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National Secondhand Sunday, introduced as a U.S. holiday in 2022, marks an effort to shift gifting traditions. Observed on the Sunday following Thanksgiving, this initiative intends to encourage consumers to embrace sustainable gifting practices by promoting the exchange of secondhand gifts. This shift is championed by both marketers and policymakers as a societally beneficial and environmentally responsible alternative to traditional gifting, particularly given the significant waste and overconsumption associated with new product purchases during the holiday season (CNN 2022; New York Post 2024). On the one hand, this shift would seem easy to accomplish. After all, consumer access to purchasing secondhand products has risen dramatically: since 2015, the e-commerce landscape has been transformed by the rapid growth of the secondhand marketplace, as demonstrated by the rise of resale platforms (e.g., Poshmark, The RealReal, ThredUp) and major brands and retailers (e.g., Amazon, IKEA, Lululemon, Nike, Patagonia) venturing into the resale space (Forbes 2025; Wall Street Journal 2025; ThredUp 2025), making secondhand options for gifts more widely available. Moreover, not only are such options more sustainable than purchasing new products, but they are also typically more affordable than new versions of the same products. Yet despite the environmental and financial advantages of secondhand gifts, are consumers willing to purchase and give secondhand products as gifts as much as receivers may want to receive them? If not, why and when does this relative aversion arise, and what might reduce the aversion to secondhand gifting?

Our research finds that consumers are averse to purchasing secondhand products to give as gifts, relative to both the extent to which receivers desire such products as gifts and the extent to which consumers are willing to purchase such products for themselves. We show this effect generalizes across a wide range of real-world brands, product categories, pricing, gifting contexts, grades of the product's physical condition, and choice trade-offs. To explain why this

effect arises, we distinguish between two overarching sets of potential concerns that givers may have about secondhand (vs. new) gifts: that they may convey weaker symbolic signals about the giver (i.e., "symbolic-signaling concerns") or that they may be weaker on product-focused aspects (i.e., "product-focused concerns"). We find that while secondhand gifting aversion is multiply determined by both perceived symbolic-signaling concerns and product-focused concerns, which operate directly and indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms, symbolic-signaling concerns play a primary role. Notably, we identify two process-consistent moderators, wherein secondhand gifting aversion was magnified when gifting to close (vs. distant) friends (i.e., when symbolic signaling about the giver's relationship valuation is presumably more important) and mitigated when gifting secondhand products reframed as having enhanced symbolic value (e.g., vintage). Moreover, we find that the aversion persists for the theoretically diagnostic context of a highly durable product that does not lose its attractiveness if blemished, indicating that this aversion can be driven solely by symbolic-signaling concerns in the absence of product-focused concerns about performance or appearance.

The current research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. First, our work contributes to the growing literature on secondhand consumption, which has predominantly focused on factors influencing purchases of secondhand products for personal use (e.g., Fuchs and Schreier 2023; Guiot and Roux 2010; Huang, Ackerman, and Sedlovskaya 2017; Huang and Fishbach 2021; Ross, Bolton, and Meloy 2023; Turunen et al. 2020) with limited consideration of the influence of interpersonal dynamics on secondhand purchases (for exceptions focusing on stylized trade-offs with product size or receiver-taste-matching, see Teigen, Olsen, and Solås 2005 and Qiu and Lu 2025, respectively). We add to this literature by being the first to offer an in-depth investigation of secondhand gifting behavior, extending beyond Teigen et al. (2005) and

Qiu and Lu (2025) by examining real-world gift decisions where consumers evaluate secondhand products with naturalistic trade-offs (e.g., against identical new alternatives) or secondhand gifts that receivers have explicitly requested (e.g., on an actual gift registry platform), while also identifying key marketplace conditions under which the aversion persists, as well as theoretically and practically meaningful conditions under which the aversion is attenuated. Second, and moreover, whereas prior research suggests that this aversion may be associated with a gifting norm favoring newness (Qiu and Lu 2025; Teigen et al. 2005), we deepen and enrich the theoretical understanding of secondhand gifts by distinguishing between symbolic-signaling concerns versus product-focused concerns as a primary driver of secondary gifting aversion. Notably, our findings indicate that concerns about adhering to gifting norms may themselves be grounded in, and partly reflect downstream manifestations of, these symbolic-signaling concerns about what gifts convey about the giver, more so than product-focused concerns. Finally, this work provides managerial insights for marketers by identifying a process-consistent, actionable moderator (i.e., symbolic framing, using the "vintage" label) that mitigates secondhand gifting aversion, and practical insights for consumers by alerting them that, as givers, their aversion to secondhand gifts (e.g., even against more expensive but otherwise identical brand-new counterparts, or even when explicitly requested by receivers) may be misplaced.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Purchasing Secondhand Products

In the marketplace, "secondhand" refers to a product that is denoted in some way by the seller to the potential purchaser as not brand new. It is common marketplace practice for sellers to denote the not-new status of secondhand products using varied grading label descriptors

corresponding to their physical condition, ranging from possibly never-used items that are nonetheless denoted as not new (e.g., an open-box return) but whose physical condition is otherwise close to and possibly even indistinguishable from new (e.g., Best Buy's "open box" or Amazon's "used – like new") to those that have visible and more considerable marks of use (e.g., Amazon's "used – good" or eBay's "acceptable"). Notably, secondhand products are typically priced lower than new versions of the same product (Guiot and Roux 2010), with few exceptions (e.g., rare antiques).

Existing literature shows that consumers' purchases of secondhand products for *themselves* can be influenced by various factors. Economic motivations, such as seeking value for a lower price (Guiot and Roux 2010) and bargaining (Padmavathy, Swapana, and Paul 2019), are particularly salient for budget-conscious consumers. The purchase of secondhand products is also influenced by prior aesthetic customization (Fuchs and Schreier 2023), disorderliness of product displays (Ross et al. 2023), hygiene concerns (Huang et al. 2017), environmental concerns (Turunen et al. 2020), and a desire for symbolic connection with previous owners (Christensen and Shu 2024; Huang and Fishbach 2021). However, it remains an open question as to what influences consumers' willingness to purchase secondhand products as gifts for *others*.

To date, only two empirical investigations that we are aware of have explored consumer willingness to purchase secondhand gifts, but both have done so in the context of stylized trade-off scenarios in which a secondhand product is explicitly traded off against a different inferior new product. The first empirical investigation, Teigen et al. (2005), examined a trade-off involving a used product as one relatively small part of a broader investigation documenting various giver-receiver asymmetries in gift preferences. Specifically, in each of Teigen et al. (2005)'s studies, undergraduate lab participants read multiple hypothetical scenarios in which

they imagined either being a gift giver or a gift receiver. Each scenario featured a different type of trade-off between two gift options (e.g., gift voucher vs. cash; one expensive bottle of wine vs. two cheaper bottles of wine) and participants indicated which option they preferred. Most relevant to the current research, one of the five scenarios in Teigen et al. (2005)'s study 1 (and replicated in their study 3) included a trade-off between a smaller new dictionary and a larger used dictionary, with price held constant. The results revealed that givers preferred the larger used dictionary less than receivers did. Teigen et al. (2005) proposed, but did not empirically examine, gifting norms as one potential underlying driver of the observed effect. More recently, a second empirical investigation also followed this approach of examining stylized trade-offs in a series of scenario-based studies, focusing on the trade-off between a used gift that better matches the receiver's tastes (e.g., a partially consumed box of black tea) versus a new gift that matches the receiver's tastes less (e.g., a new box of green tea) with price held constant (Qiu and Lu 2025). Like Teigen et al. (2005), Qiu and Lu (2025) adopted a norm-based explanation of the effect. Specifically, in one scenario study, they assessed a relative focus on "newness" versus "taste-matching" as the mediating mechanism and argued that this finding supports the existence of a "brand-newness norm" to account for why givers prefer to give new gifts, leaving it for future research to delve more deeply beyond this norm-based account.

While Teigen et al. (2005) and Qiu and Lu (2025) offer initial evidence suggestive of givers' aversion to giving secondhand gifts, further investigation is warranted. First, these prior investigations examined embedded, stylized trade-offs with gift size (small vs. large dictionary; Teigen et al. 2005) or receiver-taste-matching (black vs. green tea; Qiu and Liu 2025), leaving open the possibility that the observed phenomenon is specific to explicit stylized trade-offs, in which the gifts represent different products (rather than secondhand vs. new versions of the same

product, offered at different prices, as is commonly encountered in the real-world marketplace and as is a focus of the present research). Second, it remains an open question as to the underlying primary reasons *why* givers may be more averse to giving secondhand gifts than receivers are open to them. While prior research suggests this aversion may be associated with gifting norms favoring newness (Qiu and Lu 2025; Teigen et al. 2005), we argue that such an explanation belies a deeper and richer understanding of the source of secondhand gifting aversion. Givers might indeed believe that a secondhand gift adheres less to gifting norms than a new gift, but is this primarily because of product-focused concerns associated with the secondhand product itself (e.g., its performance or appearance) or concerns that the secondhand gift conveys weaker positive symbolic signals about the giver (e.g., the giver's relationship valuation, the giver's personal characteristics)? We differentiate between these two sets of considerations—product-focused concerns and symbolic-signaling concerns—and examine how these considerations may drive secondhand gifting aversion, both directly and indirectly via perceived adherence of secondhand (vs. new) products to gifting norms. Finally, despite the growing financial and environmental significance of the secondhand marketplace, little is known about whether consumer aversion to secondhand gifts manifests in realistic contexts in the marketplace as well as why and under what marketplace conditions it occurs or diminishes.

Drivers of the Aversion to Secondhand Gifting: A Symbolic-Signaling Account

Understanding the key proximal process(es) that underlie the previously suggested more distal norm favoring new gifts and the aversion to secondhand gifting is imperative for a deeper and richer understanding of secondhand gifting behavior. We propose a delineation between two broad sets of such proximal drivers (evaluation of symbolic-signaling aspects and evaluation of product-focused aspects), and develop our theorizing for the roles each broad set of drivers may

play in a multiply-determined process, including why evaluations of symbolic-signaling aspects may be the stronger of the proximal drivers. In other words, while likely multiply determined as many important consumer phenomena are (Pham 2013), we examine whether the aversion to secondhand gifting is grounded more in concerns about what secondhand gifts communicate about the giver than in concerns about the actual secondhand product itself. See figure 1, following References.

Product-Focused Aspects of Secondhand (vs. New) Gift. One of the proximal drivers of norms and aversion to secondhand gifting may be concerns related to the product itself. For instance, consumers often have concerns about a secondhand product's performance or appearance (Fuchs and Schreier 2023; Huang et al. 2017; Ross et al. 2023). Indeed, research on secondhand products outside of the gifting context finds that consumers' perceived risks of hidden defects or aesthetic wear-and-tear often outweigh the item's lower price (Abbey et al. 2015; Guiot and Roux 2010). One possibility is thus that if givers perceive product-focused aspects (e.g., performance or appearance) to be worse for the secondhand version compared to the new version of the same product, relative to receivers' perceptions, then this differential perception might drive secondhand gifting aversion. Indeed, to the extent that performance or appearance concerns might map onto a product's "desirability" (defined as "…the quality of the item's end-state…such as the quality…or the uses…"; Baskin et al. 2014, p. 170), such an account would be consistent with prior work demonstrating that givers place greater weight on desirability than receivers when choosing between gifts that trade-off on desirability versus feasibility[1] (Baskin et al. 2014). Furthermore, to the extent that a better product appearance may

[1] Feasibility is defined as the ease or convenience of using a product (e.g., a pen that is heavier is considered less feasible, a restaurant that is farther for the consumer to travel to is considered less feasible; Baskin et al. 2014);

be believed to generate more positive affective reactions, this explanation would also be consistent with prior work wherein givers prioritize gifts that promote positive affective receiver reactions at the moment of exchange (Yang and Urminsky 2018). Altogether, givers may perceive product-focused aspects (e.g., performance or appearance) to be relatively worse for a secondhand version of a product than the new version, relative to receivers' perceptions, which may contribute to the aversion to secondhand gifting directly and indirectly via gifting norms.

Symbolic-Signaling Aspects of Secondhand (vs. New) Gift. Yet, as a meaning-laden social exchange, gift giving extends beyond the mere transfer of material utility between two parties. Giving a gift also functions as a mechanism of symbolic signaling (Belk 1996; Belk and Coon 1993; Giesler 2006; Schwartz 1967; Sherry 1983), through which givers aim to signal positive characteristics about themselves (Flynn and Adams 2009; Kupor, Flynn, and Norton 2017) and the value they place on their relationship with the receiver (Baskin et al. 2014; Haltman et al. 2025; Liu, Dallas, and Fitzsimons 2019; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016). Notably, findings across literatures on social exchange, including on giver-receiver asymmetries in gift giving, converge on the notion that givers are more sensitive to the symbolic-signaling characteristics of what is being provided in the exchange than are receivers. For instance, research on choices for others (e.g., bringing food for a sick friend, bringing cookies as a snack for a friend) indicates that givers care about symbolically self-signaling that they are caring by exerting greater effort (Garcia-Rada et al. 2022) or choosing larger portion sizes (Liu, Kwon, and Ziano 2026), even if the product does not necessarily taste better to the receiver (e.g., making homemade over restaurant-bought soup; Garcia-Rada et al. 2022) or even if the larger portion sizes are not

given that we focus primarily on secondhand versus new versions of the same product, feasibility is unlikely to vary (i.e., the present research is not focused on desirability vs. feasibility trade-offs).

actually desired by the receiver (Liu et al. 2026). Within the gift-giving context in particular, research has shown that characteristics of a given gift can serve as symbolic signals about the giver that reinforce (or threaten) givers' self-perceptions (Reshadi and Givi 2023; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). Moreover, gift giving may also be an especially important social exchange for symbolically signaling the value that a giver places on their relationship with the receiver (Galak, Givi, and Williams 2016; Liu et al. 2019) and for strengthening relationships (Chan and Mogilner 2017). Prior conceptual work on choices for others (Liu et al. 2019) argues that what differentiates gift giving from everyday favors or errands for others is that while both involve attending to receiver preferences, gift giving adds a relationship focus, which entails caring about the relational signals and implications of their choice. Indeed, prior research suggests that an asymmetric focus on the symbolic-signaling opportunities of gifts can drive givers to systematically choose gifts that they believe convey stronger signals, even when these options are not preferred by receivers (Galak et al. 2016; Steffel and LeBoeuf 2014).

Notably, given the importance of symbolic signaling to givers relative to receivers (Galak et al. 2016; Liu et al. 2019), givers may perceive the symbolic-signaling aspects (e.g., the giver's relationship valuation or personal characteristics) of a secondhand gift to be worse than those of a new gift, relative to receivers' perceptions, which could lead to secondhand gifting aversion directly and indirectly via perceived lower adherence to gifting norms. The logic for this compromised symbolic signaling draws on the belief that secondhand products are typically cheaper and inferior to their new counterparts in the marketplace (Guiot and Roux 2010; Wu et al. 2024). Because of heightened sensitivity to how a gift conveys their personal characteristics (Garcia-Rada et al. 2022; Liu et al. 2026), givers—relative to receivers—may worry that a secondhand (vs. new) gift symbolically signals them as "cheap" or someone who lacks good

taste. Moreover, to the extent that the monetary sacrifice involved in purchasing a gift may be viewed as a symbolic signal of one's relational valuation of a receiver (Garcia-Rada et al. 2022; Garcia-Rada, Kim, and Liu 2025), givers—who are more attuned to these relational signals than receivers—may believe that a secondhand (vs. new) gift symbolically signals a lower level of care for the relationship. Altogether, givers may perceive symbolic-signaling aspects (e.g., the giver's relationship valuation or personal characteristics) to be relatively worse for a secondhand gift than a new gift, relative to receivers' perceptions, which may contribute to the aversion to secondhand gifting directly and indirectly via gifting norms.

Summary. As figure 1 delineates, our conceptual model considers whether concerns about what the secondhand gift signals about the giver (e.g., the giver's relationship valuation, the giver's personal characteristics) and concerns about aspects of the secondhand product itself (e.g., its performance, appearance) may contribute to secondhand gifting aversion both directly or indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms. Given the importance of symbolic signaling to gift givers relative to receivers (Galak et al. 2016; Liu et al. 2019), our theorizing focuses on symbolic-signaling concerns as the primary mechanism, while recognizing the potential parallel role of product-focused concerns within a multiply-determined process. We hypothesize that relative to receivers, givers perceive a secondhand (vs. new) gift as conveying weaker symbolic signals. As a result, givers will exhibit a greater aversion toward purchasing secondhand products as gifts, relative to the extent to which receivers would be interested in such products as gifts. Formally:

H1: Consumers are more averse to gifting secondhand products than to receiving these products as gifts, an effect that we term "secondhand gifting aversion."

H2: Although multiply determined, one key driver of secondhand gifting aversion is givers'

(vs. receivers') greater perception that secondhand (vs. new) gifts convey weaker symbolic signals.

Moderators of Secondhand Gifting Aversion

Consistent with the role of symbolic signaling, we propose that secondhand gifting aversion will be magnified in close (vs. distant) friendships. Our reasoning underlying this prediction is that givers may be focused on what a gift symbolically communicates about their valuation of the relationship with the receiver. Accordingly, givers' willingness to give secondhand products will be lower for close friendships (e.g., a best friend) than for distant friendships (e.g., an acquaintance friend), as a weaker symbolic signal of relationship valuation from a secondhand gift is a greater concern within a close friendship (Joy 2001; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016). By contrast, receivers may not focus as much on these symbolic-signaling considerations, and thus their willingness to receive secondhand gifts may not vary as much for a close (vs. distant) friendship. We formally propose the following:

H3: Secondhand gifting aversion will be magnified in close (vs. distant) friendships.

The symbolic-signaling account further suggests that secondhand gifting aversion will be mitigated when secondhand status is reframed to convey positive symbolic-signaling value but should persist when marketing messages do not meaningfully strengthen that symbolic value. We propose that one marketplace-relevant reframing that improves the secondhand product's symbolic-signaling value is the label "vintage," defined as "produced in the past, and typical of the period in which it was made" (Cambridge Dictionary 2024). By shifting the meaning of a secondhand gift away from not-new and cost-saving associations and toward uniqueness and expressive value (Hoff and Bellezza 2024), vintage framing, as one form of symbolic framing, should mitigate givers' concerns that the secondhand gift compromises symbolic signals.

By contrast, one might consider an alternative marketplace framing that aims instead to address product-focused concerns associated with secondhand gifts. For instance, product-focused concerns associated with secondhand goods may be that their performance or appearance are compromised even to a small degree. Thus, while limited in terms of the products to which it could most realistically apply, but valuable as a theoretical test case of whether secondhand gifting aversion can persist solely driven by symbolic-signaling concerns even when product-focused concerns are minimal or eliminated, a secondhand product which is highly durable could have marketplace framing that highlights blemishes as a hallmark of the product's appearance (e.g., a geode bookend). Yet because such framing does not alter the symbolic signals associated with its secondhand status, a symbolic-signaling account would predict that secondhand gifting aversion will persist. Formally, we propose the following:

H4a: Secondhand gifting aversion will be mitigated when the secondhand product is framed as having symbolic value (e.g., labeled as vintage).

H4b: Secondhand gifting aversion will persist when the secondhand product is framed to minimize product-focused concerns (e.g., a highly durable product which has blemishes framed as a hallmark of ideal appearance).

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We tested our theorizing in a multi-method investigation spanning a pilot study and twelve main studies (ten preregistered), including qualitative data (pilot study), secondary data (studies 1a–1b), and controlled experiments (studies 2a–8) with dyadic paradigms (studies 2a–2b) and consequential dependent variables (studies 2a–2b and 4; see summary table 1, following References). Across studies, we leveraged a wide range of real-world brands and retail platforms, product categories, pricing, gifting contexts, grades of the product's physical condition, and

choice trade-offs.

The pilot study examines consumers' lay beliefs by eliciting open-ended responses from givers to provide initial exploratory insights into potential factors that may contribute to givers' secondhand gifting aversion and factors that may mitigate it. Studies 1–4 then document the key phenomenon of secondhand gifting aversion (H1). Studies 1a–1b test for real-world evidence in a major retail platform's algorithmic search results (study 1a) and in a gift registry dataset (study 1b). Studies 2a–2b then employ real-choice paradigms with dyads, examining both rating-condition trade-offs (study 2a) and price-condition trade-offs (study 2b). Studies 3a–3c then test for generalizability of the aversion across different information contexts (study 3a), secondhand product grades (study 3b), and secondhand labels (study 3c). Study 4 employs a real-choice paradigm in which consumers visited a physical store set-up with actual products and uses purchases for self as a different baseline for comparing givers' aversion.

Studies 5–8 then test for process evidence in different ways. Study 5 tests our multiply-determined process using a parallel-serial mediation model, investigating the primary role of perceived symbolic-signaling differences underlying secondhand gifting aversion (H2), while also examining perceptions of product-focused aspects and adherence to gifting norms. To test for convergent evidence for the primary role of symbolic signaling, the final three studies examine process-consistent moderators (study 6: friendship closeness [H3]; study 7: symbolic framing [H4a]) and a theoretical test case (study 8: appearance framing [H4b]). For all experiments, we report attention check details and robustness checks in web appendix A (see all web appendix materials at https://osf.io/e4hzt/overview?view_only=158289a4bf39442a9a075135fe6d3707).

PILOT STUDY: GIVERS' THOUGHTS ABOUT SECONDHAND GIFTING

This qualitative pilot study aimed to uncover and explore givers' thoughts about secondhand gifting. By eliciting open-ended responses, we sought to gather initial insights from consumers' own introspection into psychological barriers that might contribute to secondhand gifting aversion, as well as into factors that might mitigate it, which could complement and enrich our theorizing grounded in literature. As the objective of this investigation was to uncover underlying psychological barriers rather than to test confirmatory hypotheses, we adopted a bottom-up, open-coding approach consistent with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Participants and Method

We recruited 100 U.S.-based participants from Connect (M_{age} = 41.88, SD = 11.75; 52.0% female, 47.0% male, .1% preferred not to say). Participants were informed that they would respond to four open-ended questions on a single page about their thoughts on purchasing secondhand products as gifts. We clarified that "secondhand products" referred to items that were secondhand purchases (e.g., from retailers such as eBay or Amazon Resale), rather than participants' own previously used possessions.

Participants first responded to an open-ended question about whether they would consider purchasing a secondhand product to give as a gift; responses were coded by the first two authors into "yes," "no," or "conditional" categories (Cohen's k = .73). Second, participants were asked to list as many concerns or barriers as they could think of that might keep them from purchasing a secondhand gift. Third, participants described how they thought gift receivers would feel or respond if they were given a secondhand product as a gift; responses were coded for valence into "positive," "negative," or "mixed" categories (Cohen's k = .92). Fourth, they

reported whether any of their prior responses would change if the receiver would never find out that the gift was purchased secondhand (coded as "yes" or "no," Cohen's $k = .95$). The first two authors analyzed the qualitative responses, and through iterative group discussions with all the authors, identified recurring themes and linked them to relevant theoretical constructs (Strauss and Corbin 1990; see web appendix B).

Results

Aversion to Purchasing Secondhand Products as Gifts. Most participants (75.0%) expressed at least some aversion to purchasing a secondhand product as a gift, either as an unconditional "no" (e.g., "would never purchase anything secondhand as a gift"; 13.0%) or indicating willingness only under certain conditions (62.0%). Among those participants who indicated willingness only under certain conditions, there was spontaneous referral to several recurring themes, including vintage or unique product characteristics (e.g., "Yes, but only if it was something unique like a vintage LP or some type of antique"), relationship closeness (e.g., "For me, it all depends on how close I am to the person"), and receiver-specific indication of receptiveness to secondhand products (e.g., "Unless the person I was gifting [sic] regularly bought secondhand products"). Finally, among the minority (25.0%) who expressed unconditional openness to buying secondhand products as gifts, reasons cited included "economically feasible" and "reducing waste."

Perceived Symbolic-signaling Aspects. Coding responses to the four open-ended questions holistically, we identified common themes centered on perceived symbolic signals associated with purchasing and giving secondhand products as gifts. Specifically, 27.0%[2] of

[2] Because thematic codes were not mutually exclusive, a single response could be assigned to multiple categories. Thus, the overall percentages do not sum to 100%.

participants spontaneously expressed concerns about what such a gift would signal about how much they value their *relationship* with the receiver (e.g., a perceived lack of care or value) and about *themselves* (i.e., personal characteristics such as cheapness or taste). Further, since the abstract nature of symbolic-signaling aspects may be difficult for consumers to articulate (i.e., making spontaneous mentions relatively low by nature), we also found converging evidence to support this theme. Despite most participants (73.0%) reporting that they anticipated negative or mixed reactions from receivers, most participants (70.1%)[3] reported "no change" in their initial aversion to secondhand gifting even when informed that the secondhand status was described as undetectable to the receiver, suggesting that these symbolic concerns may be generated at least in part by givers wanting to view themselves in a particular way (consistent with prior literature; Flynn and Adams 2009; Garcia-Rada et al. 2022; Kupor et al. 2017; Liu et al. 2026). Overall, perceived symbolic signals emerged as a recurring theme, as illustrated by the following quotes:

> "I don't think people would like to get a secondhand gift and it would make me look cheap."
>
> "The barrier of wanting that person to actually think I care about and value them."
>
> [When asked whether their earlier response would change if the receiver never found out that the gift was secondhand] "No, because I would still know."

Perceived Product-focused Aspects. Participants also expressed product-focused concerns about purchasing and giving secondhand products as gifts (71.0%; e.g., "Hygiene and cleanliness concerns. Worries about hidden damage or wear"; "Biggest concern is the condition the product is in and if it's an electronic of any kind, if it's still functional"). These concerns centered on the product's performance and appearance rather than on symbolic signals conveyed by purchasing and giving secondhand products as gifts.

[3] We calculated this percentage as the proportion of participants reporting no change, among those participants (i.e., 75.0% of the pilot study sample) who had expressed at least some aversion to purchasing a secondhand product as a gift in the responses to the first open-ended question.

Gifting Norms. Finally, we also identified some responses reflecting concerns about adherence to gifting norms. These responses spontaneously referred to broad concerns about the appropriateness of such gifts (8.0%; e.g., "This seems inappropriate"), alongside comments related to more specific concerns regarding symbolic-signaling and product-focused aspects.

Discussion

This pilot study offered initial insights into givers' thoughts and introspection about purchasing and gifting secondhand products, and we utilized these insights alongside our theorizing from the literature to inform our subsequent study designs. Thematic analyses suggested that most consumers reported they would only consider secondhand gifting under specific conditions, related to factors such as receiver-specific indication of receptiveness to secondhand products (study 1b), relationship closeness (study 6), and salient positive symbolic value (study 7). In addition, these open-ended responses gave some initial credence to our theorizing that secondhand gifting aversion is likely multiply determined, with perceptions of symbolic signals about the giver emerging as a prominent driver (study 5; see also studies 6–8). The responses further suggested that such symbolic signals may be differentiated into signals about the giver's relationship valuation and signals about the giver's personal characteristics. The responses also pointed to potential additional mechanisms related to concerns about product-focused aspects (e.g., performance, appearance; studies 5 and 8). Finally, adherence to gifting norms was mentioned less often and mostly accompanied by associated proximal concerns about symbolic-signaling aspects or product-focused aspects, suggesting that gifting norms may be a distal downstream mediator, whereby more proximal concerns about symbolic-signaling and product-focused aspects may underlie perceptions of adherence to gifting norms in driving secondhand gifting aversion (figure 1; study 5).

STUDIES 1A–1B: REAL-WORLD EVIDENCE

Studies 1a and 1b tested for initial real-world evidence of the secondhand gifting aversion effect (H1) by using search results from eBay, a major retail platform that offers both new and secondhand products (study 1a), and a real-world dataset from a gift registry platform (study 1b). In study 1a, adapting the approach used by van der Sluis et al. (2025, pilot study), we examined whether eBay's Cassini Algorithm presents search results with a lower percentage of secondhand product options for search terms that reflect searching for "gifts" than for "non-gifts." The eBay Cassini Algorithm determines product search listings not based on exact keyword matches but rather based on buyer behavior and engagement, showing listings that are more likely to lead to clicks, purchases, and positive buyer experiences (Drazovic 2025). Thus, the search results reflect the items that previous consumers, who used these same keywords, were most likely to purchase. In study 1b, using a dataset from a gift registry platform on which both secondhand and new products could be directly requested by gift receivers, we examined whether a gift request would be less likely to be fulfilled by givers if the requested item was secondhand (vs. new) and tested if secondhand gifting aversion persists despite receivers' indicated receptiveness.

Study 1A. Algorithm Search Evidence on a Major Retail Platform

Method. We preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/wbzm-st22.pdf) four search terms, two related to gifts ("gifts for women" and "gifts for men") and two not related to gifts ("products for women" and "products for men"). We used "women" and "men" in our search terms simply to provide a context for the search; we did not have any specific predictions about differences between the searches for "women" and "men." Following the procedure used in prior research (van der Sluis et al. 2025, pilot study) to extract results independent of prior search history, the

first author went to a coffee shop to use an IP address unaffiliated with their computer activity, opened a previously unused browser, cleared all cookies and history, navigated to eBay.com, searched "gifts for women," and printed the complete list of search results for the search keyword to save as a PDF. The same procedure was repeated for each search term. For each product search listing, eBay provided the composition of product conditions: new, used, and not specified. As preregistered, we calculated the percentage of secondhand products by dividing the number of used products by the combined number of new products and used products[4].

Results. Chi-squared tests revealed that searches for "gifts" generated a significantly lower percentage of secondhand listings than for "products," both for women (2.3% vs. 13.0%; $\chi^2 = 20{,}433$, $p < .001$, $w = .15$) and men (.7% vs. 11.2%; $\chi^2 = 654{,}856$, $p < .001$, $w = .21$).

Study 1B. Requested Gift Fulfillment Evidence on a Gift Registry

Method. We obtained a gift registry dataset from SoKind (Center for Biological Diversity 2025), a gift registry platform that enables receivers to specify their preference for new or secondhand products for each requested gift. This dataset (obtained on April 15, 2025) contained 8,394 unique gift registry entries for various occasions (e.g., weddings, baby showers, birthdays), with each gift registry containing multiple specific gift item entries (N = 74,874, from September 18, 2013 to April 15, 2025). For each gift item entry, the dataset reported the product condition requested (i.e., new or secondhand) and the quantity of that gift item purchased by givers, with "0" indicating that the requested gift was not purchased (see web appendix D for details). Given that most gift registry requests from receivers were for a single item (77.1%) and that our

[4] We conducted a robustness check using the total number of products as the denominator and a replication study using "popular gifts" versus "popular products" as search keywords, which showed that differences in the number or breadth of product categories returned in searches for "gifts" vs. "products" were not a key driver (web appendix C).

theorizing focused on purchase likelihood, we re-coded the quantity-purchased variable into a dichotomous variable indicating whether the requested gift was purchased or not (1 = purchased, 0 = not purchased) as our key dependent variable.

Results. We conducted a mixed-effects logistic regression predicting whether a requested gift item was given (1 = purchased, 0 = not purchased) as a function of product condition (1 = secondhand, 0 = new), with gift item nested within gift registry to account for random variance at the gift registry level. The results yielded a significant main effect of product condition ($b = –.52$, SE = .04, $z = –13.55$, $p < .001$, semi-partial $R^2 = .01$), such that gift requests for secondhand items (35.2%, n = 4,954 out of 14,067) were less likely to be fulfilled by givers than gift requests for new items (50.0%, n = 30,397 out of 60,807)[5].

Discussion

Altogether, studies 1a and 1b provided real-world evidence of the secondhand gifting aversion effect (H1) using two different approaches. Study 1a leveraged the eBay Cassini Algorithm, which is designed to reflect the most frequently purchased items associated with specific search keywords (Drazovic 2025), showing that consumers are less likely to purchase secondhand products when searching for "gifts" as compared to "products." Study 1b leveraged secondary data from a gift registry platform, showing that while receiver preferences might create conditions under which givers are more open to secondhand gifts (as shown in the pilot study), secondhand gifting aversion nevertheless persists even when receivers provide specific indications of receptiveness to secondhand products. Of course, while studies 1a and 1b provide

[5] We conducted two robustness checks, which revealed that the effect persists in a sub-sample in which we limited variation in product categories of gift requests and in a sub-sample of gifts for which givers were provided with purchase links (web appendix D), thereby addressing potential alternative explanations related to differential representation of product categories in secondhand gifts or differential ease-of-purchasing gifts.

valuable real-world evidence, they analyze correlational secondary data and are susceptible to potential unobserved differences (e.g., in study 1a, searches for "gifts" vs. "products" may have yielded different product categories, higher priced products, or products with descriptions that include seller-provided "gift" keywords, such as "the perfect gift," that are more likely to be new). To address these limitations, we used controlled experiments in the subsequent studies.

STUDIES 2A–2B: CONSEQUENTIAL GIFT CHOICES WITH DYADS

Studies 2a and 2b tested for evidence of secondhand gifting aversion (H1) using incentive-compatible choices, in which some givers' choices were randomly selected to be carried out, using dyadic giver-receiver paradigms. To increase generalizability, studies 2a and 2b tested for evidence of the aversion across two different trade-off contexts. Study 2a featured a product rating trade-off, such that consumers chose between a brand-new, lower-rated product and a secondhand, higher-rated product, with price held constant. Study 2b featured a price trade-off, such that consumers chose between a new, more expensive product and a secondhand, cheaper but otherwise identical product (i.e., product rating was held constant). We purposely utilized books in study 2b (and again in study 4), as the core function of a book—providing content that consumers can read—is clearly not affected by minor use, making books less subject to concerns about a secondhand product's potentially uncertain ability to fulfill its core function.

Study 2A: Product Condition and Rating Trade-Off with Naturally Occurring Dyads

Method. Four hypothesis-blind research assistants approached naturally-occurring dyads (i.e., friends) at two student dining halls on the campus of a large Chinese university to recruit them to participate in a study about people's preferences for gifts. Dyads were approached one at a time and were monetarily compensated for participation. We recruited 166 pairs of participants

(N = 332; M_{age} = 22.01, SD = 3.93; 78.6% female, 21.4% male). Within each dyad, one individual was randomly assigned to the role of the giver and the other to the role of the receiver.

Participants were asked to imagine that they were considering buying wireless headphones as a gift for their friend's birthday (giver condition) or their friend was considering buying wireless headphones as a gift for their birthday (receiver condition). They read about two models of headphones: Redmi Buds4 (30-hour battery, 5-star rating, 179 RMB) and Redmi Buds4 Youth Version (20-hour battery, 4-star rating, 99 RMB). They were also told that a secondhand Redmi Buds4 in open box, unused condition priced at 99 RMB was available on Xianyu, the local version of eBay (see web appendix E for details). Participants then indicated which of the two options they would choose to give or receive: the secondhand Redmi Buds4 (99 RMB) or the brand-new Redmi Buds4 Youth Version (99 RMB). The positions of the two options were counterbalanced. Afterward, participants responded to an attention check asking them to identify their gifting role.[6] Finally, participants provided their demographic information (i.e., age, gender; we collected the same demographic information for all subsequent studies and thus do not mention this again) and their university email to be contacted if selected as winners, before being compensated. At the end of the study, we randomly drew five participants (three givers and two receivers) as winners and delivered them their indicated headphone models.

Results. To account for within-dyad dependence, we conducted a mixed-effects logistic regression with a random intercept for each dyad. The results revealed a significant effect of gifting role (b = –.81, SE = .30, z = –2.72, p = .007, semi-partial R^2 = .02), such that participants

[6] Because we did not preregister study 2a (unlike the other experimental studies) and thus did not preregister any participant exclusions, we reported the analyses in the manuscript without exclusions. However, for consistency with the other experimental studies (which had preregistered participant exclusions based on the attention check), we also conducted a robustness check including only participants who passed the attention check for study 2a and observed consistent results (see web appendix A for details).

in the giver condition (13.9%) were less likely to choose the secondhand wireless headphones than those in the receiver condition (25.9%).

Study 2B: Product Condition and Price Trade-Off with Lab-Assembled Dyads

Method. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/qkvs-gpr6.pdf), undergraduate students[7] at a U.S. university in the northeast completed this study as part of a bundle of studies at the business research center in exchange for course credit. Prior to each lab session (i.e., 40 one-hour lab sessions held over the course of one week, with multiple participants able to sign up for each session), research assistants used a random drawing process to pair participants into lab-assembled dyads. If a lab session had an odd number of participants, the unpaired participant was not eligible to complete this study and instead completed an alternative study. We assembled 127 dyads, of which 111 dyads had both partners pass the attention check and were retained for analyses as preregistered (N = 222; M_{age} = 19.77, SD = 1.06; 46.8% female, 53.2% male). In this study and in all subsequent studies, we also conducted a robustness check without excluding those participants who failed the attention check and observed the same patterns of results (see web appendix A). Within each lab-assembled dyad, one participant was randomly assigned to the role of gift giver and the other to the role of gift receiver.

First, to induce relational closeness in the lab, all pairs were instructed to spend one minute briefly chatting and getting to know each other. Then, all pairs within a given lab session were instructed to go into the same room to complete the study at their individual computer stations (as being in the same room increases psychological closeness in the lab; Boothby et al.

[7] Each student who participated in studies conducted at this business research center was assigned a unique lab ID. As preregistered, when duplicate IDs appeared, we retained the first complete response based on the timestamped end time and excluded subsequent response(s) associated with the same ID. The reported sample sizes for all lab experiments conducted at this business research center reflect the number of unique participants who completed each experiment.

2016). Participants were informed that one or more pairs may be randomly selected to participate in a real gift exchange, with each pair having approximately a 1 in 100 chance of being randomly selected. Those in the giver [receiver] condition learned that, if selected, they [their study partner] would get $15 to purchase a book from the business research center store for their study partner [them] and that they [their study partner] would keep the remaining cash. It was further detailed for participants that, if randomly selected, the gift exchange would occur at the end of the study. All participants then learned that the store was selling both a brand-new version of a book for $10 and a secondhand version (described as having been read a few times and well maintained) of the same book for $5, and were shown an image of each version (see web appendix F). Participants indicated which of the two book options they would choose to purchase as a gift for their study partner (giver condition) or would like their study partner to choose to purchase as a gift for them (receiver condition). They then responded to the preregistered attention check that asked them to indicate their gifting role. Research assistants facilitated the gift exchange for each randomly selected pair based on the giver's choice (i.e., the receiver got the book that the giver chose in a gift bag, and the giver got the remaining cash in an envelope).

Results. As preregistered, we conducted a mixed-effects logistic regression with a random intercept for each dyad. The results revealed a significant effect of gifting role ($b = -1.52$, SE = .32, $z = -4.74$, $p < .001$, semi-partial $R^2 = .11$), such that givers (53.2%) were less likely to choose the secondhand book than receivers (83.8%).

Discussion

Altogether, studies 2a and 2b demonstrated evidence of secondhand gifting aversion (H1) using controlled experiments and real giver-receiver dyads with incentive-compatible choices. Importantly, the effect was robust to different trade-offs that consumers may face when

considering secondhand products—generalizing both to situations in which consumers make a trade-off between product condition (secondhand vs. new) and product rating (higher vs. lower overall rating), holding price constant (study 2a), and to situations in which consumers make a trade-off between product condition (secondhand vs. new) and price (cheaper vs. more expensive), holding product rating constant as the product itself was identical (study 2b).

STUDY 3A–3C: GENERALIZABILITY OF SECONDHAND GIFTING AVERSION

In studies 3a–3c, we further examined the generalizability of the secondhand gifting aversion effect (H1) by testing its robustness across various real-world contexts. Specifically, study 3a tested the generalizability across two information contexts that differed in whether details about the choice set were fully disclosed. In the limited information context, participants were provided only with a description of the secondhand product, with no other details about the choice set (e.g., price or an alternative new option), closely reflecting real-life gift exchange settings in which the receiver only knows the chosen option. In the full information context, participants received complete information about the choice set (e.g., product descriptions, prices, and an alternative new option), reflecting typical retail platform settings in which new and secondhand options are presented side by side to all users, as well as gift registry settings in which options and prices are viewable by both gift givers and receivers. Studies 3b and 3c tested for generalizability of the aversion across different secondhand descriptors. Study 3b examined generalizability across various real secondhand product grades (e.g., "used – like new," "good") commonly used by retailers (e.g., Amazon Resale, eBay). Study 3c tested generalizability across different commonly used secondhand labels (e.g., "pre-loved," "pre-cherished").

Study 3A: Generalizing across Full (vs. Limited) Information Contexts

Method. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/hz95-tnww.pdf), 400 U.S.-based Prolific participants completed a 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 2 (information context: full vs. limited) between-subjects design for monetary compensation. Among them, 383 participants passed the preregistered attention check (M_{age} = 38.61, SD = 13.12; 53.8% female, 44.6% male, 1.3% non-binary, .3% preferred not to say) and thus were retained for analyses.

Participants were asked to imagine either purchasing an Amazon smart speaker as a birthday gift for a friend (giver condition) or receiving one from a friend (receiver condition). All participants read about the latest model of the Amazon Echo Dot, sold on Amazon. Importantly, based on their randomly assigned condition, participants viewed different information about the smart speaker. In the full information condition, participants saw that the new version is priced at $49.99, while a secondhand version in very good condition is priced at $38.62. For added realism, these stimuli product descriptions were adapted from Amazon Resale. By contrast, in the limited information condition, participants saw that the secondhand version is in very good condition, but without any information about the brand-new alternative or their respective prices (see web appendix G). They indicated their interest in giving (giver condition) or receiving (receiver condition) the secondhand Amazon Echo Dot as a gift (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), and then completed the preregistered attention check in which they identified their gifting role.

Results. A two-way ANOVA on secondhand gift preference revealed a significant main effect of gifting role ($F(1, 379) = 13.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), with givers reporting lower interest in giving the secondhand product than receivers' interest in receiving the product (M_{giver} = 3.32, SD = 2.30 vs. $M_{receiver}$ = 4.16, SD = 2.20); a significant main effect of information context ($F(1, 379) = 4.55$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$), with lower interest in the secondhand product in the full information condition than in the limited information context (M_{full} = 3.47, SD = 2.24 vs. $M_{limited}$

= 3.97, SD = 2.31); and no significant interaction ($F(1, 379) < .01$, $p = .949$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$).

As supplementary analyses, pairwise comparisons revealed that givers indeed preferred giving a secondhand item less compared to receivers' preferences in both full information ($M_{giver} = 3.08$, SD = 2.23 vs. $M_{receiver} = 3.90$, SD = 2.19; $F(1, 379) = 6.18$, $p = .013$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) and limited information conditions ($M_{giver} = 3.56$, SD = 2.36 vs. $M_{receiver} = 4.40$, SD = 2.19; $F(1, 379) = 6.98$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, see figure W1 in web appendix G). In another supplementary analysis, we also compared givers in the full information condition to receivers in the limited information condition. This contrast resulted in the largest difference in secondhand gift preferences among all possible giver-receiver combinations ($M_{giver\text{-}full} = 3.08$, SD = 2.23 vs. $M_{receiver\text{-}limited} = 4.40$, SD = 2.19; $t(379) = -4.12$, $p < .001$, $d = .60$), indicating that secondhand gifting aversion persists even when receivers lack the full choice set information often available to givers.

Study 3B: Generalizing Across Varied Grades of the Secondhand Product

Method. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/w4tx-hqjf.pdf), 1,001 U.K.-based Prolific participants completed this 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 5 (secondhand product grade: open box but unused vs. used – like new vs. used – very good vs. used – good vs. used – acceptable) between-subjects design study. Among them, 728 participants passed both preregistered attention checks ($M_{age} = 43.63$, SD = 13.29; 54.9% female, 44.6% male, .4% non-binary) and were retained for analyses.

Based on their randomly assigned gifting role condition, participants were asked to either imagine that they are looking for a birthday gift for a friend who owns a MacBook Air laptop (giver condition) or that their friend is looking for a birthday gift for them and that they own a MacBook Air laptop (receiver condition). All participants then read about the Apple Magic

Keyboard with Touch ID, which is sold on Amazon and compatible with the MacBook Air laptop. They also read that the new version of this keyboard is sold at $149.00, while a secondhand version is sold at $104.86. Furthermore, participants were told that the secondhand version is sold in (a) open box but unused, (b) used – like new, (c) used – very good, (d) used – good, or (e) used – acceptable condition, depending on their randomly assigned secondhand product grade condition. For added realism, all stimuli were modeled after product pages on Amazon Resale. They then indicated which of the two gift options they would be more likely to choose to give (giver condition) or receive (receiver condition) on a 7-point scale (1 = definitely the brand-new keyboard ($149.00), 7 = definitely the used keyboard ($104.86)). Finally, participants answered the two preregistered attention check questions in which they were asked to identify their gifting role and to recall the grade of the secondhand keyboard they saw.

Results. A two-way ANOVA on secondhand gift preference revealed the focal significant main effect of gifting role ($F(1, 718) = 30.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), with givers reporting lower willingness to choose the secondhand product than receivers ($M_{giver} = 2.48$, SD = 2.00 vs. $M_{receiver} = 3.32$, SD = 2.22); a non-focal significant main effect of secondhand product grade ($F(4, 718) = 17.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$), with secondhand gift preference decreasing as the grade indicated more extensive prior use; and no significant interaction between gifting role and secondhand product grade ($F(4, 718) = .43$, $p = .784$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$; web appendix H summarizes descriptives).

Study 3C: Generalizing Across Different Secondhand Labels

Method. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/cv2f8q.pdf), 903 U.S.-based participants from Connect completed a 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 6 (secondhand label: used vs. secondhand vs. pre-owned vs. pre-loved vs. pre-cherished vs. restored) between-subjects design study in exchange for monetary compensation. Among them, 792 participants passed the

preregistered attention check item (M_{age} = 40.71, SD = 11.83; 50.6% female, 48.2% male, 1.1% preferred not to say) and thus were included in the analyses.

Based on their randomly assigned gifting role condition, participants were first asked to imagine that they were looking to purchase a birthday gift for their friend (giver condition) or that their friend was looking to purchase a birthday gift for them (receiver condition). All participants were then presented with two wooden picture frames on eBay. Both frames were identical products, one of which was a brand-new picture frame ($23.99). The other option, which was not brand new ($18.95), was described and presented based on the randomly assigned secondhand label condition: participants either read the non-new option was used, secondhand, pre-owned, pre-loved, pre-cherished, or restored. They were then asked to indicate which of the two picture frames they would prefer [to purchase and give as a birthday gift for their friend / their friend to purchase and give as a birthday gift for them] (1 = definitely the brand-new wooden picture frame ($23.99), 7 = definitely the [used / secondhand / pre-owned / pre-loved / pre-cherished / restored] wooden picture frame ($18.95)). Finally, participants responded to the preregistered attention check item that asked them to identify their gifting role.

Results. A two-way ANOVA on secondhand gift preference revealed the focal significant main effect of gifting role ($F(1, 780) = 15.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), with givers reporting lower willingness to choose the secondhand wooden picture frame as a gift than receivers (M_{giver} = 3.07, SD = 2.37 vs. $M_{receiver}$ = 3.72, SD = 2.30); a non-focal significant main effect of secondhand label ($F(5, 780) = 5.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$); and no significant interaction between gifting role and secondhand label ($F(5, 780) = .59$, $p = .705$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$; web appendix I summarizes descriptives).

Discussion

Studies 3a–3c showed that secondhand gifting aversion generalizes across a wide range of information contexts encountered by consumers (study 3a), secondhand product grades observed in the marketplace (study 3b), and secondhand labels observed in the marketplace (study 3c). In two supplemental studies, we further generalize this aversion to different product categories (hedonic product and furniture) and a different gifting occasion (web appendices J–K). Whereas studies 3a–3c considered online marketplace contexts, the next study further tests this aversion in a physical store setting, addressing an alternative explanation related to givers' uncertainty about the veracity of secondhand product grade descriptions online.

STUDY 4: CONSEQUENTIAL CHOICES IN A PHYSICAL STORE

Study 4 had two main aims. First, in another incentive-compatible choice design, we sought to generalize secondhand gifting aversion to in-store settings and to address the possibility that the phenomenon is premised on the existence of giver uncertainty about the veracity of the secondhand product grade description, a concern that may be prevalent in online marketplaces. Second, while our other experimental studies utilized receiver preference as the comparison group for givers, we examined a different baseline comparison in study 4: a choice for personal use. In doing so, we sought to examine whether secondhand gifting aversion also occurs relative to consumers' own preferences for products for their personal use.

Method

Participants and Design. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/myhm-yyp6.pdf), 201 undergraduates from a U.S. university in the northeast completed this study as part of a bundle of unrelated studies offered at the business research center in exchange for course credit. Of these participants, 180 participants passed the preregistered attention check and were retained for

analyses as preregistered (M_{age} = 19.84, SD = 2.32; 52.2% female, 47.2% male, .6% prefer not to say). This study had a 2-condition (gift giver vs. self-choice) between-subjects design.

Procedure. All participants began this study at individual computer stations in the business research center. Participants wrote the first initial of a friend whom they expected to see within the next week. They were then told that the business research center store (set-up in a different room nearby) had received a selection of popular *New York Times* bestseller books to stock one of its store shelves and that we were interested in consumers' reactions. Participants were informed that they would go into the store to look at the books displayed on the shelf. Importantly, they were also told that one participant would be randomly selected at the study's conclusion to receive $15 (see web appendix L for details), which they could use to purchase one book and keep the remaining cash. Specifically, the selected participant could choose: (a) a new book for $10 and keep the remaining $5 in cash or (b) a secondhand book for $5 and keep the remaining $10 in cash, making this an incentive-compatible choice. Participants in the giver [self-choice] condition were told that the book would be a gift for their friend [themselves].

Research assistants then released participants one at a time to walk to the store, where they viewed a store shelf containing a variety of products, as well as the focal top shelf containing six books (see web appendix L for details). The six books consisted of three titles, each offered as new (priced at $10) and secondhand (priced at $5). Participants were allowed to visually and/or physically inspect the books (e.g., some participants picked up the books to examine them more closely, as is possible in nearly all physical bookstores). After returning to their individual computer stations, participants made their choice by selecting one of the six book options they had just seen in person at the store (coded 1 = a secondhand book, 0 = a new book). As the attention check, they identified whether they considered purchasing as a gift for the friend

or for themselves. One participant was selected to receive their chosen book and remaining cash.

Results and Discussion

Results. A binary logistic regression on book choice (coded 1 = a secondhand book, 0 = a new book) showed that participants in the giver condition (48.0%) were less likely to purchase the secondhand book than those in the self-choice condition (91.5%; $b = -2.45$, SE = .44, $z = -5.53$, $p < .001$, OR = .09).

Discussion. Study 4 provides additional incentive-compatible choice evidence for secondhand gifting aversion, generalizing the aversion to in-store settings and thereby addressing the possibility that the aversion only exists under giver uncertainty about the veracity of the secondhand product grade description. Moreover, by using choices for the self, instead of gift receiver's preference, as the comparison condition, these findings cast some doubt on the alternative explanation that unique aspects of the gift receiver's perspective (e.g., their desire to avoid appearing materialistic or greedy) drive the aversion. Relatedly, while acknowledging that they are separate studies (and thus not directly comparable) but that they have parallels in being conducted with popular business books at the same business research center, we note that the choice shares of a secondhand (vs. new) book in studies 2b and 4 were similarly high among gift receivers (83.8%) and self-purchasers (91.5%), respectively, further suggesting that the effect is likely driven by givers' reluctance. The remaining four studies tested our focal symbolic-signaling process, alongside other processes.

STUDY 5: MULTIPLE PROCESSES WITH SYMBOLIC SIGNALING AS A PRIMARY DRIVER

Study 5 tested for evidence of a multiply-determined process in a parallel-serial

mediation model, investigating the key proposed role of perceived symbolic-signaling differences underlying secondhand gifting aversion (H2), while also examining the role of perceptions of product-focused aspects and adherence to gifting norms. Specifically, we tested whether givers perceived secondhand gifts to convey weaker symbolic signals about the giver (e.g., the giver's relationship valuation, the giver's personal characteristics), thereby driving secondhand gifting aversion either directly or indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms. At the same time, we also included perceptions of product-focused concerns associated with the secondhand product (e.g., its performance and appearance), examining whether these considerations could also contribute to this aversion directly or indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms (figure 1).

Method

Participants and Design. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/u6k78z.pdf), 426 undergraduates from a U.S. university in the northeast completed this study as part of a bundle of unrelated studies offered at the business research center in exchange for course credit. Of these, 417 participants passed the attention check and were retained for analyses as preregistered (M_{age} = 19.83, SD = 1.88; 56.1% female, 43.4% male, .5% prefer not to say). This study had a 2-condition (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) between-subjects design.

Procedure. All participants first thought about a friend and wrote that friend's initials. They were then randomly assigned to imagine either purchasing a birthday gift for that friend (giver condition) or receiving one from that friend (receiver condition). They then read descriptions of two gift options on Amazon: a brand-new product (sold at a regular retail price) and a used version (marked as in "very good" condition by Amazon, sold at a discounted price). Afterwards, they indicated which of the two gift options they would prefer to give or receive on a

7-point scale (1 = definitely the brand-new product at a regular retail price, 7 = definitely the used [very good condition] product at a discounted price; see web appendix M for details).

Next, participants indicated their perceptions of the two gift options' relative strengths on five mediator indices, with two capturing symbolic-signaling aspects, two capturing product-focused aspects, and one capturing gifting norms. Each index was measured with two items on a 7-point scale (1 = definitely the brand-new product, 7 = definitely the used product; approach adapted from Kupor et al. 2017), which were averaged as preregistered. The two mediator indices capturing symbolic-signaling aspects about the giver were: symbolic signal of the giver's relationship valuation index (two items: "Which gift would be a stronger signal of how much I value my friend [my friend values me]?," "Which gift would be a stronger signal of how much I care about my friend [my friend cares about me]?," $r = .82$) and symbolic signal of the giver's personal characteristics index (two items: "Which gift would be a stronger signal of how generous (vs. cheap) a person I am [my friend is]?," "Which gift would be a stronger signal of how good (vs. bad) my taste [my friend's taste] is?," $r = .35$[8]). The two mediator indices capturing product-focused aspects were: product appearance index (two items: "Which gift would look better when my friend opens it [I open it]?," "Which gift would appear cleaner when my friend opens it [I open it]?," $r = .72$) and product performance index (two items: "Which gift would work better when my friend uses [I use] it?," "Which gift would be more likely to be used by my friend [by me] for a long time?," $r = .59$). One mediator index captured perceived adherence to gifting norms (two items: "Which gift would follow (vs. violate) gifting norms

[8] As preregistered, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and found a good fit of the proposed five-factor model (web appendix M). Moreover, this more parsimonious five-factor model was preferred over alternative models that treat each item of giver's personal characteristics and adherence to gifting norms as separate factors (web appendix M). In addition, we also found similar conclusions for the parallel-serial mediation model in a robustness check where each item in the low-correlation factors was treated as a separate factor (web appendix M).

more for me [my friend] to give?," "Which gift would be more acceptable (vs. offensive) for me [for my friend] to give based on gift norms?," $r = .39$[9]). Finally, participants responded to the preregistered attention check question, in which they identified their gifting role.

Results

First, an independent-samples *t*-test revealed that givers reported a significantly lower preference for the secondhand gift than receivers ($M_{giver} = 2.51$, SD = 1.66 vs. $M_{receiver} = 3.60$, SD = 1.89; $t(415) = -6.27$, $p < .001$, $d = .61$), showing secondhand gifting aversion. Second, a series of independent-samples *t*-tests revealed that givers (vs. receivers) evaluated the secondhand (vs. new) gift option as relatively weaker in terms of: symbolically signaling the giver's relationship valuation ($M_{giver} = 2.67$, SD = 1.24 vs. $M_{receiver} = 3.32$, SD = 1.10; $t(415) = -5.66$, $p < .001$, $d = .55$), symbolically signaling the giver's personal characteristics ($M_{giver} = 2.75$, SD = 1.22 vs. $M_{receiver} = 3.27$, SD = 1.00; $t(415) = -4.74$, $p < .001$, $d = .46$), the product aspect of appearance ($M_{giver} = 1.79$, SD = .90 vs. $M_{receiver} = 2.13$, SD = 1.00; $t(415) = -3.73$, $p < .001$, $d = .37$), the product aspect of performance ($M_{giver} = 2.69$, SD = 1.17 vs. $M_{receiver} = 2.92$, SD = 1.09; $t(415) = -2.00$, $p = .047$, $d = .20$), and adherence to gifting norms ($M_{giver} = 2.47$, SD = 1.29 vs. $M_{receiver} = 2.93$, SD = 1.45; $t(415) = -3.43$, $p < .001$, $d = .34$).

Next, to examine the relationship between the four proximal explanations (i.e., two indices each for perceived symbolic-signaling aspects and product-focused aspects) and a more distal gifting norm explanation (figure 1), we conducted a parallel-serial mediation analysis[10]

[9] Please refer to footnote 8.

[10] Web appendix M contains the preregistered parallel mediation analysis, which provides consistent evidence for the stronger role of symbolic signaling within a multiply-determined process. While both analyses support the stronger role of symbolic-signaling aspects, we report a parallel-serial mediation model in the manuscript as we view it as more theoretically grounded given our conceptual model (see Fiedler, Harris, and Schott [2018], wherein they state that "choosing an appropriate causal model is essentially a theoretical issue, not a statistical one," p. 96).

using Lavaan package (10,000 bootstrapped resamples; Rosseel 2012) in R. As shown in figure 2, following References, we specified gifting role condition as the independent variable, perceived symbolic signals about the giver (i.e., the giver's relationship valuation, the giver's personal characteristics) and perceived product aspects (i.e., product appearance, product performance) as the four parallel proximal mediators (M1) in the serial chain, perceived adherence to gifting norms as the distal mediator (M2) in the serial chain, and preference for the secondhand gift option as the dependent variable. This parallel-serial mediation model has been previously used for similarly structured conceptual models (e.g., Choe, Kan, and Polman 2023; Stillman and Woolley 2023).

Focusing first on the serial indirect effects through perceived adherence to gifting norms, the analysis yielded significant serial indirect effects of symbolic signaling about the giver's relationship valuation ($b = -.04$, SE = .02, $z = -2.14$, $p = .032$, $CI_{95} = [-.077, -.009]$) and the giver's personal characteristics ($b = -.04$, SE = .02, $z = -2.70$, $p = .007$, $CI_{95} = [-.075, -.015]$). There was also a marginally significant serial indirect effect of product appearance ($b = -.02$, SE = .01, $z = -1.90$, $p = .057$, $CI_{95} = [-.045, -.003]$), and non-significant serial indirect effect of product performance ($b < -.01$, SE = .01, $z = -.45$, $p = .654$, $CI_{95} = [-.017, .008]$) through perceived adherence to gifting norms.

The analysis also yielded significant indirect effects (i.e., not operating via adherence to gifting norms), of symbolic signaling about the giver's relationship valuation ($b = -.16$, SE = .06, $z = -2.81$, $p = .005$, $CI_{95} = [-.285, -.060]$), the giver's personal characteristics ($b = -.12$, SE = .05, $z = -2.36$, $p = .018$, $CI_{95} = [-.232, -.036]$), and product appearance ($b = -.11$, SE = .05, $z = -2.39$, $p = .017$, $CI_{95} = [-.209, -.032]$). There was also a marginally significant indirect effect of product performance independent of perceived adherence to gifting norms ($b = -.06$, SE = .04,

$z = -1.72$, $p = .086$, $CI_{95} = [-.145, -.001]$). See figure 2, following References.

Discussion

Altogether, study 5 indicated that differences between givers and receivers in the perceived relative weakness of secondhand (vs. new) gifts in terms of symbolic signals about the giver (i.e., the giver's relationship valuation, the giver's personal characteristics) play a key role in driving secondhand gifting aversion, both directly and indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms. In addition, although perceived product-focused concerns (i.e., product appearance, product performance) also exerted a role both directly and indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms, these effects were weaker than those via symbolic signaling. Building on these findings which indicate support for a key role of symbolic signaling, the final three studies use process-consistent moderation (studies 6–7) and theoretical test case (study 8) approaches to provide converging evidence of the importance of symbolic signaling in driving secondhand gifting aversion.

STUDY 6: MODERATION BY FRIENDSHIP CLOSENESS

Study 6 tested for process-consistent moderation of secondhand gifting aversion, such that it is magnified in close (vs. distant) friendships (H3). If secondhand gifting aversion is driven by givers' (vs. receivers') greater perception that secondhand products convey weaker symbolic signals about the giver's relationship valuation, then the aversion should be more pronounced when gifting to close (vs. distant) friends, for whom givers may be more concerned about the strength of the relationship valuation signal (Joy 2001; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016).

Method

Participants and Design. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/67tv9s.pdf), 351

undergraduates from a U.S. university in the northeast completed this study as part of a bundle of unrelated studies in exchange for course credit. Among these participants, 329 participants passed both preregistered attention checks and were retained for analyses (M_{age} = 19.84, SD = 1.12; 53.2% female, 45.9% male, .9% other or prefer not to say). This study had a 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 2 (friendship: close vs. distant) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were first asked to provide the initials of a friend. Specifically, depending on their randomly assigned condition, they were either asked to think about a close friend, who is not just an acquaintance but someone they spend a lot of time with and consider one of their best friends (close friend condition), or a distant friend, who is an acquaintance and not a close friend, with whom they spend little time and do not consider one of their best friends (distant friend condition; adapted from Goodman and Lim 2018). Afterwards, they were told to imagine that they were looking to purchase a business book as a birthday gift for their friend (giver condition) or that their friend was looking to purchase a business book as a birthday gift for them (receiver condition). They read about a business book from the *New York Times Bestseller List* and were told that the brand-new option was sold at $23.99 on Amazon, while the used option in very good condition was sold at $14.99. Participants then indicated which of the two versions of the business book they would like [to purchase and give as a birthday gift for their friend/their friend to purchase and give as a birthday gift for them] (1 = definitely the brand-new business book, 7 = definitely the used business book). Finally, participants answered two preregistered attention check questions, one which asked whether they thought of a close or distant friend and the other which asked them to identify their gifting role (see web appendix N).

Results

A two-way ANOVA on secondhand gift preference revealed a significant main effect of

gifting role ($F(1, 325) = 26.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$), such that givers were less inclined to choose the secondhand business book than receivers ($M_{giver} = 3.28$, SD = 2.32 vs. $M_{receiver} = 4.50$, SD = 2.00). There was also a significant main effect of friendship closeness ($F(1, 325) = 14.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), such that the preference for the secondhand business book was lower in the context of a close friendship versus a distant friendship ($M_{close} = 3.40$, SD = 2.19 vs. $M_{distant} = 4.34$, SD = 2.23). Importantly, there was a significant interaction between gifting role and friendship closeness ($F(1, 325) = 7.53$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). See figure 3, following References.

We then conducted simple effects tests to examine the pattern of the interaction. First, we examined the simple effects of gifting role for each level of friendship closeness. Simple effects tests showed that for a close friendship, givers were significantly less likely than receivers to choose a secondhand gift (vs. a new gift) ($M_{giver} = 2.53$, SD = 2.02 vs. $M_{receiver} = 4.37$, SD = 1.96; $F(1, 325) = 31.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$). However, for a distant friendship, givers were only marginally significantly less likely than receivers to choose a secondhand gift (vs. a new gift) ($M_{giver} = 4.07$, SD = 2.37 vs. $M_{receiver} = 4.63$, SD = 2.04; $F(1, 325) = 2.83$, $p = .094$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). We also examined simple effects of friendship closeness for each gifting role. Simple effects tests showed that givers were significantly less willing to give a secondhand product as a gift when the receiver was a close friend compared to a distant friend ($M_{close} = 2.53$, SD = 2.02 vs. $M_{distant} = 4.07$, SD = 2.37; $F(1, 325) = 22.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$), whereas receivers exhibited no significant difference in willingness to receive a secondhand product as a gift regardless of whether the giver was a close friend or a distant friend ($M_{close} = 4.37$, SD = 1.96 vs. $M_{distant} = 4.63$, SD = 2.04; $F(1, 325) = .60$, $p = .438$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$).

Discussion

Study 6 showed that secondhand gifting aversion was magnified within close (vs. distant)

friendships (H3). Givers were less willing to give secondhand products as gifts to close (vs. distant) friends, whereas receivers were similarly willing to receive secondhand products as gifts from close and distant friends. We suggest that these findings offer process-consistent moderation evidence supporting the role of symbolic signaling (and in particular, about givers' concerns about symbolic signals of the giver's relationship valuation of the receiver) as a key driver of secondhand gifting aversion.

STUDY 7: MODERATION BY SYMBOLIC VALUE FRAMING

Study 7 tested a marketplace-relevant, process-consistent moderator, examining whether framing a secondhand product as having symbolic value (by using a "vintage" label, which may shift secondhand products towards positive symbolism such as in terms of uniqueness and expressive value; Hoff and Bellezza 2024), would mitigate secondhand gifting aversion (H4a). Indeed, in the pilot study, some givers spontaneously expressed that one context in which they would be more willing to gift secondhand goods is when the product was "vintage" (and unique).

Method

Participants and Design. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/zykc-n2v6.pdf), 801 U.S.-based participants from Prolific completed this study for monetary compensation. Among them, 738 participants passed the preregistered attention check and thus were retained for analysis (M_{age} = 41.15, SD = 13.68; 58.9% female, 39.7% male, .9% non-binary, .4% preferred not to disclose). This study had a 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 2 (secondhand product label: symbolic framing vs. baseline) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were first asked to imagine that they were looking to purchase a birthday gift for their friend (giver condition) or that their friend was looking to purchase a

birthday gift for them (receiver condition). All participants then saw two Italian leather wallets (a product category where vintage positioning is realistic) from the same brand, where one was a brand-new 2025 edition ($120) and the other was a secondhand 2009 edition ($80). The eBay product page of the new wallet described the condition as "new with tags" whereas the product page of the secondhand wallet described the condition as "pre-owned."

We manipulated the framing of the secondhand wallet by varying the seller-provided description. In the baseline condition, the secondhand wallet was described as gently used and featured a "preowned" badge, whereas in the symbolic framing condition, the secondhand wallet was described as marking the decade it was released and featured a "vintage" badge. To ensure comparable current lack of accessibility of a new product sold in the marketplace across conditions, the secondhand wallet was noted as having been released over a decade ago and no longer sold as new in both conditions (see web appendix O for details). Participants then indicated which of the two leather wallets they would prefer [to purchase as a birthday gift for their friend / their friend to purchase as a birthday gift for them] (1 = a secondhand wallet, 0 = a brand-new wallet). They completed the attention check in which they identified their gifting role.

Results

A binary logistic regression[11] regressing gift preference (1 = secondhand, 0 = new) on gifting role, secondhand product label, and their interaction revealed a significant interaction (b = .85, SE = .31, z = 2.78, p = .006, OR = 2.33). See figure 4, following References. Simple effects tests were utilized to examine the pattern of the interaction. Givers were significantly less likely than receivers to choose a secondhand product in the baseline condition (giver = 30.1% vs.

[11] Our preregistered analysis plan inadvertently specified an ANOVA test. However, since our dependent variable is a binary choice, an ANOVA test is not appropriate. We thus conducted and reported the binary logistic regression.

receiver = 52.9%; b = –.96, SE = .22, z = –4.39, p < .001, OR = .38), replicating the secondhand gifting aversion effect. However, there was no significant giver-receiver discrepancy when the secondhand product was symbolically labeled as vintage (giver = 59.3% vs. receiver = 62.0%; b = –.12, SE = .21, z = –.54, p = .590, OR = .89). Examined differently, givers were significantly more willing to gift a secondhand product when it was symbolically labeled as vintage compared to baseline (baseline = 30.1% vs. symbolic framing = 59.3%; b = 1.22, SE = .21, z = 5.69, p < .001, OR = 3.39). Receivers were also marginally significantly more willing to receive a secondhand product when it was symbolically labeled as vintage compared to baseline (baseline = 52.9% vs. symbolic framing = 62.0%; b = .37, SE = .22, z = 1.72, p = .085, OR = 1.45).

Discussion

Study 7 demonstrates that framing secondhand products to highlight symbolic value, such as labeling the product as vintage, mitigates givers' aversion to giving secondhand items as gifts (H4a). When a secondhand product was labeled as vintage, givers were as likely as receivers to select the secondhand product as a gift. Importantly, the current findings also offer practical insights for practitioners seeking to promote secondhand gifting. By shifting givers' attention to vintage value, the framing may help alleviate givers' concerns about the symbolic-signaling potential of the secondhand product, making these products more acceptable gifts to givers. Of course, it is worth noting practical limitations of the vintage label, such as that it may not be applied realistically to all product categories. Accordingly, one potential implication discussed further in the General Discussion is for marketers to consider developing symbolic framing for secondhand products that can be applied realistically to their focal product category.

STUDY 8: A THEORETICAL TEST CASE OF HIGHLY DURABLE PRODUCTS

Study 8 examines a theoretical test case, examining whether secondhand gifting aversion would persist even when the product and its messaging eliminate product-focused concerns (i.e., performance and appearance) for a secondhand good, while leaving the symbolic-signaling concerns associated with its secondhand status unaddressed. Thus, as a theoretical test case, study 8 utilized a highly durable product category (stone bookends), comparing instances where the product's ideal hallmark appearance is framed as blemished (geode bookends) or unblemished (marble bookends). If secondhand gifting aversion is driven primarily by product-focused concerns, it should be attenuated for these highly durable products, especially when the ideal appearance is framed as naturally blemished. By contrast, if the aversion is driven primarily by symbolic-signaling concerns, it should persist even for highly durable products for which appearance-based concerns have been eliminated (H4b).

Method

Participants and Design. As preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/w6au4b.pdf), 465 undergraduates from a U.S. university in the northeast completed this study as part of a bundle of unrelated studies in exchange for course credit. Of these participants, 445 participants passed the attention check and were retained for analyses as preregistered (M_{age} = 19.87, SD = 1.02; 54.8% female, 44.9% male, .2% preferred not to say). This study had a 2 (gifting role: giver vs. receiver) × 2 (ideal appearance framing: blemished vs. non-blemished) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were first told to imagine that they were looking to purchase a birthday gift for their friend (giver condition) or that their friend was looking to purchase a birthday gift for them (receiver condition). They read about stone bookends sold on Amazon, where the brand-new option was sold at $37.99, while the used option in like new condition was sold at $30.39. Critically, those in the blemished framing were informed that the bookends were

made of geodes and that ideal geode bookends have, as a chief hallmark, some blemishes or imperfections. Those in the non-blemished framing condition were informed that the bookends were made of marble and that ideal marble bookends have, as a chief hallmark, no blemishes or imperfections (see web appendix P for details). Next, participants were asked to indicate which of the two bookends they would prefer [to purchase and give as a birthday gift for their friend / their friend to purchase and give as a birthday gift for them] (1 = definitely the brand-new bookends ($37.99), 7 = definitely the used (like new) bookends ($30.39)). Then, they answered a manipulation check item for ideal appearance framing, in which they were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement that the ideal [geode/marble] bookend has some blemishes or imperfections as a chief hallmark (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Finally, participants responded to the preregistered attention check item, in which they indicated their gifting role.

Results

The manipulation check for ideal appearance framing was successful, as indicated by participants in the blemished condition (M = 4.70, SD = 1.67) expressing significantly greater agreement that the ideal bookend has blemishes or imperfections than participants in the non-blemished condition (M = 3.10, SD = 1.63; $t(443) = 10.27$, $p < .001$, $d = .97$).

A two-way ANOVA on secondhand gift preference revealed a significant main effect of gifting role ($F(1, 441) = 24.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$), with givers (vs. receivers) reporting lower willingness to choose the used bookends as a gift (M_{giver} = 3.19, SD = 2.17 vs. $M_{receiver}$ = 4.16, SD = 2.06); a significant main effect of ideal appearance framing ($F(1, 441) = 8.98$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), with blemished (vs. non-blemished) framing resulting in a greater secondhand gift preference ($M_{blemished}$ = 3.95, SD = 2.19 vs. $M_{non\text{-}blemished}$ = 3.38, SD = 2.11); and no significant interaction between role and framing ($F(1, 441) = .08$, $p = .779$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$). See figure W2 in web

appendix P.

Discussion

Study 8 demonstrates that secondhand gifting aversion occurs even when product-focused concerns associated with performance and appearance are addressed, but symbolic-signaling concerns are not, providing further support for the primary role of symbolic-signaling. Specifically, while givers and receivers were both more receptive to secondhand gifts (vs. new gifts) if the ideal appearance of the product was framed as blemished (vs. non-blemished), as evidenced by the significant main effect of ideal appearance framing, the gap between givers and receivers persisted. Altogether, these findings thus provide further support for the primary role of symbolic-signaling, as secondhand gifting aversion can persist even when product-focused concerns about performance and appearance are minimal or non-existent.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Despite marketers and policymakers increasingly promoting secondhand gifting as it provides both a more sustainable and more affordable alternative to traditional gift giving, as well as the widespread availability of secondhand products for purchase (Forbes 2025; Wall Street Journal 2025; ThredUp 2025), we demonstrated a robust phenomenon wherein givers are more averse to buying secondhand products as gifts than receivers are to receiving secondhand gifts (H1), and than consumers are to purchasing secondhand products for themselves (study 4). This aversion was demonstrated across real-world secondary datasets (studies 1a–1b) and real-choice experiments (studies 2a–2b, 4). It generalized across different trade-offs (studies 2a–2b), information contexts (study 3a), secondhand product grades (study 3b), secondhand marketplace labels (study 3c), product categories and gifting occasions (all studies and supplemental studies

1–2, see web appendix J–K), and sample populations (U.S., U.K., and China). While multiply determined, a primary reason why this aversion arises is that relative to receivers, givers perceive secondhand (vs. new) gifts as conveying weaker symbolic signals about the giver (study 5, H2). Consistent with this account, secondhand gifting aversion is magnified within close (vs. distant) friendships (study 6, H3), attenuated for secondhand goods framed (vs. not) as having symbolic value (study 7, H4a) and persists even in a theoretical test case when concerns about a secondhand good's performance and appearance are minimal or non-existent (study 8, H4b).

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Our research offers key theoretical contributions and practical implications. First, we expand the literature on secondhand consumption. Existing secondhand consumption research has predominantly focused on psychological antecedents of purchasing secondhand products for personal use (e.g., Fuchs and Schreier 2023; Guiot and Roux 2010; Huang et al. 2017; Huang and Fishbach 2021; Padmavathy et al. 2019; Ross et al. 2023), such as environmental concerns (Turunen et al. 2020) and loneliness (Huang and Fishbach 2021). By contrast, we focus on barriers to purchasing secondhand products as gifts for *others*. Notably, we document a robust aversion to secondhand gifting using a multi-method approach that spanned both real-world data and consequential choices examining gift decisions with naturalistic trade-offs (e.g., against identical new alternatives), extending beyond prior work that found initial scenario-based evidence suggestive of secondhand gifting aversion in the context of stylized trade-offs with product size (Teigen et al. 2005) or receiver-taste-matching (Qiu and Lu 2025).

Second, this research contributes to the streams of literature on secondhand consumption and gift giving by offering a deeper and richer explanation of why secondhand gifting aversion arises. As part of a multiply-determined process, we identify symbolic signaling about the giver

as a key mechanism underlying secondhand gifting aversion. Prior research suggests that such an aversion may be associated with gifting norms favoring newness (Qiu and Lu 2025; Teigen et al. 2005). Our findings deepen and enrich the theoretical understanding of secondhand gifts by distinguishing between symbolic-signaling concerns versus product-focused concerns as a primary driver; in doing so, our findings also suggest that perceived violation of gifting norms may partly reflect downstream manifestations of symbolic-signaling concerns, more so than of product-focused concerns. In other words, our findings suggest that the norm favoring new gifts suggested in prior literature may itself be grounded more in concerns about what gifts communicate about the giver rather than in concerns about the product itself. In addition, while secondhand gifting aversion is multiply determined, we also empirically addressed several potential alternative accounts that seem unlikely to be key drivers of secondhand gifting aversion, such as givers' uncertainty about the veracity of secondhand product grade descriptions (as products were available for physical inspection in study 4) or concerns that secondhand items are not returnable, as the aversion persisted even when neither the new nor the secondhand gift option was returnable in incentive-compatible designs (studies 2a–2b and 4).

Third, our findings contribute to the literature on socially responsible gifting (Cavanaugh, Gino, and Fitzsimons 2015; Das et al. 2021; Green, Tinson, and Peloza 2016) by identifying a theoretical lens that could potentially differentiate between different types of socially responsible gifts. While prior research suggests that givers may be receptive to purchasing some socially responsible gifts, such as those with ethical attributes (Cavanaugh et al. 2015; Das et al. 2021) or corporate social responsibility features (Green et al. 2016), our supplemental study 3 (web appendix Q) reveals that givers remain averse to purchasing secondhand gifts, despite their alignment with socially responsible values (Guiot and Roux 2010). By offering a symbolic-

signaling account, our work provides a potential theoretical basis for understanding when consumers will be receptive to socially responsible gifts, suggesting that such receptivity depends not only on social responsibility cues alone, but also on whether those responsibility cues undermine or enhance the symbolic signals of the gifts.

Our research also provides practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and consumers. For marketers in secondhand markets (e.g., eBay, ThredUp), our findings suggest that in contexts in which gift giving is especially common (e.g., particular times of the year, or when consumers search for "gifts" on their platforms; Liu et al. 2019), interventions grounded in our theorizing may be needed to promote secondhand gifting. Marketers may benefit from using intervention strategies that enhance the positive symbolic-signaling value of secondhand goods, and we tested symbolic framing using the "vintage" label as one such intervention (study 7). Other labels, such as "estate" might similarly enhance the positive symbolic-signaling value of secondhand goods. By contrast, messages that merely minimize concerns about the appearance or performance of a secondhand product, without improving symbolic meaning, are less likely to be effective (study 8). Likewise, from a policy perspective, efforts to promote secondhand gifting have emerged as part of broader initiatives to encourage socially responsible behavior. Yet, not all forms of socially responsible gifting may be viewed similarly, particularly in their relative appeal to givers versus receivers (supplemental study 3). Rather than solely emphasizing the socially responsible aspects of secondhand gifting, policymakers should consider encouraging givers to reframe secondhand gifts in terms of their positive symbolic signals (e.g., vintage value). Finally, givers themselves may benefit from recognizing their tendency to misperceive the symbolic signals of secondhand gifts as weaker, such that their aversion to secondhand gifting may be misplaced, helping them make better gifting decisions.

Open Questions and Future Directions

Our findings offer several directions for future investigation. First, our studies focus on the decision-making process involved in purchasing secondhand products from the marketplace as gifts. Future work could explore domains that are similar yet conceptually distinct, both in gifting contexts and more broadly in other contexts involving choosing for or sharing products with others (Belk 2010; Liu et al. 2019). In gifting contexts, for instance, consumers might decide whether to pass along a gift they previously received (i.e., regifting, Adams, Flynn, and Norton 2012). While both the focal phenomenon and regifting focus on gifting items that are not new, the gifting context differs in important ways. First, regifting involves an original giver whose feelings may be at stake (e.g., concerns about offending the original giver, Adams et al. 2012), whereas purchasing secondhand products as gifts from the marketplace involves no such original giver for the focal giver to be concerned about offending, mitigating this particular concern. Second, while regifting involves repurposing an item already received, which is a more passive choice, secondhand gifting involves intentionally selecting and purchasing an item, potentially signaling more of the giver's relationship valuation or their personal characteristics such as taste. Third, whereas the regifter has a prior personal relationship with the item (having received or used it themselves, and thus potentially affecting its product-focused aspects), the secondhand giver purchases from a marketplace seller, with any product-focused concerns stemming from other consumers' prior ownership or use rather than the giver's own.

Outside of gift giving, future research could also extend research on secondhand items to other choosing-for-others contexts, such as everyday favors, joint consumption, or caregiving (Liu et al. 2019). For instance, research could examine how consumers navigate offering personally owned items or temporarily sharing them with others either as favors or as part of a

marketplace exchange, where distinct mechanisms might be involved, such as empathy (Ross, Kim, and Meloy 2026). In doing so, future work might also consider a wider range of close relationships (Wight et al. 2022). Although relationships with close friends, spouses, or children may all be close, partners and children may be perceived as part of the self (Joy 2001) and/or same household. Consequently, secondhand gifting aversion may be stronger in close friendships (study 6), but possibly attenuated in close familial relationships (e.g., spouses, children) where the self-other boundary is more blurred. Examining such distinctions, including contexts such as parents purchasing secondhand items for young children (Wight et al. 2024) or spouses (Belk 2010) either as gifts or everyday choices within a household, could offer valuable contributions.

Finally, given the importance of understanding decisions about secondhand purchases on retail platforms, decisions which are made by givers, our investigation primarily focuses on the giver's perspective in terms of psychological barriers to secondhand gifting (e.g., lay beliefs pilot study) and benchmarking the aversion relative to receiver preference (studies 2a–3c, and 5–8) and choices for personal use (study 4). However, future research might instead focus on the receiver's perspective, to fully explore why receivers are so open to secondhand gifting, such that some even request them on registries (study 1b). Perhaps as part of a multiply-determined process, possibilities may include that receivers prefer givers spend less money to buy secondhand (vs. new) versions, due to other-focused caring about givers' finances, self-focused concerns about pressure to reciprocate (Belk 1996; Sherry 1983), or strong environmental values.

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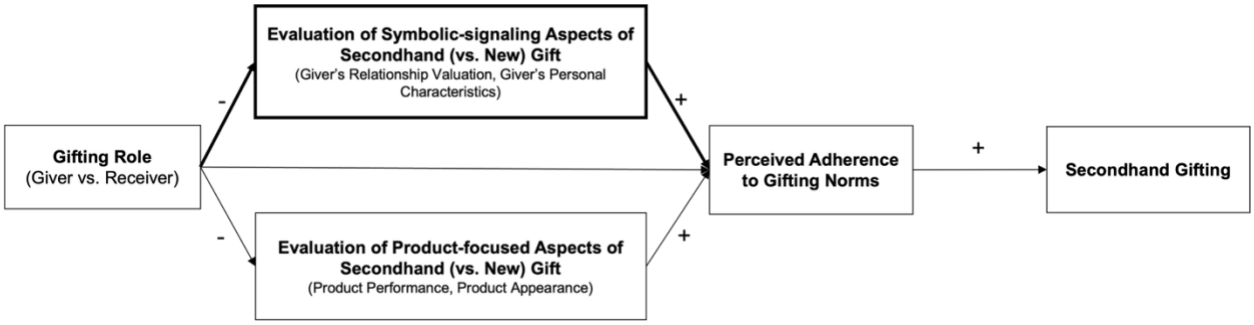
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TABLES AND FIGURES

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL



Note. Negative pathways indicate lower values anticipated among givers than receivers. While not depicted with additional pathways for simplicity of the conceptual diagram, the proximal drivers—symbolic-signaling aspects and product-focused aspects—can lead to aversion to secondhand gifting both directly and indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms in our conceptualization.

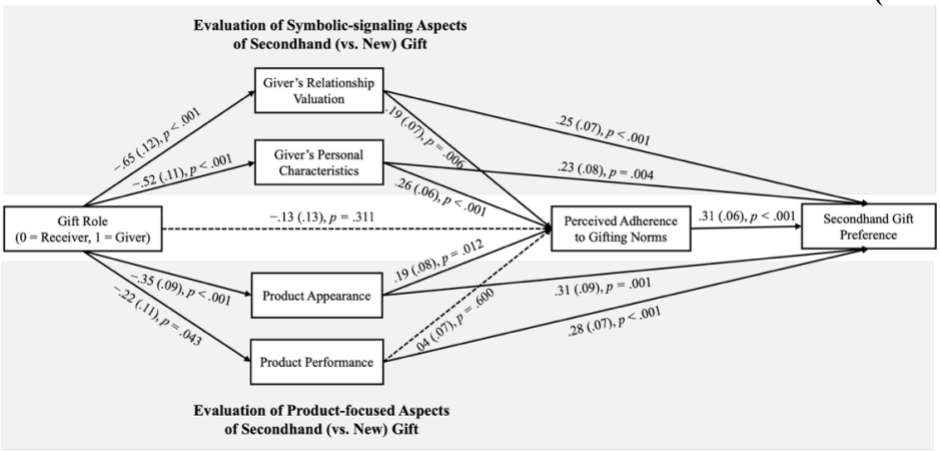
TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF STUDIES

Study	Data Source	Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable	Key Finding(s)
Pilot	Connect	N/A (Giver Only)	N/A (Open-ended responses)	**Initial exploratory insights via open-ended responses:** Initial insights into potential mechanisms and moderators were elicited through open-ended questions to givers.
1A*	Secondary	"Gift" vs. "Product" Search Terms	Behavior-based search results	**Algorithmic evidence in the marketplace:** Fewer secondhand search results on eBay for "gift" (vs. "product") search terms.
1B	Secondary	Secondhand vs. New Requested Gifts on Registry	Whether the gift in the gift registry was gifted (Yes vs. No)	**Real-world gift registry evidence:** Givers are less likely to fulfill gift requests for items categorized as secondhand (vs. new).
2A	Naturally-occurring dyads	Giver vs. Receiver	Incentive-compatible gift choice (5-star secondhand option vs. 4-star brand-new option)	**Real-choice dyadic evidence:** Givers (vs. receivers) are more averse to choosing secondhand products (higher star rating but priced the same vs. new products) as gifts in naturally-occurring dyads.
2B*	Lab-assembled dyads	Giver vs. Receiver	Incentive-compatible gift choice (Used $5 vs. Brand-new $10)	**Real-choice dyadic evidence:** Givers (vs. receivers) are more averse to choosing secondhand products (identical in functionality but cheaper vs. new products) as gifts in lab-assembled dyads.
3A*	Prolific	Giver vs. Receiver, Information Contexts	Purchase interest as a gift (1= not at all, 7 = very much)	**Generalizability across information contexts:** Givers (vs. receivers) are more averse to secondhand products as gifts regardless of full or limited information about the choice set.
3B*	Prolific	Giver vs. Receiver, Varied Secondhand Product Grades	Gift preference (1 = brand-new, more expensive; 7 = cheaper secondhand)	**Generalizability across varied product grades:** Givers (vs. receivers) are more averse to secondhand (vs. new) products as gifts across varied secondhand product grades.
3C*	Connect	Giver vs. Receiver, Varied Secondhand Labels	Gift preference (1 = brand-new, more expensive; 7 = cheaper secondhand)	**Generalizability across varied secondhand labels:** Givers (vs. receivers) are more averse to secondhand (vs. new) products as gifts across varied secondhand labels.
4*	Lab	Choosing for Others vs. Choosing for Self	Incentive-compatible product choice (Used $5 vs. Brand-new $10)	**Real-choice evidence in a physical store and with choices for self as a baseline condition:** Consumers are more averse to choosing secondhand (vs. new) products as gifts for others (vs. purchases for themselves), even with physical inspection opportunities.
5*	Lab	Giver vs. Receiver	Gift preference (1 = brand-new, more expensive; 7 = cheaper secondhand)	**Parallel-serial mediation evidence:** Secondhand gifting aversion is multiply determined, but a primary driver is differences in perceived symbolic signals about the giver, operating both directly and indirectly via perceived adherence to gifting norms.
6*	Lab	Giver vs. Receiver, Friendship Closeness	Gift preference (1 = brand-new, more expensive; 7 = cheaper secondhand)	**Process-consistent moderator:** Secondhand gifting aversion is magnified for a close (vs. distant) friend, consistent with the notion that symbolic signaling is more important in close friendships.
7*	Prolific	Giver vs. Receiver, Secondhand Symbolic Framing	Gift choice (brand-new, more expensive vs. cheaper secondhand)	**Process-consistent and market-relevant moderator:** Secondhand gifting aversion is mitigated when a secondhand product is framed as having enhanced symbolic value (e.g., vintage), consistent with the notion that such framing reduces givers' concerns that secondhand status conveys a weaker symbolic signal.

8*	Lab	Giver vs. Receiver, Product Appearance Framing	Gift preference (1 = brand-new, more expensive; 7 = cheaper secondhand)	**Theoretical test case:** Secondhand gifting aversion persists when product-focused concerns are minimized (i.e., for a geode bookend, a highly durable product with blemishes framed as part of the product's ideal appearance), suggesting that symbolic-signaling concerns alone can drive secondhand gifting aversion.

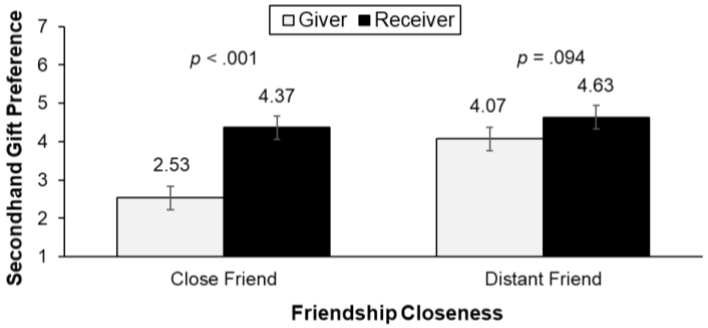
Note: * indicates preregistered studies.

FIGURE 2: PARALLEL-SERIAL MEDIATION MODEL RESULTS (STUDY 5)



Note. Path coefficients are unstandardized estimates (standard errors in parentheses). Solid lines indicate statistically significant pathways, and dashed lines indicate non-significant pathways.

FIGURE 3: SECONDHAND GIFT PREFERENCE ACROSS FRIENDSHIP CLOSENESS AND GIFTING ROLE CONDITIONS (STUDY 6)



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals of the mean.

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE CHOOSING THE SECONDHAND OPTION BY GIFTING ROLE AND SECONDHAND PRODUCT LABEL (STUDY 7)

