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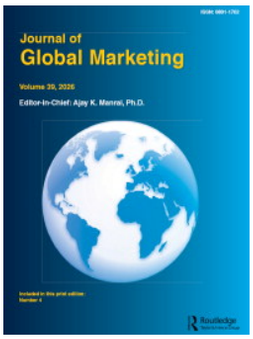
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Are We More Willing to Forgive an Underdog? An Investigation of the Consequences of Second-Hand Product Failures

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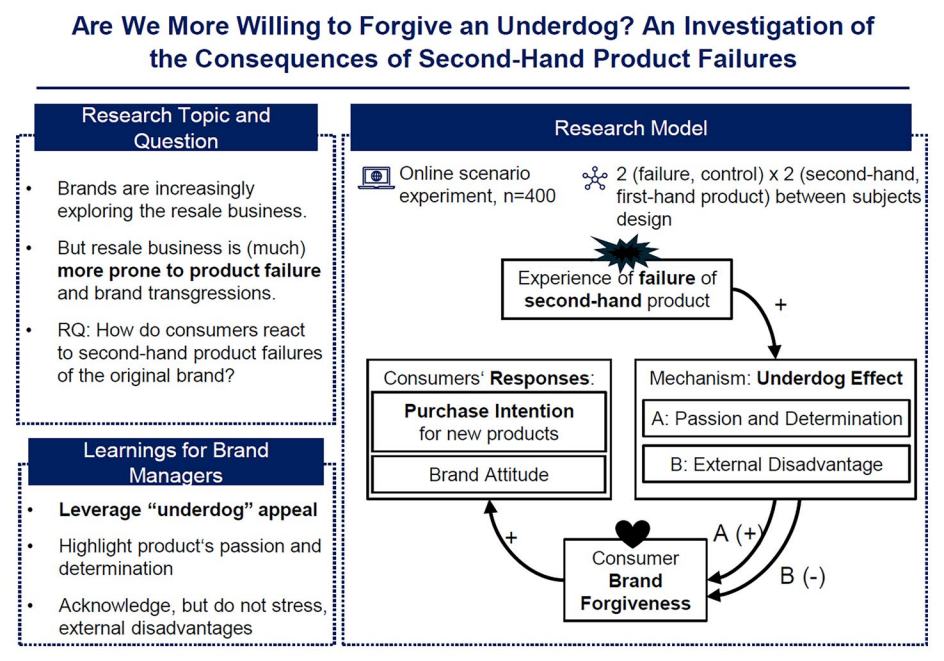
ABSTRACT

As more firms enter the re-commerce market, selling second-hand products poses unique brand risks. This study explores how consumers respond to negative experiences with second-hand products sold by the original brand. Experimental results reveal that consumers are more forgiving of failures in second-hand than new products, leading to less negative word-of-mouth, higher purchase intentions, and more positive brand attitudes. This response is shaped by an ambivalent "underdog" image associated with pre-used products: perceived passion and determination enhances forgiveness, whereas perceived external disadvantage reduces it. The findings offer strategic insights for managing second-hand brand offerings.

KEYWORDS

Second-hand consumption; brand forgiveness; underdog effect; consumer behavior; product failure

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



Introduction

An increasing number of consumers have embraced second-hand consumption, particularly in the fashion sector. It is projected that the global second-hand apparel market will expand at a rate three times faster than the overall clothing market, with an estimated 127% growth from 2021 to 2026 (ThredUp, 2022). Recognizing this shift in consumer behavior, well-known fashion brands like Patagonia and Hugo Boss have established their own second-hand platforms, resulting in a 275% increase in brand-owned second-hand stores from 2020 to 2021 (ThredUp, 2022). Selling second-hand clothes enables brands to reduce

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advertising expenditures, attract new customer groups, and profit from upselling (Miller & Brannon, 2022), thereby alleviating potential cannibalization risks (Abbes et al., 2020).

Extant research has contributed to explaining consumers' motivations for second-hand consumption (positive beliefs about the environmental impact of buying pre-owned products motivate second-hand consumption; Borusiak et al., 2020; and negative emotions such as guilt or shame motivate consumers to make more sustainable choices; Auxtova et al. (2025), but it has widely neglected the business consequences for firms selling their own brands second-hand. Critically, selling products second-hand can be challenging for firms as their pre-used condition makes consumers more likely to experience negative product outcomes (i.e., failures) and, therefore, increases their perceived purchase risk (Bezançon et al., 2019). Such failures can have detrimental effects on the original brand, harming the consumer-brand relationship, purchase intentions, brand image, and word-of-mouth (hereafter WOM) behavior (Aaker et al., 2004; Das et al., 2026; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Smith & Bolton, 1998). However, while prior research has primarily concentrated on the consequences of new product failures (e.g., Dunn & Dahl, 2012), the consequences of second-hand product failures are much less explored. Consumers' evaluations of product failures may differ because of different expectations, and because higher perceived risks and fears are often associated with second-hand consumption (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Bezançon et al., 2019; Gilal et al., 2024).

In this study, we investigate whether consumers tend to be more forgiving toward a brand if a second-hand, as compared to a first-hand (~ new) product fails. We focus on clothing, as it is the most frequently purchased second-hand item among all consumer goods, such as books, electronics, and others (Brandt, 2024). Consumer brand forgiveness plays a substantial role in interpersonal, corporate, and brand relationships (McCullough et al., 1998; Yoruk et al., 2025) and is a key predictor of consumers' behavioral responses to brand and product failures (e.g., Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019). However, research on forgiveness intentions is scarce (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015), and the factors influencing forgiveness intentions remain ambiguous. It bears mentioning that the question of whether forgiveness intentions vary based on product type (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019), such as second-hand or new products, remains unresolved.

In our conceptual model, which is depicted in Figure 1, we argue that consumers' forgiveness intentions are higher when they experience a second-hand product failure than when they experience a failure of a new product. We propose that this tendency arises because consumers are more inclined to perceive a second-hand product as an underdog. The underdog effect refers to consumers exhibiting positive attitudes toward a weaker entity, despite particular disadvantages (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012; Kim et al., 2019). Extant literature demonstrates that these positive emotions can increase consumers' willingness to forgive a failing brand (Hegner et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2021; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018).

To investigate our model, we employed a scenario experiment with $N = 400$ respondents and manipulated both the product type (new vs. second-hand product) and whether the product failed (no product failure vs. product failure). The results largely support our propositions by showing that customers are more likely to forgive the brand after a second-hand (as compared to a

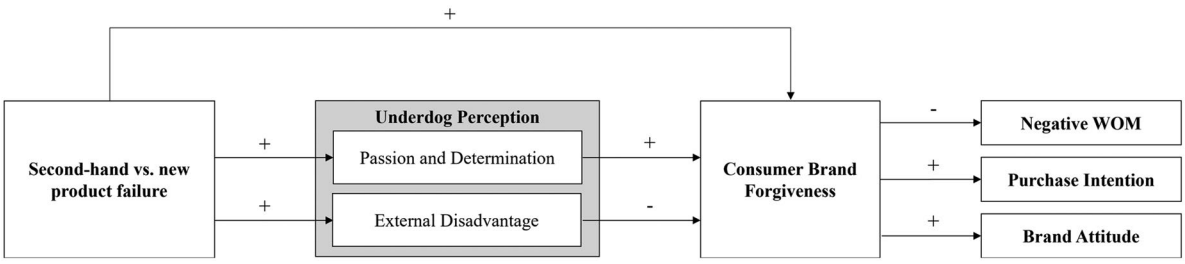


Figure 1. Overview of Proposed Relationships in the Conceptual Model.

new) product failure. This effect is partially rooted in higher perceptions of the second-hand product as an underdog (i.e., attributed passion and determination). As a result, a product failure has a less negative impact on consumers' behavioral intentions (i.e., lower intention to engage in negative WOM, higher intention to purchase a new product), and a positive attitude toward the brand is preserved. Critically, however, we also find that consumers attribute a higher external disadvantage to second-hand products as part of their underdog perception. Rather than reducing the impact of a product failure, this perception actually decreases their willingness to forgive the brand, thereby worsening the negative effect of product failures on the brand relationship.

The findings of this study provide implications for research on consumer behavior and sustainable consumption. We contribute to the literature by demonstrating that consumers are more inclined to forgive failures in second-hand products compared with new products, and by showing that underdog perceptions shape this response through two opposing pathways. The passion and determination dimension increases forgiveness, whereas perceived external disadvantage reduces it. Our results offer managers valuable implications for communication strategies when selling second-hand products.

Conceptual framework

In the following, we first introduce the concept of second-hand consumption. We then develop our conceptual framework (see Figure 1). As depicted in Figure 1, we argue that consumers are more likely to forgive a brand after experiencing a failure with a second-hand product than after experiencing a failure with a new product (~ higher levels of consumer brand forgiveness). Second, we propose that consumers' responses to second-hand product failures are shaped by underdog perceptions of pre-used products. Specifically, we distinguish between two underdog dimensions: perceived passion and determination, which should increase consumer brand forgiveness, and perceived external disadvantage, which should decrease consumer brand forgiveness. Lastly, we argue that consumer brand forgiveness transmits these opposing underdog-based pathways to downstream brand relationship outcomes, as reflected in negative WOM, intention to purchase further products from the brand, and brand attitude.

Second-hand consumption

A few decades ago, second-hand products were frowned upon. However, since the 2000s, a paradigm shift has occurred, as second-hand consumption has gained growing popularity (Ferraro et al., 2016). Second-hand consumption is often discussed within the broader context of collaborative consumption, as it involves purchasing goods that have been previously owned or used by others (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). More specifically, second-hand consumption refers to the purchase of pre-owned goods (Roux & Guiot, 2008), that is, products that have already been owned and used by someone else (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016).

Trading second-hand goods emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century during industrialization (van Damme & Vermoesen, 2009). The advent of mass production ensured that everyday products were offered at lower prices, thus making second-hand products, which were initially bought due to economic reasons, obsolete (Weinstein, 2014). Consequently, purchase channels such as flea markets, garage sales, and thrift and charity stores were increasingly associated with deprivation and poverty (Hamilton, 2009). In recent decades, this point of view has changed gradually. While it was once associated primarily with thriftiness, second-hand consumption is now driven by utilitarian, hedonic, biospheric, and fashion-related motivations (e.g., Roux & Guiot, 2008). Importantly, second-hand purchases can be accompanied by different expectations regarding product condition and uncertainty, which may shape consumers' interpretations of product outcomes and failures.

A central distinction among second-hand business models concerns the actors involved: transactions may occur directly between consumers, be facilitated by a firm that resells products to consumers, or take place between businesses (Yrjölä et al., 2021). Consumer-to-consumer

models are typically organized as digital marketplaces that facilitate exchanges between peers, while platforms earn revenue through fees or commissions (Padmavathy et al., 2019). Business-to-consumer models involve a brand more actively, for example, by acquiring items, inspecting and authenticating them, and reselling them to end consumers. In such reseller or recommerce models, the intermediary exerts greater control over the assortment (Turunen & Gossen, 2024). Marketing research has mainly focused on the consumption of pre-owned products via consumer-to-consumer platforms (Roux & Guiot, 2020) and has so far disregarded a business perspective.

Product failure experiences and consumer brand forgiveness

To understand how consumers respond to failures in second-hand versus new products, we integrate three theoretical perspectives: the confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm, attribution theory, and the underdog effect. Confirmation-disconfirmation theory captures how strongly a failure violates prior expectations, attribution theory captures how responsibility for the failure is assigned, and the underdog effect captures how a positive predisposition toward a product can shape how consumers interpret and respond to the failure.

Product failures trigger negative emotions, such as anger, fear, or sadness, which diminish consumers' willingness to forgive the brand and maintain the relationship (Christodoulides et al., 2021; Joireman et al., 2016). Consumer forgiveness is a cognitive, behavioral, and affective process whereby consumers relinquish retaliatory responses after a brand's trust violation and subsequent efforts to remedy the situation (Xie & Peng, 2009). By practicing forgiveness, consumers aid in rebuilding trust in the failing brand (Xie & Peng, 2009). The extent to which consumers forgive a brand depends on various factors, such as the severity of the failure (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019) or the perceived control of the brand over the failure (Yagil & Luria, 2016). To date, prior research has not examined whether consumers are more inclined to forgive a brand when a second-hand product fails compared to when a new product fails. Building on confirmation-disconfirmation and attribution theory, we first introduce two complementary mechanisms that can explain higher forgiveness for second-hand failures.

Mechanism 1

The confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm explains satisfaction as a comparison between anticipated and actual outcomes (e.g., Oliver, 1980). Consumers form expectations before purchase and compare them with actual experience. Given their pre-used condition, consumers often hold lower performance expectations for second-hand products and anticipate a higher likelihood of defects (Bezançon et al., 2019). In addition, pre-owned goods may evoke contamination concerns or perceptions of unsanitary conditions (Gullstrand Edbring et al., 2016), which can increase perceived risk. Thus, consumers often anticipate greater uncertainty when purchasing second-hand products. Consequently, disconfirmation from product failures is less severe, making consumers more willing to forgive the brand when a second-hand product fails.

Mechanism 2

Attribution theory, as a second mechanism, describes "how people make causal explanations" (Kelley, 1973, p. 107) and determine why an event has occurred (Weiner, 2000). Attribution theory suggests that consumers interpret failures by assessing different dimensions, such as the locus (or origin) of the failure and controllability (e.g., Suri et al., 2019).[1] Locus describes whether the cause of (and responsibility for) the failure is rooted internally (within the individual) or externally (outside the individual). In contrast, controllability addresses the extent to which the outcome was avoidable for the individual (Weiner, 2000).

Forgiveness research shows that consumers tend to be less forgiving when they perceive that the brand had high levels of control over the experience (Suri et al., 2019), but more forgiving toward less controllable failures (Sinha & Lu, 2016; Zourrig et al., 2009). Given that second-hand products have at least one previous owner, consumers may perceive the brand as less responsible

for failures, as it is often unclear how much the brand versus the prior owners contributed to the product's condition. Accordingly, consumers may be less likely to hold the brand responsible for a second-hand product failure.

Together, these mechanisms suggest that consumers may be comparatively more forgiving of the focal brand when experiencing a second-hand product failure, both because they anticipate lower performance (confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm) and because perceived control over the failure may be lower, as compared to a new product failure (attribution theory). We therefore hypothesize:

> *H1: Consumers' willingness to forgive the failing brand will be higher after experiencing a failure of a second-hand product than after experiencing a failure of a new product.*

The underdog effect and consumer brand forgiveness

In addition to expectation and attribution mechanisms, the underdog effect may further increase consumer forgiveness for second-hand products. Unlike confirmation-disconfirmation and attribution processes, which focus on expectation violations and blame assignment, the underdog effect captures a distinct supportive mechanism that can shape responses even when outcomes fall short or responsibility is unclear. Moreover, underdog status is often inferred before an outcome is known, such that consumers may categorize a product as an underdog prior to use, which can subsequently positively influence how later experiences are interpreted.

The term *underdog* emerged in the nineteenth century, originating in the context of dog fights. Later, this term was symbolically extended to a range of social and marketplace contexts referring to those holding a competitive disadvantage (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). Contemporary discourse frequently invokes underdog narratives, for example through individuals challenging powerful institutions (Paharia et al., 2011), or brands positioning themselves against dominant market players (Schlossberg, 2015). Accordingly, underdogs can be understood as individuals or groups with comparatively fewer resources and lower power than others in their environment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

The underdog effect is defined as a phenomenon whereby individuals exhibit positive beliefs and supportive behavior toward weaker entities (Kim et al., 2019), while disregarding potential disadvantages such as a low likelihood of success (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). In contrast, top dogs have a superior position, with greater access to resources and a higher probability of success (Jin & Huang, 2019). In marketing research, underdog brands are often perceived as being highly passionate and determined, while facing external disadvantages due to their restricted access to resources (Kim et al., 2019) and inferior market position (Paharia et al., 2011). Importantly, merely recounting the tale of a brand's challenging beginnings is insufficient to position it effectively as an underdog. To generate the underdog effect, firms must actively demonstrate passion and determination and clearly communicate the external disadvantages associated with their products (Paharia et al., 2011).

In the present paper, we apply this two-dimensional conceptualization as a product-level perception rather than as a claim about a brand's resource constraints. Specifically, we focus on whether a focal second-hand item is perceived as disadvantaged while simultaneously signaling effort, care, and perseverance (i.e., passion and determination). Thus, even when the original brand could be seen as a "top dog", a second-hand product can be construed as underdog-like because it is evaluated relative to its pre-used background and therefore is inherently more uncertain and potentially constrained than a new product.

Applied to products, the two underdog dimensions map onto item-level cues rather than brand-level resources. Drawing on prior work that conceptualizes underdog narratives through passion and determination and external disadvantage (Paharia et al., 2011), second-hand products may signal characteristics of an underdog based on their pre-used, humble nature and associated limitations relative to new goods (Jin & Huang, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). *Passion and determination* can be reflected by the perceived effort, care, and perseverance invested in extending the product's life (e.g., refurbishment, inspection, and

repair), as well as by associations with sustainability (e.g., Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; McGinnis & Gentry, 2009), nostalgia (e.g., Guiot & Roux, 2010), or unique features, which parallel the virtuous intentions associated with supporting underdogs (Kim & Park, 2020). *External disadvantage* can be reflected by product-specific constraints and uncertainty (e.g., prior use, condition variability, and incomplete information about handling) that may make failures feel more plausible. Importantly, in this context *external disadvantage* reflects product-specific constraints and uncertainty (e.g., prior use, item condition variability, and limited information about handling) rather than a brand's lack of resources.

These product-level cues may be reinforced by consumers' self-related beliefs. Consumers frequently perceive themselves as underdogs in their everyday lives (Kim & Park, 2020), enhancing their likelihood of empathizing with underdog products (Li & Zhao, 2018). This self-identification may be linked to a tendency toward anti-consumption motives (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009), which are commonly observed in second-hand purchases (Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020; Guiot & Roux, 2010). Hence, we hypothesize:

H2: Consumers perceive second-hand products as more of an underdog compared to new products, as reflected in (a) higher perceived passion and determination and (b) higher perceived external disadvantage.

Building on H2, we next consider how the two dimensions of underdog perception shape consumer brand forgiveness following a product failure. Although underdog perceptions can generally foster beneficial consumer responses, their two dimensions should have different consequences in the context of failing second-hand products.

Perceptions of passion and determination signal effort and perseverance in the face of adversity. Such cues are typically associated with more supportive responses toward underdogs and should therefore make consumers more willing to forgive the brand (Kim et al., 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). By contrast, perceived external disadvantage should reduce consumer brand forgiveness in a product-failure context. Although disadvantage can evoke sympathy (Quesque et al., 2021), it may also raise doubts about the product's competence and reliability. In a product-failure context, this should make the failure seem less like an isolated incident. Because competence perceptions are central to trust repair, such doubts should reduce consumers' willingness to forgive the brand (Xie & Peng, 2009).

Taken together, second-hand products should lead to an underdog perception with countervailing indirect effects on brand forgiveness: a positive indirect effect via passion and determination, but a negative indirect effect via external disadvantage. Thus, rather than assuming that underdog perceptions are uniformly beneficial, we expect the two dimensions to exert opposing indirect effects on consumer brand forgiveness.

H3a: Among consumers experiencing a product failure, second-hand products, compared with new products, have a positive indirect effect on consumer brand forgiveness through perceived passion and determination.

H3b: Among consumers experiencing a product failure, second-hand products, compared with new products, have a negative indirect effect on consumer brand forgiveness through perceived external disadvantage.

Overall effects on consumer brand relationship outcomes

Product failures can harm consumers' brand attitude, the consumer brand relationship, consumers' purchase intention, and WOM (Aaker et al., 2004; Das et al., 2026; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Smith & Bolton, 1998). Although prior insights focus on new products, a similar pattern should apply to failing second-hand products, particularly since pre-used products are more prone to defects. Therefore, the more consumers forgive a brand after second-hand product failures, the less severe these harmful effects should be. For instance, previous research has shown that customers who are willing to forgive a failing brand are less likely to engage in negative WOM (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019). Hence, we expect that the two countervailing underdog-based pathways identified above carry over to consumer-brand relationship outcomes through consumer brand forgiveness. We hypothesize:

H4: Among consumers experiencing a product failure, experiencing a second-hand rather than a new product failure has opposing indirect effects on (a) negative WOM intentions, (b) intention to purchase a new product, and (c) positive brand attitude through perceived passion and determination versus perceived external disadvantage, followed by consumer brand forgiveness.

Methodology

To investigate our conceptual framework, we used a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design, manipulating the product type (new vs. second-hand) and product experience (product failure vs. no failure). In the scenarios (the vignettes are shown in Appendix A), we introduced participants to wearIMM, a fictional global clothing company that offers new and second-hand fashion products. We used a fictional brand to control for prior brand knowledge, existing brand attitudes, and heterogeneous purchase histories that could confound responses to product failure. Using a standardized, unfamiliar brand allows us to attribute differences in outcomes to the manipulated factors rather than to respondents' preexisting brand familiarity or loyalty. All participants were informed in writing about the confidentiality and anonymity of the study and provided their informed consent.

We chose a fashion product context, as this reflects a typical second-hand consumption context, and consumers purchase pre-owned garments for economic and sustainability reasons, as well as for fashion-related reasons (purchasing unique items) (e.g., Roux & Guiot, 2008). To make the procedure explicit, participants first received a short introduction to the brand wearIMM. Each participant was then randomly assigned to one of four scenarios. In the first part of the scenario, participants were asked to imagine that they had purchased either a new jacket from wearIMM or a pre-owned jacket from wearIMM. Participants then evaluated the focal product, including its perceived passion and determination and external disadvantage. Only afterward did they receive the product-outcome manipulation, which described either no product failure or a product failure. Specifically, participants were informed that they were invited to the movies and took the jacket out of the wardrobe. In the no-failure condition, the jacket was in the same good condition as a few weeks earlier and the participant felt comfortable wearing it. In the failure condition, the jacket was in a much worse condition, and the participant did not feel comfortable wearing it any longer. Thus, the defect became apparent when preparing to wear the jacket rather than "failing" spontaneously while stored. We chose a jacket as the exemplar product because jackets are among the most frequently purchased items of second-hand apparel (Momox, 2022) and are worn by people of any gender.

Data collection

To pretest our manipulations, we recruited students from a major European university and conducted an online experiment in November 2022 using a convenience sample. The pretest sample comprised 187 participants (Mage = 25.04 years old and 67.9% female). Participants did not receive monetary compensation for completing the study.

For the main sample, we then recruited 400 participants residing in the United Kingdom via Prolific in June 2024. As the sole prescreening criterion, participants were required to have a 100% approval rate on the platform. Respondents were compensated at a rate of £9.60 per hour. We randomly allocated the respondents to one of the four experimental conditions (second-hand product without failure, second-hand product with failure, new product without failure, new product with failure), yielding $n = 100$ respondents per cell. Overall, 69.3% of the respondents were female, and the average age was 40.3 years. Additionally, 5.2% of respondents reported being currently unemployed.

Measures

We report all measures in Appendix B. As dependent variables, we assess consumers' negative WOM intentions (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006), purchase intention toward new products of the failing brand (Argo et al., 2006), and brand attitude (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2009). We measure consumers' underdog perceptions using a condensed version of the underdog scale developed by

Paharia et al. (2011), adapted to the focal product context. Prior to data collection, we consulted two academic experts who were not involved in the research process. They reviewed whether the adapted items preserved the conceptual meaning of the original underdog dimensions while fitting the focal product context. An underdog perception typically comprises two distinct dimensions: *external disadvantage* and *passion and determination* (Paharia et al., 2011). We assessed these dimensions before introducing the failure experience because we conceptualize underdog perceptions as a pre-outcome interpretive lens through which subsequent product experiences are evaluated, rather than as a reaction to the failure event itself (Paharia et al., 2011; see also Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). More broadly, this sequencing is consistent with research showing that consumers enter product experiences with preexisting expectations that shape subsequent evaluations (Oliver, 1980). At the same time, we acknowledge that measuring underdog perceptions beforehand may have increased the salience of underdog-related considerations. We therefore report robustness analyses to examine whether the indirect-effects pattern is sensitive to this sequencing decision (see Robustness Checks).

We also measured consumer brand forgiveness on a three-dimensional scale including cognitive (e.g., "I disapprove of this brand"), affective (e.g., "I feel sympathetic toward this brand"), and behavioral (e.g., "I avoid using this brand") elements (see Christodoulides et al., 2021). Finally, as control variables, we included consumers' preference for second-hand clothing (see Cheng et al., 2017), their experience with second-hand clothing (Lo et al., 2019), and product involvement (Brocato et al., 2015), age, and gender. Because second-hand preference and experience were highly correlated (r = .79), we orthogonalized[2] the preference measure with respect to experience by regressing preference on experience and retaining the residualized preference component. Including these individual-level control variables substantially increased the explanatory power of the structural model (see Table 1).

Measurement evaluation and descriptive statistics

Following our pretest, we checked the manipulations in the final research sample. The manipulations worked as intended: Respondents in the failure group reported a significantly worse product experience (M_{Fail} = 2.32 vs. M_{Nofail} = 6.06, t_{398} = 35.239, $p < .01$). Additionally, subjects who were introduced to the second-hand scenario were more likely to perceive the jacket as second-hand (previously owned, not new) than those who were exposed to the new product scenario ($M_{Second\text{-}hand}$ = 6.700 vs. M_{New} = 2.685, t_{398} = −27.225, $p < .01$).

To further assess the scenario and adapted product-level underdog measures, we conducted an additional validation study via Prolific (N = 157 after excluding attention-check failures). General scenario plausibility was significantly above the scale midpoint (M = 5.01, $p < .001$; e.g., "The scenario was easy to imagine."), as was failure plausibility and clarity regarding how the defect is discovered (M = 5.32, $p < .001$; e.g., "It seemed plausible that a problem with the jacket would only become noticeable when taking it out to wear it."). Finally, the second-hand product was rated higher than the new product on global product-level underdog perception ($M_{Second\text{-}hand}$ = 4.80 vs. M_{New} = 4.15; b = .64, p = .001; e.g., "This jacket is viewed as an underdog.").

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics and correlations of our key variables. Our measures largely align with recommended thresholds for reliability, average variance extracted (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We further conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the validity of our measures. The analysis yielded acceptable measurement model fit, $\chi^2(389)$ = 813.97, $p < .001$, CFI = .891, TLI = .874, RMSEA = .074 (90% CI [.067, .081]), and SRMR = .084. Although some bivariate correlations among the brand relationship outcomes are high, variance inflation factor diagnostics indicate no multicollinearity concerns in the multivariate models (all VIFs ≤ 2; mean VIF = 1.24).

To assess the potential impact of common-method variance, we estimated a latent common-method-factor model in which

Table 1. Path Model Estimation Results.

	Model 1: uncontrolled interaction model		Model 2: interaction model (H1, H2)		Model 3: mediation model (H3, H4)	
Estimated paths	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Second-hand Product (Y/N) → Passion and Determination	.582***	.107	.624***	.103	.742***	.151
Product Failure (Y/N) → Passion and Determination	−.025	.107	.027	.107	–	–
Product Involvement → Passion and Determination			.163***	.039	.138***	.054
Second-hand Product Preference → Passion and Determination			.059	.059	−.062	.076
Second-hand Product Experience → Passion and Determination			.009	.028	−.007	.043
Consumer Age → Passion and Determination			.001	.004	−.000	.005
Consumer Gender → Passion and Determination			−.098	.112	−.021	.169
Second-hand Product (Y/N) → External Disadvantage	.852***	.132	.866***	.128	.854***	.184
Product Failure (Y/N) → External Disadvantage	.003	.132	.012	.131	–	–
Product Involvement → External Disadvantage			.008	.049	.015	.068
Second-hand Product Preference → External Disadvantage			.093	.060	.101	.079
Second-hand Product Experience → External Disadvantage			−.130***	.036	−.156***	.051
Consumer Age → External Disadvantage			−.009**	.005	−.009	.007
Consumer Gender → External Disadvantage			−.083	.161	−.030	.254
Second-hand Product (Y/N) → Brand Forgiveness	.107	.106	.065	.103	.770***	.147
Product Failure (Y/N) → Brand Forgiveness	−2.51***	.113	−2.56***	.123	–	–
Second-hand Product x Product Failure → Brand Forgiveness	.729***	.184	.811***	.176	–	–
Passion and Determination → Brand Forgiveness					.345***	.074
External Disadvantage → Brand Forgiveness					−.183***	.064
Product Involvement → Brand Forgiveness			−.011	.032	−.095**	.046
Second-hand Product Preference → Brand Forgiveness			.056	.044	.088	.060
Second-hand Product Experience → Brand Forgiveness			.107***	.025	.098***	.035
Consumer Age → Brand Forgiveness			−.002	.003	−.011*	.005
Consumer Gender → Brand Forgiveness			.219**	.101	.187	.144
Brand Forgiveness → Negative WOM					−.941***	.073
Passion and Determination → Negative WOM					−.049	.091
External Disadvantage → Negative WOM					.106*	.064
Second-hand Product (Y/N) → Negative WOM					−.229	.162
Product Involvement → Negative WOM					−.048	.049
Second-hand Product Preference → Negative WOM					.013	.057
Second-hand Product Experience → Negative WOM					.039	.044
Consumer Age → Negative WOM					.003	.005
Consumer Gender → Negative WOM					.083	.165
Brand Forgiveness → Brand Attitude					.508***	.080
Passion and Determination → Brand Attitude					.171**	.072
External Disadvantage → Brand Attitude					−.016	.066
Second-hand Product Failure → Brand Attitude					.199	.169
Product Involvement → Brand Attitude					.073*	.043
Second-hand Product Preference → Brand Attitude					.062	.061
Second-hand Product Experience → Brand Attitude					.025	.039
Consumer Age → Brand Attitude					.001	.004
Consumer Gender → Brand Attitude					.029	.135
Brand Forgiveness → Purchase Intention					.982***	.079
Passion and Determination → Purchase Intention					.077	.089
External Disadvantage → Purchase Intention					−.009	.084
Second-hand Product Failure → Purchase Intention					.152	.211
Product Involvement → Purchase Intention					−.017	.056
Second-hand Product Preference → Purchase Intention					−.034	.077
Second-hand Product Experience → Purchase Intention					.040	.046
Consumer Age → Purchase Intention					.004	.006
Consumer Gender → Purchase Intention					−.254	.184
Sample Size	400		400		200 (failure only)	
R^2 Passion and Determination	.070		.121		.125	
R^2 External Disadvantage	.094		.146		.163	
R^2 Brand Forgiveness	.593		.630		.343	
R^2 Negative WOM					.578	
R^2 Brand Attitude					.416	
R^2 Purchase Intention					.544	

Notes: We estimated a path model with maximum likelihood estimation in Stata v.19. We report unstandardized coefficients and bootstrapped standard errors (10,000 repetitions). $N = 200$ respondents in product failure condition.
***$p<.01$, **$p<.05$, *$p<.10$.

all measurement items additionally loaded on a common latent factor. The inclusion of the method factor did not improve model fit relative to the baseline measurement model (ΔCFI = .026, with RMSEA and SRMR increasing), and the method factor was not associated with the experimental manipulations (cov. = .036, p = .995). These results suggest that common-method bias is unlikely to account for the observed effects.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Passion and Determination												
2	External Disadvantage	.404*											
3	Consumer Brand Forgiveness	.170*	−.044										
4	Second-hand Product Failure	.263*	.307*	.163*									
5	Product Involvement	.186*	−.067	.072	−.104*								
6	Second-hand Product Preference	.024	−.088	.080	.040	−.205							
7	Second-hand Product Experience	.063	−.191	.148*	.001	.242*	.000						
8	Consumer Age	−.029	−.051	.022	.08	−.259*	−.018	−.084					
9	Consumer Gender	.022	.115*	−.135*	.027	−.14*	−.027	−.302*	.054				
10	Negative WOM	−.104*	.062	−.845*	−.137*	−.05	−.054	−.062	−.04	.03			
11	Purchase Intention	.144*	−.044	.836*	.079	.149*	.063	.089	.027	−.087	−.801*		
12	Brand Attitude	.134	−.064	.793*	.105*	.116*	−.014	.132	.007	−.053	−.726*	.777*	
	Mean	4.088	3.252	4.344	0.500	4.605	4.158	4.149	40.313	0.308	3.014	4.248	4.075
	SD	1.105	1.387	1.445	0.501	1.574	1.145	2.067	13.059	0.462	1.897	1.959	2.059
	AVE	.506	.681	.591	–	.895	.889	.904	–	–	.802	–	.849
	α	.857	.923	.917	–	.971	.959	.965	–	–	.927	–	.956

Notes:
*$p < .05$.

Analysis and results

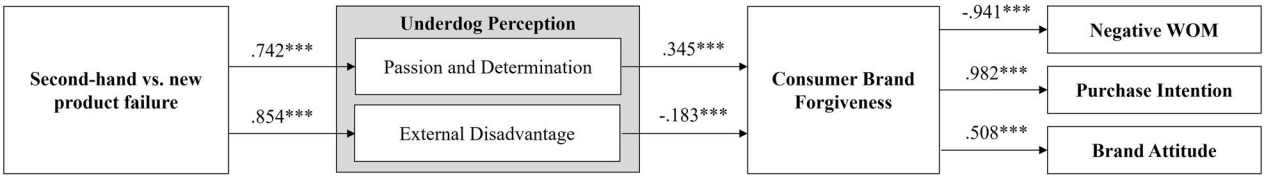
We employed a path model estimated via maximum likelihood with heteroskedasticity-consistent (Huber–White sandwich) standard errors to account for potential variance heterogeneity. All analyses were conducted in Stata 19. Table 1 reports the structural path estimates, whereas Figure 2 reports the specific indirect effects for the mediation model.

To test H1 and H2, we analyze the full sample ($N = 400$) and examine the interaction between product type (second-hand vs. new) and product failure experience (failure vs. no failure) on brand forgiveness (H1), as well as the direct effects of second-hand products on the two underdog dimensions (H2a, H2b). The results of the fully controlled interaction model reported in Table 1, Model 2, show a significant interaction effect of product type and product failure experience on brand forgiveness (b = .811, $p < .01$). As illustrated in Figure 3, when no failure occurs, brand forgiveness does not differ between new and second-hand products (Δ = .065, $p = .529$). In contrast, under product failure, consumers report significantly greater brand forgiveness for second-hand products than for new products (Δ = .876, $p < .001$), in support of H1. This pattern suggests that second-hand products do not benefit from higher baseline levels of brand forgiveness. Rather, the advantage emerges when consumers evaluate a negative product outcome.

Next, we investigated whether consumers evaluate both underdog dimensions higher for second-hand, as compared to new products (H2a, H2b). As shown in Table 1, Model 2, we find a significant positive effect of a second-hand (vs. new) product on the underdog dimension of passion and determination (b = .624, $p < .01$) and a significant positive effect on perceived external disadvantage (b = .866, $p < .01$). A Wald test indicates that the impact on external disadvantage is marginally stronger than the impact on passion and determination (Δb = .242, $p < .10$), which is an intriguing finding we further discuss below. In sum, consumers perceive second-hand products as exhibiting greater passion and determination and higher external disadvantage than new products, supporting H2a and H2b.

To investigate the opposing indirect pathways through which underdog perceptions shape consumer brand forgiveness (H3a, H3b) and downstream brand relationship outcomes (H4a-c) when second-hand, as compared to new, products fail, we focus on the respondents who experienced a

Direct Effects in Mediation Model:



Specific Indirect Effects / Contrasts in Mediation Model:

		Hyp.	b	SE	Lower CI 95%	Upper CI 95%
1.	SH Product Failure → Passion and Determination → Brand Forg.	H3a	.256***	.074	.136	.429
2.	SH Product Failure → External Disadvantage → Brand Forg.	H3b	-.157**	.063	-.305	-.052
3.	___Contrast: 2. vs. 1		-.412***	.118	-.691	-.213
4.	SH Product Failure → Passion and Determination → Brand Forg. → Negative WOM	H4a	-.241***	.073	-.418	-.125
5.	SH Product Failure → External Disadvantage → Brand Forg. → Negative WOM	H4a	.147**	.062	.050	.297
6.	___Contrast: 5. vs. 4		.388***	.117	.197	.677
7.	SH Product Failure → Passion and Determination → Brand Forg. → Purchase Intention	H4b	.251***	.076	.131	.438
8.	SH Product Failure → External Disadvantage → Brand Forg. → Purchase Intention	H4b	-.154**	.064	-.312	-.052
9.	___Contrast: 8. vs. 7		-.405***	.123	-.702	-.205
10.	SH Product Failure → Passion and Determination → Brand Forg. → Brand Attitude	H4c	.129***	.044	.064	.240
11.	SH Product Failure → External Disadvantage → Brand Forg. → Brand Attitude	H4c	-.079**	.034	-.168	-.028
12.	___Contrast: 11. vs. 10		-.209**	.069	-.383	-.105

Notes: We estimated a path model with maximum likelihood estimation in Stata v.19. We report unstandardized coefficients and bias-corrected bootstrapped standard errors (10,000 repetitions). Contrasts reflect the external disadvantage pathway minus the passion and determination pathway. N=200 respondents in product failure condition.*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

Figure 2. Results of the Mediation Model (Failure-only Sample).

failure (second-hand or new product; $n = 200$) (see Table 1, Model 3 for the results). To estimate indirect effects, we used bootstrapping with 10,000 repetitions.

The results show that perceived passion and determination increase brand forgiveness (b = .345, $p < .01$), whereas perceived external disadvantage decreases brand forgiveness (b = −0.183, $p < .01$). These paths are shown in Table 1, Model 3 and visualized in Figure 2. Consistent with this pattern, a second-hand product failure, compared with a new product failure, has a positive indirect effect on brand forgiveness via perceived passion and determination (b = .256, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.136, .429]) and a negative indirect effect via external disadvantage (b = −0.157, $p < .05$, 95% CI [−0.305, −0.052]). These specific indirect effects are reported in Figure 2 and support H3a and H3b.

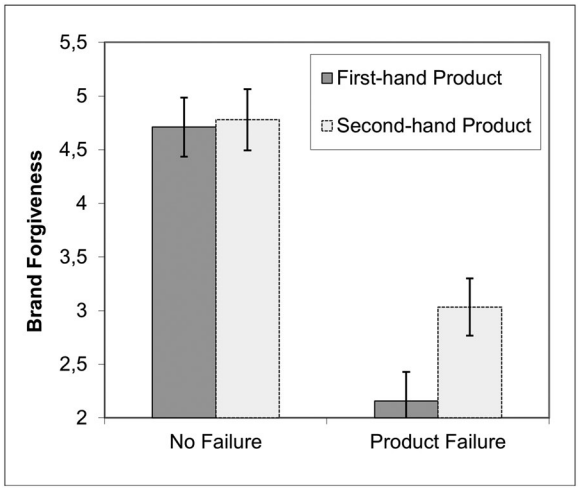


Figure 3. Interaction Plot for the Impact of Second-hand vs. First-hand Product Failure.

In addition, the contrast between these two specific indirect effects is significant (external disadvantage path minus passion and determination path: b = −0.412, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-0.691, −0.213]), indicating that the two pathways differ reliably in direction and magnitude. However, the overall net indirect effect on brand forgiveness points in a positive direction but is not statistically significant (b = .099, $p > .10$, 95% CI [−0.025, .240]). Thus, the findings suggest that underdog perceptions do not operate as a uniformly positive mediation process. Rather, they point to two opposing mechanisms: the passion and determination dimension enhances forgiveness, whereas external disadvantage reduces forgiveness.

A similar pattern extends to the downstream brand relationship outcomes predicted in H4. As reported in Table 1, Model 3, consumer brand forgiveness is significantly associated with all three downstream outcomes. As expected, we

find that consumer brand forgiveness decreases negative WOM intentions (b = −0.941, $p < .01$), increases the intention to purchase a new product from the same brand (b = .982, $p < .01$), and benefits consumers' brand attitude (b = .508, $p < .01$). In addition, we find significant indirect effects of second-hand, compared with new, product failure on all three brand relationship outcomes via the two underdog dimensions and consumer brand forgiveness. These downstream indirect effects are reported in Figure 2. Specifically, the indirect effects via passion and determination are negative for negative WOM (b = −0.241, $p < .01$, 95% CI [−0.418, −0.125]) and positive for intention to purchase a new product (b = .251, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.131, .438]) and brand attitude (b = .129, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.064, .240]), whereas the indirect effects via external disadvantage run in the opposite direction (negative WOM: b = .147, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.050, .297]; intention to purchase a new product: b = −0.154, $p < .05$, 95% CI [−0.312, −0.052]; brand attitude: b = −0.079, $p < .05$, 95% CI [−0.168, −0.028]). Thus, the downstream consequences of second-hand product failure are likewise characterized by two opposing indirect pathways. These findings support H4 by showing that the two underdog dimensions transmit opposing effects to brand relationship outcomes through consumer brand forgiveness. The contrast tests reported in Figure 2 further show that the two indirect pathways differ significantly across all downstream outcomes.

Taken together, these findings reveal an ambivalent pattern. The results for H2a and H2b show that second-hand products increase both underdog dimensions, with perceived external disadvantage increasing somewhat more strongly than passion and determination. This pattern is also reflected in the failure-only sample reported in Table 1, Model 3 and Figure 2 (passion and determination: b = .742; external disadvantage: b = .854). However, the results for H3a, H3b, and H4 show that these two dimensions have opposing downstream consequences. The passion and determination dimension fosters forgiveness and, through forgiveness, more favorable brand relationship outcomes, whereas external disadvantage undermines forgiveness and transmits less favorable downstream responses. The non-significant net indirect effect on brand forgiveness suggests that these opposing mechanisms partly offset each other. Thus, the underdog perception of second-hand products is not uniformly beneficial; it functions as a double-edged mechanism.

Robustness checks

To address concerns regarding construct sequencing, we conducted two additional robustness analyses. First, because underdog perceptions were measured before the failure manipulation, they should not differ across the subsequently assigned failure versus no-failure conditions if they were not contaminated by the later product experience description. This was the case for both dimensions (external disadvantage: $\Delta = .00$, $p = .981$; passion and determination: $\Delta = -0.02$, $p = .881$). Second, we re-estimated the mediation model after excluding the two passion and determination items of the scale that appeared conceptually closest to the failure manipulation (items 3 and 5, see Appendix B). The substantive patterns remained unchanged. For instance, the indirect effect of a second-hand (vs. new) product via external disadvantage on brand forgiveness remained negative and significant (b = −0.183, $p < .01$, 95% CI [−0.317, −0.049]), whereas the indirect effect via passion and determination remained positive and significant (b = .314, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.152, .477]). The downstream indirect effects also remained significant and directionally unchanged. Thus, our results are not unduly affected by the construct sequencing in our survey.

As an additional robustness check, we examined interactions between the experimental conditions (product type and product failure) and individual-level characteristics, including age, gender, experience with second-hand products, second-hand preference, and product involvement. Indeed, we found some significant interaction effects, such that, for instance, respondents with lower experience with second-hand clothing reported higher levels of brand forgiveness when confronted with a second-hand rather than a new product scenario (interaction effect: b = .803, $p < .01$; $b_{-1SD} = -0.15$, $p > .10$; $b_{+1SD} = .29$, $p < .05$).

However, including these additional control interaction terms did not affect the direction, magnitude, or significance of our effects of interest, indicating that our core findings are robust across heterogeneous consumer profiles.

Discussion

The popularity of second-hand purchases is on the rise, but extant research has focused mainly on consumers' motivations for buying pre-owned products. A business perspective, such as investigating the consequences of brands selling their own branded second-hand products, has largely been overlooked. Addressing recent calls to investigate potential limitations of selling pre-used products (Guiot & Roux, 2010), our study explores consumer responses to (especially their willingness to forgive) second-hand product failures.

Implications for research

Our study provides several implications for research. To date, no research has combined the topics of consumer brand forgiveness and underdog perceptions with product-related cues (i.e., second-hand vs. new). First, our study shows that consumers are more forgiving when they experience a second-hand product failure and, consequently, less likely to engage in negative WOM and more likely to show higher purchase intentions or brand attitudes. Put differently, second-hand products systematically change failure evaluations in a way that can be beneficial for the original brand. Specifically, second-hand product failures activate two opposing underdog-based pathways that shape forgiveness and downstream relationship outcomes. Perceived passion and determination increase consumer brand forgiveness, whereas perceived external disadvantage decreases it. Thus, underdog perceptions do not operate as a uniformly beneficial mechanism; rather, they reveal an ambivalent interpretive lens through which consumers evaluate second-hand product failures. Therefore, we add to the consumer behavior literature by showing that consumers respond differently to experiencing a second-hand versus new product failure. This advances brand forgiveness research by showing that second-hand products shift consumers' failure interpretations and forgiveness intentions, while also revealing that the underlying underdog-based process is ambivalent rather than uniformly favorable.

Second, we extend the literature on sustainable consumption (e.g., Tezer & Bodur, 2020) by explaining why consumers may continue to support second-hand offerings even when failures occur. Prior research on second-hand consumption has focused extensively on purchase motivations, whereas downstream consequences for brands selling their own second-hand offerings remain less understood. Specifically, we identify underdog perceptions as an ambivalent interpretive lens through which consumers evaluate second-hand offerings when failures occur. This lens can sustain consumer support through perceived passion and determination, but it can also undermine support when external disadvantage is interpreted as a signal of lower reliability. While underdog perceptions have been studied in storytelling and brands (Delgado-Ballester, 2021), a connection to pre-used products in the consumer behavior literature remains scarce. Because supporting underdogs and purchasing second-hand products can be driven by related motives (e.g., McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; Paharia et al., 2011; Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2022), we show that consumers are likely to perceive second-hand products as underdog-like. Our results indicate that consumers perceive both underdog dimensions - passion and determination and external disadvantage - significantly higher for second-hand as compared to new products.

Third, we also show that the underdog perception is not uniformly beneficial for consumers' responses to product failures but rather shows ambivalent effects. While the literature has identified two dimensions of the underdog effect, the fact that these can be perceived differently and may also have different effects on consumer brand forgiveness has received limited attention. Specifically, we found that consumers' perceptions of a product's passion and determination increase their willingness to forgive a product failure, whereas perceptions of external disadvantage hamper consumers' forgiveness intentions. Identification theory (e.g., Kim et al., 2019) offers one possible explanation for why consumers respond more

supportively to passion and determination than to external disadvantage. According to this theory, customers develop a positive attitude toward products or brands they can identify with (Einwiller et al., 2006). In the context of underdog perceptions, passion and determination are likely to facilitate identification because they represent qualities that consumers admire and may aspire to embody. Given that consumers may see themselves as underdogs in their everyday lives (Kim & Park, 2020), passion and determination can create perceived similarity, which should foster supportive reactions and, consequently, greater forgiveness following a failure (Einwiller et al., 2006; Li & Zhao, 2018). By contrast, external disadvantage may evoke a different identification response. While disadvantage signals hardship, it may be less attractive as an identity basis because it highlights constraints, vulnerability, or lower status. As a result, consumers may be less willing to identify with unfavorable entities (Schimel et al., 2000), which can reduce supportive reactions and, in our setting, hamper forgiveness intentions. This interpretation also clarifies why the two dimensions can exert opposite effects: passion and determination invite self-enhancing identification, whereas external disadvantage can undermine identification by making the underdog position feel less desirable to align with. Conceptually, this highlights that underdog perceptions are multifaceted and can produce opposing downstream effects in failure contexts.

Implications for marketers

When selling pre-used and pre-owned products, product failures are more difficult to avoid and may occur more frequently than with new products. Our results nevertheless indicate that customers are, on balance, more willing to forgive second-hand than new product failures by the original brand. For managers, this means that second-hand products can trigger both protective and risky interpretations. Passion and determination can buffer negative responses to failure, whereas external disadvantage can amplify quality concerns and reduce forgiveness.

In practice, the importance of second-hand research for companies' global marketing and brand strategy becomes clear. The global market size for second-hand clothing is projected to grow at a rate of 12.42% from 2026 to 2035 (360 Research Reports, 2026). Against this backdrop, our findings offer an incremental contribution to global marketing and second-hand brand strategy by explaining how global brands can scale brand-owned resale programs while safeguarding the original brand. To differentiate themselves from their competitors, companies must adapt their brand strategy and communication across markets. In this context, the cultural and global perspective should not be overlooked (Gilal et al., 2024). Our results show that second-hand offerings can evoke underdog perceptions that shape how consumers interpret product failures. Specifically, communication can make passion and determination more salient while preventing external disadvantage from being interpreted as a quality risk cue. Underlying perceptions influence whether product failures are interpreted through a supportive perspective of effort and care or through a risk-oriented perspective of disadvantage and lower reliability. These results inform how brands can develop second-hand brand strategies that support the international expansion of resale offerings without undermining the original brand.

One further practical implication is to make effort, care, and determination more salient, while ensuring that disadvantage is not read as a sign of inferior quality. Although our results clearly indicate that consumers' perception of an external disadvantage lowers brand forgiveness, we must caution against concealing this characteristic of a second-hand offering. This is because external disadvantage and passion and determination jointly constitute the underdog perceptions (Paharia et al., 2011). Instead, we suggest acknowledging the external disadvantage transparently, but paired with signals that reduce uncertainty and reinforce competence.

Marketers should make visible the effort and care invested in second-hand offerings. Pre-purchase communication, for example, could emphasize the brand's efforts to extend product lifetimes through measures such as refurbishment, authentication processes, quality checks, or a transparent condition-grading system. Such cues are likely to strengthen perceptions of passion and determination and, at the same time,

reduce the likelihood that the disadvantaged nature of pre-owned products is interpreted as inferior quality. Concrete operationalizations include, for example, a "certified pre-owned" label tied to explicit inspection criteria, item-specific condition reports (e.g., grading with checklists or photos), and statements that communicate effort (e.g., "professionally inspected"). Post-purchase communication is equally important. Repair options, recovery policies, or return procedures (e.g., prepaid returns) may help ensure that product imperfections are seen as manageable rather than as evidence of systematically lower quality. More generally, firms should not frame second-hand offerings in terms of limitations or inferiority. Instead, they should present them as carefully assessed and maintained products with an extended life, supported by clear signals of competence and care. This could be achieved by emphasizing the positive aspects of such a purchase. For example, the buyer could be presented with a card congratulating them on their purchase, which would highlight the advantages of the purchase (e.g., supporting circular use and reducing waste).

Overall, our findings suggest that brand-owned second-hand business models need not automatically undermine the original brand when failures occur. Instead, their success depends on how firms manage the ambivalent meaning of second-hand products, particularly when the risk of product failure is higher than for new products. What matters is not simply whether the product is second-hand, but whether firms can pair its disadvantaged, pre-used nature with credible cues of care, competence, and determination.

Limitations and future research

Our study has several limitations that open fruitful avenues for future research. First, our scenario experiment examines one specific type of product failure in comparison between second-hand and new products. Yet consumers' responses are likely to vary with the severity, type, and frequency of the failure. Future research should therefore investigate whether the forgiveness advantage observed for second-hand products generalizes across different failure conditions. In particular, failure severity may represent an important boundary condition: while consumers may be relatively forgiving of minor defects in second-hand products, this advantage may weaken or disappear when failures substantially impair product performance or usability.

Second, we did not examine the role of price differences between second-hand and new products. This omission was intentional, as second-hand products are often sold at individually varying prices. However, the perceived price advantage of a second-hand product may shape how consumers interpret subsequent failures. A larger price discount may increase tolerance because consumers perceive the purchase as involving a favorable tradeoff, whereas a smaller discount may reduce such tolerance. Future research should therefore examine whether and how price advantage moderates consumers' forgiveness and downstream behavioral responses following second-hand product failures.

Third, our use of a fictional brand and a scenario-based design entails a tradeoff between internal and external validity. Although the fictional brand helps isolate the focal effects by minimizing confounds from prior brand familiarity, loyalty, and reputational beliefs, it also limits realism, because real brands carry established associations that may shape both failure interpretations and forgiveness. In addition, scenario-based responses rely on respondents' imagination rather than on actual marketplace experiences. Future research could strengthen external validity by replicating our findings with real brands, field settings, or more immersive stimuli.

Fourth, although we find significant opposing indirect effects through the two underdog dimensions, the overall net indirect effect on brand forgiveness was not statistically significant. This suggests that underdog perceptions alone do not fully explain why consumers are more forgiving of second-hand than new product failures. Future research should therefore examine additional mechanisms, such as expectation disconfirmation, perceived responsibility, perceived controllability, or price-related tolerance, to explain the remaining forgiveness advantage of second-hand product failures.

Finally, several boundary conditions deserve systematic attention. The underdog label for second-hand products may not come intuitively in brand-owned recommerce settings. However, our empirical contribution is anchored in the two-dimensional perception pattern (*passion and determination* and *external disadvantage*) and its countervailing effects on consumer brand forgiveness; future research could investigate alternative narratives such as "product comeback" or "product-redemption". Additionally, product category is likely to matter because acceptable condition standards and perceived uncertainty differ across categories (Li & Zhao, 2018). For instance, consumers may react differently to second-hand failures in apparel than in electronics, and the effect may also vary between luxury, functional, and hedonic products. Brand strength may represent another important boundary condition. Strong brands may benefit from higher levels of trust and reputational buffering (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005), whereas weaker brands may be more vulnerable to having external disadvantage cues interpreted as signals of poor quality or unreliability. Even a well-established "top dog" brand may offer a product that is perceived as an underdog because the product itself is evaluated as comparatively disadvantaged, constrained, or in need of support. However, it remains unclear whether this product-level perception can emerge equally for new and second-hand products, or whether the strong reputation and resources of a dominant brand suppress underdog perceptions of its individual offerings. Future research should therefore manipulate brand status and product type jointly to examine whether consumers can simultaneously perceive a brand as a top dog and one of its products as an underdog. Finally, cultural context is likely to shape the generalizability of our findings. Norms surrounding second-hand consumption, sustainability, and acceptable product imperfection may vary across markets (e.g., Gilal et al., 2024) and can influence both consumers' willingness to purchase second-hand products and their reactions to second-hand product failures. Examining these contingencies would help clarify when the forgiveness advantage of second-hand offerings is most likely to emerge, persist, or reverse.

Notes

1. Notably, there is only scarce research on the relationship between the third attribution dimension, stability, and the willingness to forgive a failing brand. The few studies that exist have shown a negative relation between the stability of a failure (e.g., the probability that it may re-occur) and the consumers' forgiveness intentions (Zourrig et al., 2009).
2. This residualized measure captures the variance in second-hand preference that extends beyond prior experience and was included alongside experience as a control in all main models, following established procedures in prior marketing research (e.g., Friess et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2015).

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The authors used generative AI (Open AI's ChatGPT Version 5.5) for language improvement. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical declarations

The authors confirm that the research complies with ethical guidelines and meets the legal requirements of the study country. The data was collected from human participants recruited through a large university and the Prolific platform. All participants were informed in writing about the confidentiality and anonymity of the study and provided their informed consent. Given the non-sensitive nature of the data, ethical approval was not required at the time of collection, in accordance with the research institution's guidelines and legal regulations. The data collection process followed the principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Sandra Baringhorst**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Maximilian Friess**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Manfred Schwaiger**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

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Data availability statement

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

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