-based questionnaire developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections. The first three sections presented the same set of questions, applied respectively to rental commerce, second-hand, and vintage items.

These three forms of consumption were chosen as the most representative of the two typologies CFPs are made of: (i) rental commerce as a product-service system based on access over ownership, and (ii) second-hand and vintage shopping as transfer of ownership. The further distinction between second-hand and vintage shopping was made because these practices rely on different motivations, with second-hand being associated with an eco-friendly lifestyle or the need to save money, and vintage shopping with the search for style and individuality. The motivations were investigated in relation to each form of consumption separately. Each section began with a definition of the consumption form under investigation to facilitate the respondents' understanding of the questions. Moreover, questions about frequency and usage mode were also included to better frame the purchasing trends. The questionnaire items were identified in the literature (Annex A) and measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1= completely disagree, 5= completely agree). The last section of the questionnaire concerns the socio-demographic data of the respondent, including age, gender, education level, occupation, and geographic origin.

Quota sampling was adopted as the non-probabilistic method that comes closest in terms of representativeness to probability sampling (Yang and Banamah, 2014). The sample was constructed from the identification of bachelor's and master's students enrolled at the authors' university. This group constituted the main stratum of the sample. Within this stratum, age-based quotas were defined, selecting only individuals belonging to Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2004). Within the defined quotas, participants were selected according to a random and convenient approach, which was deemed suitable for meeting the research objectives and is therefore widely used in the literature (Turnšek *et al.*, 2020; Gupta *et al.*, 2022). The sample consists of young Italians, belonging to one of the most important markets for the fashion industry, a leading sector of the national economy (Demyanova *et al.*, 2023). In Italy, Generation Z allocates a significant portion of its spending to clothing (Demyanova *et al.*, 2023). The decision to focus on a single country is justified by the fact that consumer attitudes and behavior are strongly influenced by specific social, cultural and economic factors, which also affect the adoption of collaborative fashion business models (Iran *et al.*, 2019; Demyanova *et al.*, 2023). The questionnaire was sent to participants between June and September 2023, collecting 387 valid responses from actual and potential users of CFPs.

3.2 Data analysis

The collected data were processed using a cluster analysis. Since the research aims to segment Generation Z users, cluster analysis was selected because it allows the creation of distinct groups based on shared characteristics (Blashfield and Aldenderfer, 1978). The analysis was performed using SPSS 23.0 software. Due to the high number of variables and the output of the bivariate correlation analysis, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out. PCA is a tool to reduce the dimension of a large set of correlated variables, leading to a small set of uncorrelated

variables that still contain most of the information (Johnson and Wichern 2007). The analysis resulted in 12 main variables that could explain 76% of the overall variability across the cases (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Total variance explained

	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
Component	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
Var.1	20,892	35,410	35,410	20,892	35,410	35,410
Var.2	4,616	7,823	43,233	4,616	7,823	43,233
Var.3	4,244	7,193	50,426	4,244	7,193	50,426
Var.4	2,770	4,695	55,122	2,770	4,695	55,122
Var.5	2,537	4,301	59,422	2,537	4,301	59,422
Var.6	1,905	3,229	62,651	1,905	3,229	62,651
Var.7	1,686	2,858	65,510	1,686	2,858	65,510
Var.8	1,554	2,634	68,144	1,554	2,634	68,144
Var.9	1,337	2,267	70,411	1,337	2,267	70,411
Var.10	1,243	2,107	72,517	1,243	2,107	72,517
Var.11	1,090	1,847	74,365	1,090	1,847	74,365
Var.12	1,047	1,775	76,140	1,047	1,775	76,140

Source: authors' elaboration

The validity of this solution is tested by the KMO measure (.929) and the statistical significance of the Bartlett's test (sig. .000). Then, to perform the cluster analysis, two steps were carried out. First, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using the Ward's minimum variance method with squared Euclidean distance measure. The coefficient of agglomeration has then been analyzed to identify the amount of homogeneity that can be observed across the cluster solutions. Consistent with the elbow criterion method, which is based on the error sum of squares as an indicator of residual heterogeneity (Cui, 2020), 4 to 6 cluster solutions could be adopted. To identify the best solution, non-hierarchical clustering processes were applied with 4, 5, and 6 clusters. In particular, the k-means technique was applied, where each observation is associated with the cluster with the nearest mean. A 6-cluster solution was adopted based on the iteration history and the distribution of the cases across the clusters. Moreover, this choice was confirmed by the results of the one-way ANOVA analysis, performed with a Bonferroni post-hoc test, which further tests the reliability and validity of the adopted cluster solution. In fact, as shown in Table 2, the ANOVA results indicate significant differences between groups for all the variable comparisons ($p < 0.001$). The high F-values suggest a strong between-group variance relative to within-group variance, reinforcing the robustness of these differences.

Tab. 2: One way ANOVA test

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Var.1	Between groups	166,157	5	33,231	57,592	,000
	Within groups	219,843	381	,577		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.2	Between groups	106,437	5	21,287	29,012	,000
	Within groups	279,563	381	,734		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.3	Between groups	81,693	5	16,339	20,456	,000
	Within groups	304,307	381	,799		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.4	Between groups	143,531	5	28,706	45,107	,000
	Within groups	242,469	381	,636		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.5	Between groups	39,986	5	7,997	8,806	,000
	Within groups	346,014	381	,908		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.6	Between groups	63,541	5	12,708	15,015	,000
	Within groups	322,459	381	,846		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.7	Between groups	35,843	5	7,169	7,800	,000
	Within groups	350,157	381	,919		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.8	Between groups	99,358	5	19,872	26,413	,000
	Within groups	286,642	381	,752		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.9	Between groups	57,990	5	11,598	13,472	,000
	Within groups	328,010	381	,861		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.10	Between groups	34,658	5	6,932	7,517	,000
	Within groups	351,342	381	,922		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.11	Between groups	49,585	5	9,917	11,231	,000
	Within groups	336,415	381	,883		
	Total	386,000	386			
Var.12	Between groups	127,814	5	25,563	37,723	,000
	Within groups	258,186	381	,678		
	Total	386,000	386			

Source: authors' elaboration

4. Findings

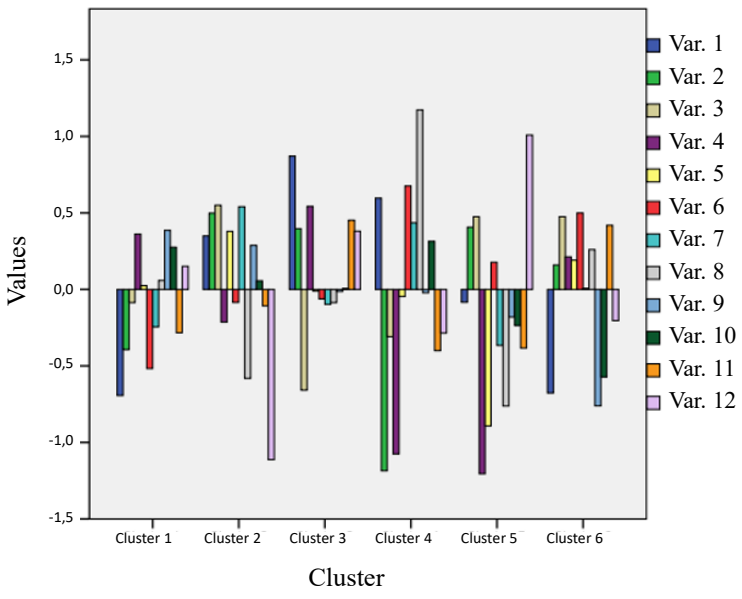
The performed analysis indicated the presence of six clusters of users, which have been labeled based on their main features as: Eco-Sceptics, Green Buyers, Experience Lovers, Digital Shoppers, Indulgent Consumers, and Undigitals (Table 3, and Figure 2).

Tab. 3: Final cluster centers

	Cluster					
	Cluster 1 Eco-sceptics	Cluster 2 Green Buyers	Cluster 3 Experience Lovers	Cluster 4 Digital shoppers	Cluster 5 Indulgent consumers	Cluster 6 Undigitals
Var.1	-,69336	,34890	,87036	,59618	-,08334	-,67657
Var.2	-,39398	,49853	,39727	-1,18502	,40662	,15967
Var.3	-,08579	,54978	-,65819	-,30879	,47465	,47560
Var.4	,36148	-,21375	,54206	-1,07515	-1,20542	,21249
Var.5	,02459	,37900	-,01129	-,04610	-,89284	,19061
Var.6	-,51748	-,08447	-,06128	,67590	,17771	,49939
Var.7	-,24462	,54055	-,09707	,43564	-,36659	,00688
Var.8	,05782	-,58129	-,08583	1,17312	-,76232	,26035
Var.9	,38612	,28759	-,01312	-,02241	-,18134	-,76067
Var.10	,27503	,05585	,00568	,31452	-,23565	-,57218
Var.11	-,28393	-,10828	,45174	-,39995	-,38347	,41844
Var.12	,15136	-1,11291	,38011	-,28525	1,00918	-,20405

Source: authors 'elaboration

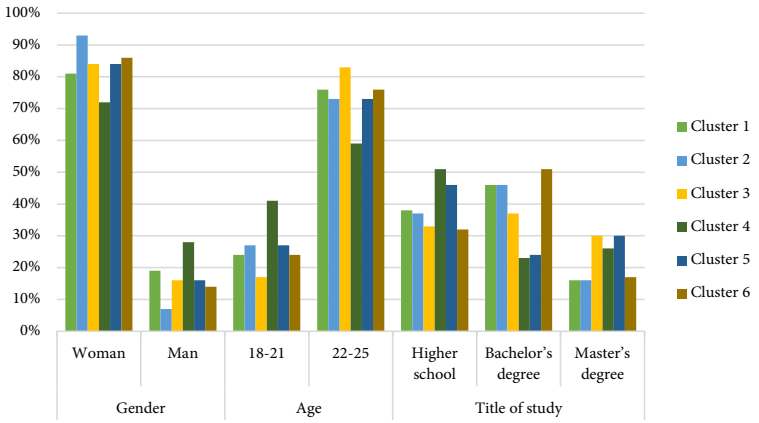
Fig. 2: Final cluster centers bar chart



Source: authors 'elaboration

The overall sample is mostly composed of women (87%), and the age group most covered is 22-25 years (75%). In view of their age, just over half of the sample has a bachelor's degree as their qualification (51%).

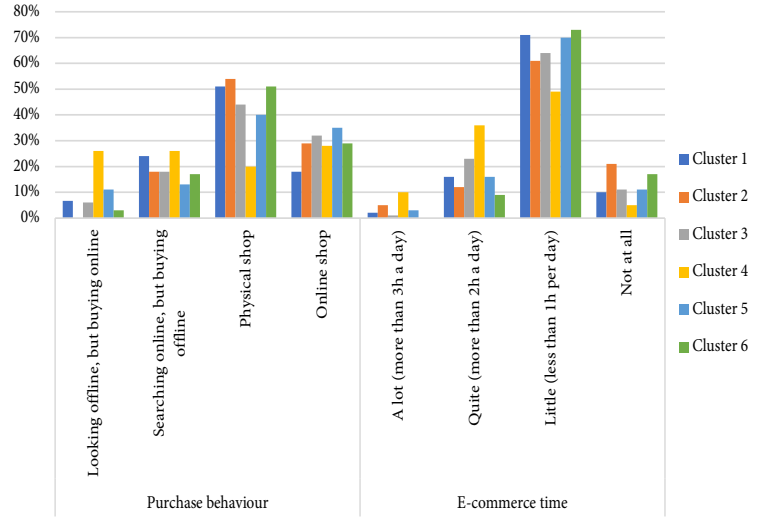
Fig. 3: Socio-demographic aspects of clusters



Source: authors 'elaboration

Figure 4 describes the purchasing behavior of the identified clusters. The sample predominantly prefers physical shops for purchasing. Generally, almost all clusters search online, but then purchase offline. Regarding the time spent on e-commerce, however, the clusters spend little time online (less than one hour per day).

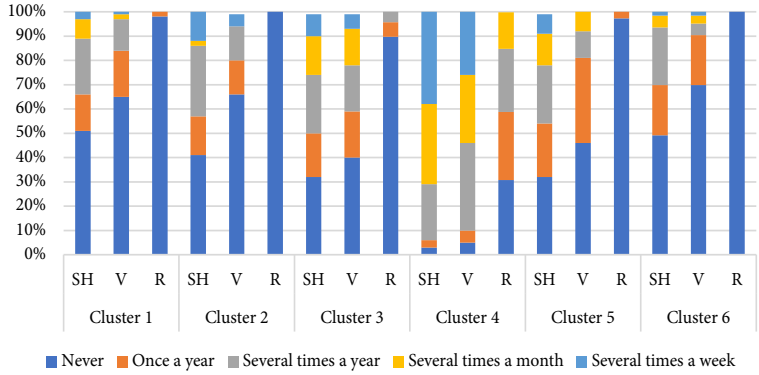
Fig. 4: Clusters' purchasing behavior



Source: authors 'elaboration

The sample considered for the cluster analysis uses more second-hand platforms. A large proportion of consumers also use platforms for vintage products. The use of rental platforms, on the other hand, is low compared to the other practices considered.

Fig. 5: Use of rental, second hand, and vintage



Source: authors 'elaboration

The first cluster is the largest (27%) and groups people who do not use CFPs much. Their use is lacking in both offline and online contexts. The members of this cluster show much disagreement towards the motivations considered in this study, and there is no driver towards which they show agreement; this shows that this is a cluster that does not buy these products much. The main reason why they do not choose these practices is an intrinsic motivation, i.e., sustainability. The cluster shows disagreement with everything related to this variable, to the point of considering it a barrier to purchase. Although these practices are very much associated with sustainability, consumers show their scepticism. Consumers believe that buying second-hand, vintage, or rented products does not help to save natural resources, and, therefore, they believe that it is not a sustainable and environmentally friendly purchasing choice. The results are homogeneous, and this barrier is present in all three practices (second-hand, rental, and vintage). Therefore, considering these characteristics, the cluster was named *Eco-Sceptics*. Although to a small extent, this cluster also disagrees with the quality driver. Consumers believe that these products, besides being unsustainable, do not have high-quality standards and are therefore not reliable in their performance.

The second cluster covers 14% of the sample and groups people who purchase these types of products several times a year, mostly in offline contexts. Differently from the Eco-Sceptics cluster, in this case sustainability is a driver for purchase. Consumers feel that by choosing these products they contribute to saving natural resources. This aspect emerges strongly in all three purchase forms considered in this study (second hand, vintage, rental). For these reasons, the cluster was named *Green Buyers*. In addition to supporting the sustainability driver, this cluster is also in agreement

with the quality driver, considering these products to be of good quality and reliable in their performance. This is a cluster of users who buy these products a lot and the only barrier identified is the experience dimension, towards which the cluster disagrees the most.

The third cluster covers 22% of the sample and consists of users who, similarly to the previous cluster, purchase products several times a year, mostly in offline contexts. Compared to the previous cluster, individuals in this case state that their key motivation lies in the search for experience and uniqueness. Buying these products allows them to have a positive and unique experience, to feel part of a community, and to meet new people with similar interests. Furthermore, these products allow users to express their individuality and a distinctive self-image through products that no one else has. Therefore, this cluster has been called *Experience Lovers*. Although this is the characterising element, the cluster also shows its interest in other motivations, albeit to a lesser extent, such as quality and sustainability.

The fourth cluster covers 10% of the sample and consists of users who purchase second-hand, vintage, or rental products several times a month at physical shops and several times a week on e-commerce. This cluster spends more time on e-commerce websites than any other. The analysis conducted shows that these users believe that the accessibility of these forms of purchasing makes shopping easier and more efficient. Furthermore, they believe that online shopping makes a wide range of products available, facilitating their purchasing process. Considering these characteristics, this cluster was named *Digital Shoppers*. This cluster is also in agreement with the economic driver, as buying second-hand, vintage and rental products on digital platforms is economically advantageous. At the same time, according to this cluster, sustainability has little influence on the adoption of CFPs.

The fifth cluster covers 10% of the sample and consists of users who generally shop both in physical shops and on digital platforms, spending about one hour per day on e-commerce. Individuals belonging to this cluster make a rare use of CFPs, at most once a year, with economic reasons being their key motivation. Users consider the price of these products to be fair and suited to allow for the purchase of a wider quantity of products. For this reason, the fifth cluster has been named *Indulgent Consumers*. The cluster does not consist of strong users, mostly because of experience and uniqueness dimensions with which respondents strongly disagree. Users in this cluster do not feel part of a community by buying new products, and do not believe that by using CFPs they can meet new people with similar interests. Likewise, products do not allow them to feel unique nor enable them to express their personality in a distinctive way.

The sixth cluster covers 16% of the analysed sample and is composed of people who buy more at physical shops, spending little time on e-commerce. Respondents use CFPs very few times, and more than half do not use them at all. The analysis showed that the cluster disagrees with many of the proposed motivations, and, in particular, with online accessibility. The digital platforms on which CFPs are based do not make purchasing easy. Purchasing productivity is not improved by such

platforms. The cluster also disagrees with the possibility that the wide range of products available online can facilitate their purchase. For these reasons, the sixth cluster was defined as *Undigitals*. In addition, users in this cluster avoid purchasing these products because they do not consider them economically advantageous or fairly priced. Cluster analysis shows that the only reason why respondents sometimes turn to CFPs is because they consider them to be sustainable.

Annex B summarizes the characteristics of the clusters.

5. Discussion

The performed analysis revealed the existence of six different clusters of Gen Zers, that differ from each other in terms of motivations towards CFPs. The results confirm, in part, what has already been stated in the literature, namely that Gen Zers aligns itself with values of sustainability, individuality, and digital mastery (McKinsey and Business of Fashion, 2020), but they also highlight, in line with Hill and Lee (2012), the presence of a gap between declared environmental awareness and actual practices, especially in clusters where economic or accessibility-related motivations prevail (Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Hamari *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, the role of factors such as uniqueness and experience, already discussed by Lang and Armstrong (2018) and by studies on second-hand, vintage, and rental commerce (Guiot and Roux, 2010; Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Guzzetti *et al.*, 2021), is confirmed in clusters more oriented towards the search for stylistic differentiation and experiential consumption rather than sustainability. Compared to existing literature, this work broadens the focus beyond sustainability alone, integrating the analysis with a complex set of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and offering a detailed segmentation of Gen Zers in a national context, thus helping to fill a research gap and provide operational guidance for CFP managers.

The value of this output is twofold: as it allows us to reflect on both the clusters and their specific variables, as well as the ways these elements are actually related to one another. A first consideration that is worth making refers to the fact that the three typologies of collaborative fashion (second-hand, vintage, and rental) are mostly considered in the same way by respondents. This means that the perceived drivers and barriers impact the way consumers from Generation Z approach the sharing economy as a whole within the fashion industry, with the exception of slight differences.

Focusing on the six clusters, they can be interpreted in the light of two key variables: the use of CFPs and the intrinsic/extrinsic nature of the motivation. As for the use, four of the achieved clusters (*Green Shoppers, Experience Lovers, Digital Shoppers and Indulgent Consumers*) are actually made of individuals who use CFPs on a higher or lower frequency, yet they are actual users of these platforms. In this regard, cluster descriptions allow us to shed light on those elements that lead the consumers towards the adoption of CFPs. On the other hand, there are two clusters (*Eco-sceptics* and *Undigitals*) that are made of individuals who do not make use of the investigated platforms. As for these clusters, the performed analysis shed

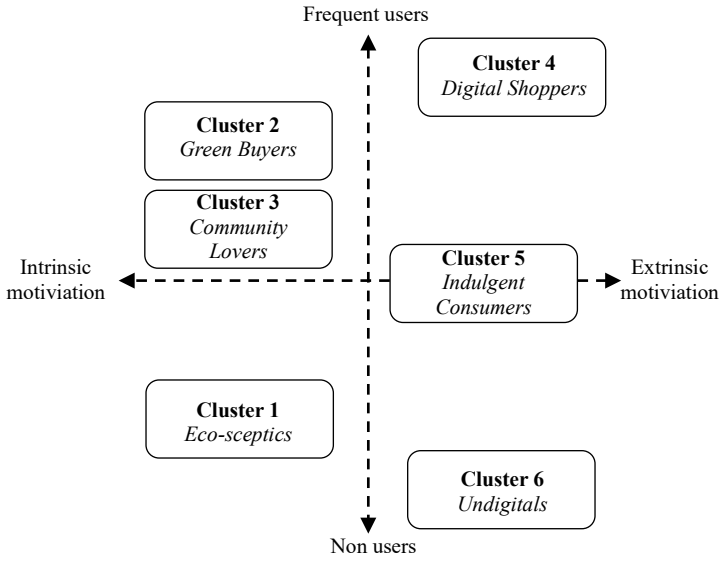
light on those elements that prevent them from using the platforms and thus gaining a deeper understanding of their perceived barriers.

The six clusters can thus be ideally positioned according to the frequency of use and the nature of motivations as described by SDT (Fig. 6). It is interesting to note how the same element can act as a driver for some clusters and a barrier for others, both for intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. In terms of intrinsic motivation, sustainability illustrates the contradiction: while it is a key driver for Cluster 2 (*Green buyers*), it represents the main barrier of use for Cluster 1 (*Eco-sceptics*). This is a non-surprising contradiction that reflects the inner duality of the wider relationship between the sharing economy and sustainability (Grieco and Palagonia, 2024). The opposition between Cluster 2 and Cluster 1 shows two sides of the same coin, as both clusters share Generation Z's characteristic attention to waste, as well as environmental and economic resources. In both clusters, sustainability shapes the formation of attitudes and behavioural intentions towards CFPs, yet in two converse directions.

In a similar way from the extrinsic motivation perspective, the digital nature of CFPs acts as a driver and a barrier at the same time. Accessibility to digital platforms represents a strong purchasing driver for Cluster 4 (*Digital Shoppers*). The focus on the approach to technology characterizes Generation Z, also defined as a generation of digital natives, constantly connected and tied to technological tools. The technological element reinforces the perceived usefulness for consumers, allowing the purchase of products at any time (Lee *et al.*, 2016; Bulin et al, 2024). However, digital platforms also emerge as an obstacle that does not facilitate the purchasing process. For cluster 6 (*Undigitals*), in fact, digital accessibility represents a barrier, witnessing an aspect that goes against the shared trend from Generation Z.

Finally, Cluster 3 (*Experience Lovers*) and Cluster 5 (*Indulgent Consumers*) also appear to be in opposition to each other. The experience and uniqueness dimensions play a driving role for Cluster 3 and represent the main reasons for purchase. Second-hand, vintage, and rental products, in fact, allow consumers to have a pleasurable consumption experience and feel unique by owning items that no one else has (Ravikumar *et al.*, 2020; McCoy *et al.*, 2021). Cluster 5, on the other hand, emerges as being totally indifferent to these dimensions and more inclined towards following current trends to wear what others are wearing. This goes along with the attention to the economic saving, making this kind of user enthusiasts of fast fashion, who meet their key need to cheaply stay in line with trends (Slaton and Pookulangara, 2021).

Fig. 6: Cluster positioning according to use of platform and nature of the drivers



Source: Authors' elaboration

As seen from the description of the clusters, the specific variables coexist to construct and delineate segments' profiles. Users may be motivated or hindered to purchase these products by extrinsic and intrinsic motivations that are often combined or in opposition to each other. The results of the study reveal direct or inverse relationships among the variables that emerge both between and within the intrinsic and extrinsic groups (Fig. 7).

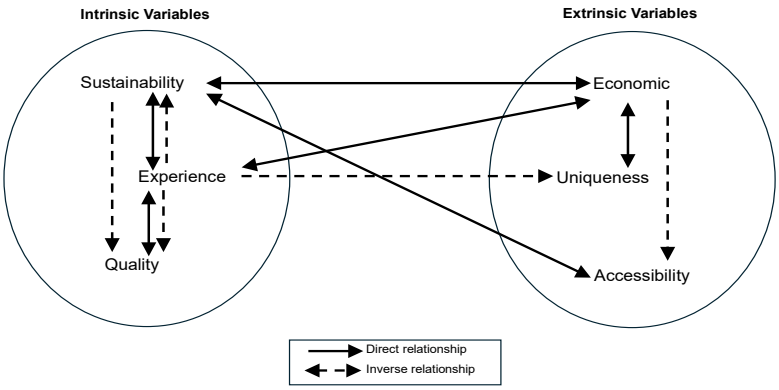
In the case of Cluster 1 (*Eco-sceptics*) and Cluster 2 (*Green buyers*), a relationship emerges between two intrinsic variables (sustainability and quality) that construct the profiles of these two clusters. The relationship here is direct: users who consider sustainability a driver of choice also consider quality an important driver (Cluster 2); similarly, users who disagree with the sustainability driver also disagree with the quality driver (Cluster 1).

In the case of Clusters 3 (*Experience Lovers*) and 5 (*Indulgent Consumers*), an interesting relationship emerges that sets these two clusters in opposition: the direct relationship between experience (intrinsic variable) and uniqueness (extrinsic variable). These two variables combine to define the profiles of clusters 3 and 5. In the first case (Cluster 3), users are both motivated by the search for experience and uniqueness. In the second case (Cluster 5), the two variables both represent barriers to the use of CFPs.

In the case of Cluster 4 (*Digital Shoppers*) and Cluster 6 (*Undigitals*), a direct relationship emerges between two extrinsic variables, accessibility and affordability. When users consider the accessibility of digital platforms positively, they also consider the economic driver positively (Cluster 4). When, on the other hand, users express their disagreement with the accessibility, the disagreement also extends to the economic dimension

(Cluster 6). In the case of these two clusters, it also emerges that in the presence of the accessibility and affordability driver, we witness the absence of the sustainability driver, and vice versa. In other words, consumers either choose CFPs for their sustainability or for platform accessibility and price.

Fig. 7: Relations among the variables emerged from the clusters



Source: Authors' elaboration

6. Theoretical and managerial implications

Several implications can be derived from this study, at both the academic and managerial levels. From an academic perspective, this research adds multiple contributions to the sharing economy field of research. First, it focuses attention on a specific generational cohort, i.e., Generation Z, which has thus far been overlooked. In fact, most studies on consumer behavior in the sharing economy are focused on older generations, and Gen Zers have only recently started to be more closely investigated (Fan *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, compared with exisiting contributions, this research advances the discourse in two main directions. First, it offers an investigation of CFPs, unveiling the dynamics of consumer behavior within a specific industry, taking into account different practices that are usually treated separately (e.g., McCoy *et al.*, 2021; Pham *et al.*, 2021; Palomo-Domínguez *et al.*, 2023). This approach aligns with recent calls in the literature on the sharing economy and consumer behavior for greater attention to both specific target groups and specific industries as key directions for future research in this subfield (Grieco and Palagonia, 2024). Second, it moves beyond the conventional analysis of sustainability concerns within which studies about Gen Zers and sharing economy are usually framed (Palanichamy and Mohanty, 2024; Surmacz *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, the study fits into the stream of research about users' motivations, yet compared to extant literature, it pushes the discourse forward as it does not focus on the single drivers which have already been extensively covered in literature (Pham *et al.*, 2021; Slaton and Pookulangara, 2021; Aktan and Kethüda, 2023; Bulin et al, 2024), rather

it uses motivations to build users profiles through cluster analysis. This aspect has been recently raised by scholars, who recognized the strategic importance of different users' profiles in determining equally different consumption practices (Muylaert *et al.*, 2024). Despite nurtured research about consumers' profiles in the fashion industry (e.g., Alevizou *et al.*, 2021), this aspect has yet to be fully focused on in the sharing economy context. Also, the research sheds light on two different profiles of non-users, adding to a topic that has so far been underexamined in prior research and mostly referring to specific geographical contexts (Lang and Zang, 2019; Luo and Park, 2024).

From a managerial point of view, the implications are evident in the research output, where the identified clusters can be interpreted as market segments towards which platform managers can define and/or refine the proper strategies to reach the desired market. This is true both in focusing on users and even more on non-users, to support the implementation of acquisition and conversion strategies. Acquiring a greater knowledge about users' motivations can, in fact, orient managers to understand the elements to stress in the strategic positioning of their platform, in the definition of the value proposition, and the marketing and communications decisions. Although relevant for all the categories of users, it becomes even more interesting to focus on Generation Z, given its purchasing power and the greater access to income comparing to other generations.

7. Conclusion

This study aims to explore Generation Z motivations towards CFPs and to profile them through the development of a cluster analysis. The analysis of collected data led to the identification of six clusters of users and the relationships between motivations.

Although this study provides valuable insights, it also has some limitations, which can be considered as promising avenues for future research. From a methodological point of view, the main limitation lies in the involvement of the student population as the primary respondents to the survey which made the sample mostly composed of individuals with Italian nationality. In this sense, further research could improve the representativeness of the sample, involving respondents from other contexts and countries. Also, comparative analysis with other generational cohorts might reinforce the identification of Gen Zers' specificities. Further research could also examine the influence of cultural norms, dimensions of social acceptance, and social media usage to further explore the behavior of these target users. The cluster analysis methodology could also be a source of limitation, as it implies a margin of discretion for the researchers who perform it. Thus, despite all the measures that have been taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the proposed solution, additional analysis could be helpful in reinforcing the achieved findings. For example, qualitative research could integrate the performed analysis with a more detailed exploration of each cluster, allowing for other possible latent motivations to be explored.

Finally, the study identifies the relationship between extrinsic variables (economic factors, uniqueness, accessibility) and intrinsic variables (sustainability, quality, experience) and the ways these impact the definition of Gen Zers users' profiles. Despite pointing to interesting conclusions about the ways motivations act as drivers or barriers for the different clusters, in the present form these observations lack statistical significance. Future investigation could be oriented towards this aspect to further validate the relations that seem to emerge from the cluster description.

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Annex A: Questionnaire items

Driver	Item	Reference
Sustainability	[CFP] helps to save natural resources (S1) [CFP] is a sustainable consumption mode (S2) [CFP] is eco-friendly (S3)	Hamari *et al.*, 2016
Economic	I can afford more clothes because I pay less when [CFP] (Ec1) With [CFP], I feel like I'm paying a fair price for clothes (Ec2) I don't want to pay more for a piece of clothing just because it's new (Ec3)	Guiot *et al.*, 2010
Uniqueness	[CFP] allows me to express my individuality (U1) [CFP] items allow me to create a distinctive personal image (U2) I hope to come across items that no one else has (U3)	Padmavathy *et al.*, 2019
Experience	[CFP] allows me to belong to a group of people with similar interests (Ex1) Using the products makes me feel part of a community (Ex2) [CFP] is a good way to meet new people (Ex3)	Minami *et al.*, 2021
Quality	[CFP] are reliable in their performance (Q1) I like the design of [CFP]products (Q2) [CFP] have high quality standards (Q3)	Gokhale *et al.*, 2020
Accessibility	[CFP] increases the ease of use in my purchasing ability (A1) [CFP] helps me buy what I want from a wide range of available products (A2) [CFP] increases the ease of use in my purchasing ability (A3)	Padmavathy *et al.*, 2019
Yearly use of [CFP] (offline/online)	Never Once a year Several times a year Several times a month Several times a week	

Annex B: Summary clusters' profiles

Cluster label	Main characteristic	Other characteristics	Purchase Drivers	Barriers to purchase
Cluster 1: Eco-Sceptics	Consumers are very sceptical about the sustainability of these products, to the point of not buying them.	Consumers do not consider products of higher quality.	NA	Sustainability Quality
Cluster 2: Green Buyers	Consumers use CFPs because they see these products as a sustainable and environmentally friendly choice.	Consumers consider the products to be of better quality. Experience could be a barrier to purchase.	Sustainability Quality	Experience
Cluster 3: Experience Lovers	Consumers use CFPs because buying them allows them to have a positive experience and feel unique.	Consumers also consider these products sustainable and of quality.	Experience Uniqueness Quality Sustainability	NA
Cluster 4: Digital Shoppers	Consumers are motivated to purchase these products by the accessibility of digital platforms.	Consumers also consider these products to be cost-effective. However, they do not consider the products sustainable	Accessibility Economic	Sustainability
Cluster 5: Indulgent consumers	Consumers consider products to be cost-effective	Consumers, by buying these products, do not have a positive experience and do not feel unique.	Economic	Experience Uniqueness
Cluster 6: Undigitals	Consumers do not buy these products because they do not find digital platforms accessible.	Consumers consider these products to be economically unviable. However, they recognise their sustainability.	Sustainability	Accessibility Economic

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