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Negotiations with Sharing, Volunteerism and Second-Hand Goods Use as a University Event in Türkiye: "Yeniden Kullan" Project

Abstract

"Yeniden Kullan" (YK) ("Reuse") events have highlighted alternative consumption habits and environmental consciousness since 2017 at the Social Sciences University of Ankara. This biannual second-hand goods exhibition promotes waste reduction, sustainable consumption, and a sharing culture within the university. This study analyzes how YK challenges traditional values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors related to second-hand use. We used focus group and participant observation analyzing perceptions of YK volunteers on sharing and usage of second-hand items. Utilizing relevant theoretical and empirical literature on production and consumption, we found the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory helpful in our analysis. The results indicate that while the changes are not substantial, volunteers are beginning to internalize second-hand use as the norm, influenced by social connections, economic factors, and ecological concerns. The horizontal sharing framework of the initiative facilitates this transformation by challenging vertical, hierarchical charity models prevalent in Türkiye. YK exemplifies how micro and university-based projects may incorporate sustainability and cultural change by serving as a collaborative social space and a helpful ecological intervention. The study contributes to the sociology of consumption and change by focusing on the underexplored dynamics of ecological and second-hand practices in Türkiye, emphasizing their broader implications for sustainable and shared consumption.

Keywords: Second-hand, Volunteering, Solidarity, Ecological Consumption, Value-belief-norm theory.

Türkiye'de Bir Üniversite Etkinliği Olarak Paylaşım, Gönüllülük ve İkinci El Eşya Kullanımı Üzerine Tartışmalar: "Yeniden Kullan"

Öz

"Yeniden Kullan" (YK) etkinliği, 2017 yılından bu yana Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi'nde alternatif tüketim alışkanlıklarını ve çevre bilincini öne çıkarmaktadır. Yılda iki kez düzenlenen bu ikinci el eşya sergisi, atıkların azaltılmasını, sürdürülebilir tüketimi ve üniversite bünyesinde paylaşım kültürünü teşvik etmektedir. Bu çalışma, YK'nin ikinci el kullanımına ilişkin geleneksel değerleri, inançları, normları ve davranışları nasıl sorguladığını analiz etmektedir. Analizde üretim ve tüketim ilişkisi ilgili teorik ve ampirik literatürden ve Değer-Inanç-Norm (VBN) teorisinden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışmada, YK gönüllülerinin ikinci el eşyalarla ilgili sosyal dinamiklerini, motivasyonlarını ve algılarını değerlendirmek için nitel teknikler kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlara göre, değişim sınırlı bir ölçekte kalsa da, gönüllüler sosyal bağlar, ekonomik faktörler ve ekolojik kaygıların etkisiyle ikinci el kullanımını bir norm olarak içselleştirmeye başlamışlardır. Girişimin yatay paylaşım bağlamı, Türkiye'de yaygın olan dikey, hiyerarşik yardım modellerine alternatifler oluşması konusunda bir dönüşüme alan açmaktadır. YK, üniversite temelli projeler gibi küçük çaplı faaliyetlerin sürdürülebilirlik ve kültürel değişimi nasıl içerebileceğini göstermektedir. Bu şekilde işbirlikçi bir sosyal alan ve etkili bir ekolojik müdahale olarak YK önemli bir örnektir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki ekolojik ve ikinci el uygulamaların keşfedilmemiş dinamiklerine odaklanmakta, sürdürülebilir ve paylaşımcı tüketim için daha geniş kapsamlı çıkarımları ile tüketim ve değişim sosyolojisine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İkinci el, Gönüllülük, Dayanışma, Ekolojik tüketim, Değer-inanç-norm teorisi.

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1. Introduction to the 'Yeniden Kullan' Initiative: Promoting Ecological Awareness and Alternative Consumption

At the Social Sciences University of Ankara (ASBU/SSUA), the "Yeniden Kullan" ("Reuse") project has been organized biannually since 2017. This second-hand goods exhibition seeks to foster ecological awareness, cultivate a culture of sharing, promote sustainable consumption, and minimize waste by redistributing unused items within the university community. The initiative, coordinated by academic and administrative staff, involves all university members—including students—in roles such as donating, taking items, and preparing the exhibition space. By November 2024, the project has been held 11 times, demonstrating a significant and growing institutional tradition. As faculty members, we have participated in almost all Yeniden Kullan events since the first exhibition in 2017 (Yeniden Kullan: Ekolojik Bilinci Geliştirme ve Sosyal Paylaşım Projesi, u.d.).

Each event starts with an introductory speech highlighting consumption-related ecological and social issues. The exhibition operates on a principle of horizontal solidarity, allowing any university member to donate or receive items without charges or restrictions, breaking from traditional hierarchical charity models. Each event is announced via university email, and announcements emphasize the goals of protecting nature, normalizing the use of second-hand goods, and fostering solidarity. The organizational process involves collecting donations through these announcements, followed by volunteer students inspecting, sorting, and displaying the goods on the day of the event. Volunteers also engage in activities such as decorating the space and collaboratively managing the event, fostering a sense of fulfillment and connection. These activities contribute to the unique role of Yeniden Kullan (we will hitherto refer to the project as YK) as both a practical ecological initiative and a collaborative social space.

In a rapidly changing world marked by escalating climate crises and environmental degradation, our collective concerns about nature, production, and consumption are undergoing a fundamental transformation. The traditional, consumption-driven economic models are increasingly questioned as societies confront the ecological limits of unchecked production and waste. In this shifting landscape, the meaning attached to consumption is also evolving—buying more or expensive items is no longer inherently valued as a sign of status or success. Instead, practices that emphasize protecting nature, minimizing waste, and fostering solidarity with others are gaining moral and social significance. Sustainable consumption practices, especially those centered around reuse, sharing, and volunteer-driven initiatives, are being redefined as meaningful responses to global ecological and social challenges.

Although ecological awareness in consumption has become a rapidly expanding field in recent years, its sociological investigation remains limited. Much of the focus has been on environmental science, policy, or economics, leaving a gap in understanding how norms, values, and social relationships are being reshaped by ecological concerns. Yet sustainable consumption involves more than just behavior, it reflects changing cultural norms related to second-hand use, attitudes toward waste, and the social meanings of solidarity. In this sense, sociological perspectives are crucial to fully grasp the transformative potential of ecological awareness in everyday life.

This study aims to explore how participation in the YK project influences participants' perceptions, values, and behaviors concerning second-hand consumption. It seeks to understand how ecological, economic, and social motivations interact within the context of a horizontal sharing practice. This study investigates how participants navigate the social and cultural meanings attributed to second-hand use within the YK project, and examines the role that volunteering plays in reshaping consumption-related values and normalizing second-hand practices in Türkiye. By analyzing these dynamics, the research aims to address a significant gap in empirical studies on ecological and alternative consumption in the Turkish context, while also contributing to broader sociological discussions surrounding sustainable and solidarity-based consumption.

Our research question is; "in which ways does the participants' engagement with YK encourages them to question and, to some extent, transform existing cultural norms surrounding second-hand use?" While traditional values and stigmas persist, we anticipate that new ecological motivations will emerge alongside economic and cultural considerations, leading to a gradual but meaningful shift in how second-hand goods are perceived and practiced within this university setting.

The sociology of consumption highlights the social significance of material goods and the processes of meaning-making associated with buying, paying, and donating. Sustainable consumption, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of balancing ecological concerns with the equitable use of natural resources. Our research specifically focuses on the social acceptance of ecological awareness practices, such as sharing second-hand items, within the framework of discourse analysis. In this context, we observe that the combined influence of sociological and environmental concerns reflects not a marginal, but rather a gradual and meaningful transformation in participants' attitudes and behaviors. Through this study, we aim to contribute to the field by addressing these nuanced dynamics and exploring their implications for sustainable and shared consumption practices in Türkiye.

2. Literature

This research begins by exploring sociological perspectives on commodities, focusing on production. While consumption is also examined, traditional studies have largely emphasized macro-level analyses, often overlooking the agency of individual users. These studies primarily focus on mass culture and consumer society. However, with the introduction of postmodernity and the cultural turn, the agency of consumers has become prominent in sociological discourse. This development has raised consumer behavior, conventions, and values to the leading edge of commodity studies. This viewpoint has also generated new ideas and conversations on sustainable consumption and the usage of second-hand commodities, which promoted the integration of environmental concerns with consumption patterns.

Furthermore, ideas of solidarity and charity, like gifting and bartering, are connected with the ecological consequences of second-hand use and sharing behaviors. The literature review of this study strives to focus on research conducted in Türkiye on environmental issues relevant to sharing and second-hand use. Based on volunteers' experiences participating in YK activities, the fieldwork component analyzes attitudes and views around second-hand usage in Türkiye. The value-belief-norm framework, which defines environmental consumer behavior, will be used to assess the normalization process of second-hand use.

2.1. Theoretical Discussions on Production and Consumption

Studies about the phenomenon of the commodity in sociology originated with studies on production (Marx, 1977: 7; Weber, 2012: 93), and in these studies, scholars of classical sociology referred to consumption only indirectly. Namely, classical sociological perspectives focused on the production process, distribution of wages, the distribution of profit, and regulations on work but not on the consumer related issues such as consumers' experiences or their choice and possibility of being an active subject (Blue, 2017: 265-266).

Then, even though studies on consumption gained focus, they were still regarded with a macro perspective. Among those perspectives, the sociology of consumption included two key approaches and positions: mass culture and consumer culture. Focusing on the impact of structure on consumption, the pioneer studies of the Frankfurt School discuss consumer culture within the "mass culture" theory (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 95). In this view, consuming individuals have been considered relatively passive victims. Consumption is structured by the powerful elite and the culture they produce in line with their own interests (Bottomore, 2003: 45; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002:105). The effect of cultural turn and postmodern thought drawn attention to the creative potential of "consumer culture" in the 1980s (Jameson, 1998: 110; Featherstone, 2007: xi). Studies on consumer culture emphasizing the agency of individuals gained attention in the field. The concept of consumer culture focuses on attributing consumers' meaning to the goods they choose and use. It includes identity construction with different, selected combinations, styles, and symbols. Now, goods are not only about their use value and exchange value; their symbolic value has become an issue to deal with in the literature (Blue, 2017: 268).

Coming to the symbolic meanings of the commodity, we can say that, as Baudrillard puts it in *The Consumer Society* (1999: 192), we consume not only goods per se but also meaningful signals, such as texts or visuals. For consumers to make informed consumption decisions, they must be able to "read" the meanings within the consumption system, which refers to inferring what they represent. Consumers understand what it means to choose one product over another since we are all familiar with the "code" and what it represents. Therefore, the definition of a commodity now depends more on what it represents than how it is used. Furthermore, their significance is determined by how they relate to the overall system of commodities and indications rather than by what they perform. For example, the meaning of using a branded good represents power and dignity while using a second-hand product is coded with poverty and vulnerability, according to our FGD discussions. For the YK participants the "code" that second-hand products represent is under transformation, and among the new symbolic meanings attributed to using second-hand commodities are protecting nature and having an environmental consciousness.

Additionally, consumption has different types: consumption as an experience, consumption as a means of integration with a social group family, consumption as a game, and consumption as a symbol (Saf, 2016: 66). YK may be considered a social activity, close to the definition as consumption as a means of integration. Furthermore, Gabriel and Lang aim to overcome "demonize or romanticize the consumer" (2006: 2) and explain different approaches that define the consumer subject differently depending on definitions of their identity and agency: chooser, communicator, explorer, identity-seeker, hedonist, artist, victim, rebel, activist, and citizen.

The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory developed by Stern and colleagues explains how values, beliefs, and norms influence individuals' engagement in environmental activism. According to this theory, individuals' fundamental values shape their beliefs, which in turn guide social norms, ultimately leading these norms to drive behaviors toward environmental action. Within this theoretical framework, egoistic, altruistic, and environmental (biospheric) values are linked to ecological worldviews and norms that demand specific behaviors. We use this theory to understand the change of norms considering sustainable and environmental consumption. In this context, personal norms are highlighted as playing a mediating role in influencing environmentally conscious purchasing habits (Stern et al., 1999: 81).

In Yang et al.'s (2024) work, values are egoistic, altruistic, and environmental (biospheric), while beliefs represent ecological worldviews and norms that demand particular behaviors. Corresponding to this, Dabas and Whang (2022) argue that in some situations, the social value of sustainable consumption may be greater than the environmental value. In their study, Kim and Seock (2019) provide evidence by emphasizing the mediation function of personal norms in influencing environmentally conscious purchasing practices.

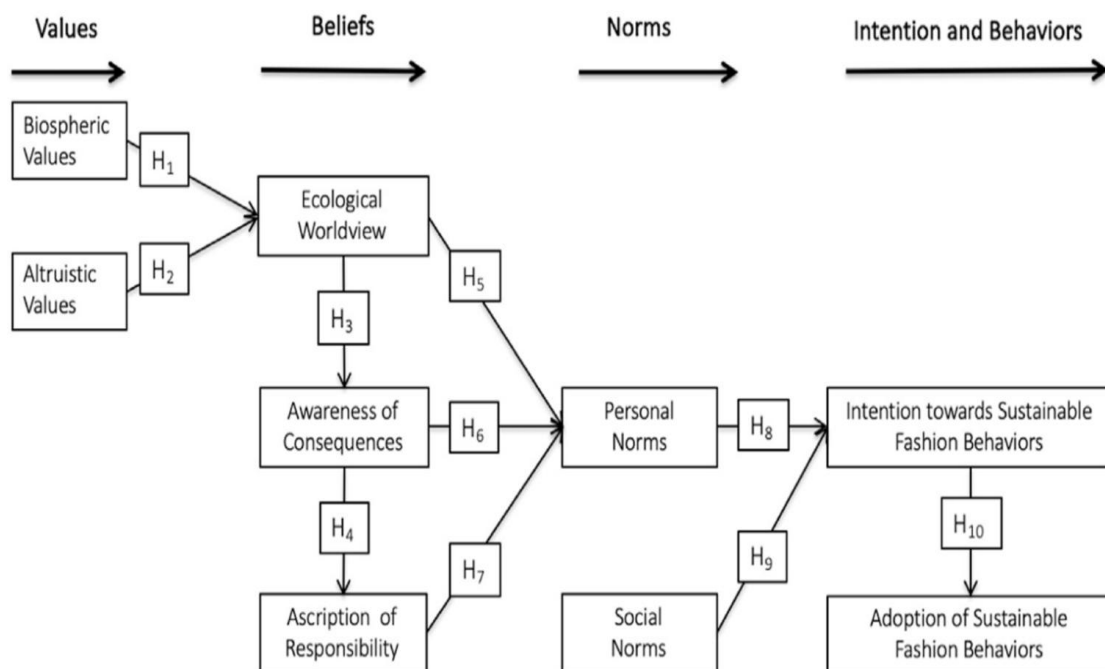


Figure 1: VBN Theoretical Framework (Yang et al. 2024: 184)

The figure developed by Yang et al. (2024: 184) represents the theoretical framework as part of the VBN (Value-Belief-Norm) model. Though we have not utilized all the subconcepts in this theoretical framework, we find it helpful to discuss the relation between values, beliefs, norms, intentions, and behaviors. In the context of Türkiye and within the exemplifying case of YK, we observe that values and beliefs are emerging at this stage while norms are still in the process of being established. Indeed, what becomes evident here is that none of the participants had completely abandoned the purchase of new (unused) items—at least, this was not explicitly stated, and it remains a point that could be further explored through direct questioning (e.g., “Do you no longer buy any new products from stores?”). In fact, one participant openly remarked that they had brought unused items from home to donate, which in turn created a sense of moral relief that now allowed them to purchase something new. This means buying

something new is still a dominant norm while values are in process of changing. Once the norms such as this one are further developed, we anticipate that intentions and behaviors aligned with these norms may also strengthen. However, this progression does not necessarily follow a clear and linear trajectory. Instead, we think that values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors interact with and influence each other at various levels mutually in a circular fashion, creating a dynamic and interdependent process.

We chose the Value-Belief-Norm Theory for its ability to explain how individual environmental concern turns into personal norms and behavioral intentions. While the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory provides a structured framework for understanding how ecological values shape beliefs and lead to sustainable behaviors, evaluating it alongside alternative sociological frameworks is significant. Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1961: 13–15; Blau, 1964: 91–94) centers on cost-benefit calculations and reciprocal motivations in social relations. It offers valuable perspectives into volunteering and second-hand consumption by emphasizing perceived rewards and interpersonal obligations. In contrast, Bourdieu's theory of practice (2013: 78–95) explains such behaviors through the interplay of habitus, capital, and field, highlighting how social positions (as class and status) and embodied dispositions shape consumption. While these theories are valuable, this study adopts the VBN framework for its capacity to address internal, value-driven transformations rather than strategic exchanges or class-based behavioral patterns. In the context of "Yeniden Kullan", VBN is particularly suited to examine how participants internalize ecological norms and reconfigure their consumption behavior through moral commitment rather than through calculated self-interest or the pursuit of social status.

2.2. Ecological Concerns and Sustainable Consumption

The discussion on sustainable consumption revolves around recycling, product disposal, and supporting second-hand use. According to Burgazoğlu et al., historically, production and consumption practices were very different before the development of modern society, and people only discarded their used goods when they got old and barely functional. However, in modern society, overproduction and overconsumption are among main contributors of environmental pollution. Therefore, the overconsumption culture has created a new issue with using, exchanging, and donating used goods (2024: 4). Besides individual choices, industrial mass production and overconsumption have increased ecological concerns, movements, and environmental difficulties. These actions have resulted in exploiting natural resources, pollution, and environmental damage, underscoring the pressing need for sustainable solutions. This circumstance also sparked social concerns about conserving the environment through alternative consumption practices, primarily the sharing and using of used goods.

The choice of motivations for consumption also leads to sustainability awareness. Karaca expresses that consumers today are increasingly aware that their consumption decisions can help ensure a sustainable environment by promoting responsible consumption (2019: 150), as excessive and unsustainable consumption is a major contributor to environmental degradation (Blue, 2017: 272). As a sociologically significant phenomenon, the usage of second-hand goods is deeply related to the social, economic, and political issues that impact the individuals involved in this circulation. People's habits and motivations for purchasing and utilizing used goods vary depending on their time and location. The concept of "sharing culture" encompasses more than just the exchange of products. It represents a greater understanding

of other people, supporting relationships, cooperation, initiative, and a readiness to lend a hand. According to Light and Miskelly, it also helps people create a shared identity (2015: 55). In this setting, participants work together to rethink the social and cultural implications of reusing products.

By participating in these activities, people directly help change the beliefs and conventions of society around sharing. Their actions subvert traditional norms and integrate contemporary sharing strategies, ultimately changing how people view consumption. The approach redefines the symbolic worth of products and services, focusing on social and ecological issues. Making conscious choices to consume responsibly and giving preference to products that are fairly traded, cleanly produced, and used within reasonable bounds are all part of sustainable consumption. This involves adopting second-hand products while keeping moral and environmental concerns in mind. Sustainable consumption encourages behaviors that support individual and societal well-being by attempting to balance ecological integrity and social responsibility.

Second-hand items can be viewed as a component of a more significant movement toward sustainability, even though they are frequently interpreted as signs of social standing or financial necessity. In addition to being purely ecological, this movement involves the normalization of behaviors that go against traditional consumption patterns, which have an attitude of labeling second-hand items as used by poor people only. According to Ilmonen (2001: 9), people's experiences with used items are frequently influenced by their personal choices on lifestyle and cultural significance, as well as by established social routines, habits, and ordinary, everyday consumption. These themes frequently come up in our focus groups on used goods. Indeed, in YK, the code of second-hand goods must be tackled to understand the representations adopted by individuals who participated. Indeed, commodities are now valued not for their function but for what they represent within a more extensive system of symbols and meanings since their significance comes from their relationship to other commodities, not their practical use (Baudrillard, 1999: 191-192).

Binanchi and Birturitsle (2010) divide disposal practices into three economic disposal categories: selling through e-bay, giving away to family and friends, and donating to charity. In addition to sharing activities with individuals from personal networks, the sharing economy includes borrowing, renting, and giving away to strangers. Even in Türkiye, the first category, "economic disposal such as selling," has been introduced recently, and it has also helped to normalize the use of second-hand use. However, as in the second and third categories, giving away and donation behaviors are more common in Türkiye. We claim that YK, as a platform in the second category, enables space for the behavior of giving away by extending the sharing circle from "family and friends" to all members of a particular university. Therefore, it enables the possibility of paving the way towards a community and a sharing culture formation.

The sharing economy plays a significant role in how commodities are consumed and circulated, and it is inherently related to alternative consumption patterns, such as sustainable consumption practices. According to Abdalla et al. (2023: 3), the sharing economy is an ecosystem based on renting, borrowing, and sharing personal property, frequently through digital platforms. Like YK, the sharing economy allows people to create and maintain a sense of community while facilitating the exchange of money for commodities. Trenz et al. argues that

for many sharing economy users, this sense of belonging and support from others is an essential source of motivation (2018).

As previously stated, the numerous exchanges of the sharing economy, including gifts, barter, and presents, are examined in administration and economic disciplines; however, our research also underlines the importance of these exchanges' sociological and anthropological dimensions. We mainly argue consumption with a non-cash perspective, as the studies of Mauss and Malinowski emphasize the cultural meaning of in-kind exchanges of things (Mallard, 2019: 68). Anthropologists Homans and Blau concentrated on the reciprocal and sequential exchange process in the 1950s while Malinowski and Mauss highlighted the ceremonial responsibility of gift-giving. According to Emerson, power is the most crucial element in the social exchange process (Hall, 2003, 292). Power, in this context, is not a fixed possession but a dynamic outcome of dependency relations between actors. In a relationship, the more one party depends on the other for important resources or outcomes, the more power the other party obtains. Thus, power emerges from imbalanced exchanges, where one actor has more to offer or is less dependent. According to this theory, social exchange is no longer understood as equal reciprocity but rather as a more strategic, hierarchical interaction in which power and influence become inherent in social ties.

In Türkiye, the primary motivations for people getting involved with the participation economy are to provide solidarity (65%), save money and create additional income (67%), and protect the environment (64%) (Tepe-Küçükoğlu, 2024: 626). Thus, these motivations are consistent with the more universal problems of community involvement and sustainable consumption. This leads us to focus on the cultural, emotional, or spiritual motivations in Türkiye that function as the price of the exchange in the YK event at the center of this study since the event works on a non-monetary basis. We assume these include ecological awareness, solidarity, and a sense of community.

2.3. Sustainable Consumption, Donation, and Second-hand in Türkiye

In Türkiye, sociological field studies on alternative consumption, such as the sharing economy, volunteering, using, and donating second-hand, are rare and limited. Within the studies in Türkiye, the prominent themes related to alternative consumption are donation, gift, sharing, volunteerism, and solidarity. The scarcity of donation studies in Türkiye is criticized for being primarily limited to blood donation (Özcan and Özçiçek- Dölekoğlu, 2023: 3510). There are inquiries on the theoretical background of the phenomenon of barter in general (Saf, 2016: 73-75). The concept of sharing economy (Tepe-Küçükoğlu, 2024) is studied from an administrative and economic perspective.

Furthermore, second-hand use in Türkiye is studied from two perspectives: one concerning solidarity (Burgazoğlu, 2024), and the other one is about environmental problems and technological improvements (Tepe-Küçükoğlu, 2024). Thus, consumption's meaning is social and individualistic, requiring an analysis of personal values with broader social concerns. Kermesse (kermes / kernisse) seems to be a platform similar to the YK since giving and receiving are based on volunteerism in kermesse. Kermesse charity sale, based on volunteer production, donation, and purchase, is a way of contributing to the budget of a common cause, such as school funding or church/mosque charity work. Macit studies kermesse as a form of a charity shop and as a sample of religiosity or social solidarity, emphasizing the relationship of

volunteerism, donation, and community engagement within this platform. The welfare social state and civil society are among the donors of kermesse (2010: 180). Donation experience and helping others are integral to our culture in Türkiye; donation is prevalent, significant, and frequent in Türkiye. According to the study of Özcan and Özçiçek-Dölekoğlu, 70.9% of the participants stated they planned to donate in the near future, and most of the participants (77.2%) stated that they had donated within the last year. (2023, 3519). According to studies, in Türkiye, most donations are made to family and close acquaintances (Burgazoğlu, 202: 143; Özcan and Özçiçek-Dölekoğlu, 2023, p. 3519). Clothing donation is prevalent in Türkiye, and textiles are the most donated product (95.9%) (Burgazoğlu, 2024: 142). Clothing donation, which positively impacts the ecosystem and restricts waste, is also intensively supported by networks and organizations of local governments and NGOs (Özcan and Özçiçek-Dölekoğlu, 2023: 3519).

As mentioned above (Binanchi and Birturitsle, 2010), second-hand products were initially donated to the impoverished or family members as part of the second-hand giving culture with motivations of charity or saving. Given environmental concerns, used goods and donations are now considered activist ways to reduce industrial waste. Second-hand and donation activism includes three roles: giving away, receiving-using, and volunteering (Macit, 2010: 177). Research of Burgazoğlu indicates that volunteer work is the least common form of charity activity in Türkiye while donating money is the most prevalent. (2024: 139). Baycar argues the religiosity and donation relation in Türkiye, suggesting donation is considered a religious obligation, like Sadaka (voluntary charity given for spiritual merit) and Zakat (a obligatory charity giving by for those who meet a minimum wealth limit), and second-hand is also considered in terms of "nimet" (blessing from God), avoiding "israf" (wasting in religious terms) and encouraging sharing the second-hand as a contribution to people in poverty, a religious duty (2019: 215).

On the other hand, giving, solidarity, helping, social contribution, national belongings and solidarity, development of society, and conscious sharing are universal and national terms besides their religious connotations. However, giving away goods with ecological concerns is a new concept. This overlaps with both religious and non-religious giving behavior, but it is an issue that people have not intensively thought about before. Thus, in Türkiye, second-hand use is currently being rethought, second-hand, in terms of its global meaning and potential for reuse. However, a new meaning is formed by merging and assessing both the universal movement and the local meaning of second-hand in Türkiye, resulting in a new, unique meaning. Ecological concern and solidarity merge, while image and brand are challenged.

To conclude, the literature review begins with Theoretical Discussions on Production and Consumption, tracing the evolution of sociological thought from classical theories centered on production to more recent approaches that emphasize consumption, consumer agency, and symbolic meanings. This sets the foundation for understanding second-hand use not only as an economic act but also as a culturally and socially embedded practice. The review then continues with the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory, which explains how individuals' values shape their environmental beliefs, which in turn influence personal norms and sustainable behaviors. This framework is particularly useful in analyzing how ecological motivations can support changes in consumption habits. The next section, Ecological Concerns and Sustainable Consumption, expands on how second-hand use and sharing economies are

increasingly seen as conscious responses to environmental degradation and capitalist overconsumption. Finally, the part, Sustainable Consumption, Donation, and Second-hand in Türkiye contextualizes these broader discussions within the Turkish setting, highlighting local dynamics, cultural values, and donation behaviors. By weaving together these strands, the literature review not only grounds the study theoretically but also positions the Yeniden Kullan initiative as a unique empirical case through which to explore the ongoing negotiation between traditional consumption norms and emerging sustainable practices.

3. Methods

This study employs qualitative methods, including participant observation and focus group discussions (FGD) conducted during YK events. We observed interactions, negotiations, and cultural meanings attributed to second-hand goods, documenting how participants navigated their roles as donors, recipients, and volunteers. Data was analyzed through thematic coding, focusing on perceptions towards second-hand use, ecological awareness, YK as a social space, and the normalization of second-hand use.

Though we have observed and participated in the event as donors and receivers in almost all of these events since 2017, we specifically conducted two participant observations and two focus group discussions with different participants from two exhibitions. Though our methodological starting point comprises specifically 10th and 11th YK exhibition events, participants' experiences about previous YK exhibitions were also shared and included in our analysis.

The data from both the focus groups and participant observation field notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. We employed an inductive coding approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than using predetermined thematic codes. The coding process involved multiple readings of transcripts and field notes, followed by the identification of recurring patterns and categories relevant to the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) framework and broader sociological theories of consumption.

We discussed and repeatedly reviewed themes to ensure accuracy in methodology and clarity. We used multiple data sources—participant observation, FGDs, and long-term involvement in YK events—which helped to validate findings. Although the primary fieldwork for this study was conducted during the 10th and 11th YK exhibitions, the insights gained from earlier iterations of the project—accumulated through long-term participant observation—are incorporated into the analysis as background context. These prior experiences provided a broader understanding of the event's evolving dynamics, volunteer participation, and cultural meanings.

As researchers, we have been long-term participants in the YK project since its inception in 2017. Our roles have included donating and receiving goods, as well as assisting with the preparation and organization of the exhibition space. This sustained involvement has provided us with deep contextual knowledge and helped build trust with volunteers and participants, thereby enriching the quality of our observations and discussions. However, we also acknowledge the dual role we occupy—as both participants and researchers—which may influence how we interpret social interactions and narratives. To mitigate potential bias and enhance the credibility of our findings, we maintained detailed field notes during and after each event and FGD. Additionally, we critically reflected on our own assumptions, positionality, and interpretations throughout the research process. Rather than striving for full objectivity, we

embraced reflexivity as a methodological strength, allowing our insider perspective to offer deeper insight into the evolving norms, values, and practices surrounding second-hand use and volunteerism in the YK initiative. Further information about the participants and the method will be explained in the analysis chapter.

Table 1: Data collection methods, dates and the YK exhibition analyzed

Data collection method	Date conducted	The YK exhibition
Participant observation 1	May 29, 2024	10th YK Exhibition
Focus group discussion 1	June 12, 2024	10th YK Exhibition
Participant observation 2	October 22, 2024	11th YK Exhibition
Focus group discussion 2	October 27, 2024	11th YK Exhibition

Additionally, on May 29, 2024, a panel was conducted to coincide with the opening of the 2024 May YK exhibition related to ecological awareness and second-hand use. During this panel, we presented our research on the theoretical background of the initiative, discussing themes such as volunteering, sharing culture, and solidarity.

Our study received ethics approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Social Sciences and Humanities Research and Publication at Ankara Social Sciences University. A Certificate of Ethics Approval was issued on 23 July 2024 for the project titled “New Ecological Social Movements and Collective Consciousness: A Sociological Discussion on ‘Yeniden Kullan’ and Solidarity”.

4. Analysis on Volunteering in Yeniden Kullan

As an alternative sustainable consumption, to discover the ways of interaction towards the alternative set of norms of sharing that occur with Yeniden Kullan (YK), we conducted participant observation in two exhibitions organized on May 29, 2024, and October 22, 2024. While observing and taking notes at both exhibitions, we also volunteered to prepare and classify the donated goods with other volunteers.

The field notes we gathered in the participant observations provide insights into the participants and their interactions. The volunteers comprised diverse groups, including students, cleaning staff, and academic personnel. Key actions included the cleaning staff managing heavy items and students engaging in creative roles. There has already been a culture of consumption in Türkiye, where items were given to close ones and those in need. However, in this project, volunteers experienced something different. For example, individuals' motivations for participation ranged from ecological concerns to contributing to social responsibility projects, with the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake solidarity memories further inspiring involvement. The participants who arrived earlier and those who volunteered in the former YK events guided newcomers, ensuring smooth adaptation. There is a shop window mannequin, and dressing it together in every YK exhibition appears to be a symbolic social activity by the volunteers. Discussions centered on the design and arrangement of items, with questions like, "Is this item suitable or too old for the exhibition?" Notably, male participants often sought advice from women on outfit groupings. Collected items included clothing, kitchenware, and shoes, with a high demand for blazers and shirts.

Throughout the preparation processes for the two YK exhibitions, we had the opportunity to meet volunteering students with the help of the project coordinators, Assoc. Prof Nagihan Gür Çalışır and Faculty Secretary Nihal Tekin. There, we briefly told the coordinators about our intention of conducting a focus group discussion (FGD) on YK and asked for students' contact

information to organize a meeting with them on the following days of the event. The students who volunteered in the YK via the coordinators' guidance were informed about the FGD and the coordinators asked for their contact information. Since the volunteering groups in YK events are small, being an ASBÜ student or alumni and having been participated in at least one of the YK events were the only selection criteria for our sampling.

We selected participants for the focus group discussions, exclusively the volunteers who had actively taken part in the organization and execution of either of the 10th and 11th YK exhibitions. Initial contact was made during the event days, and participants were invited based on their level of engagement, diversity of roles (e.g., item sorting, decoration, coordination), and willingness to reflect on their experiences. We conducted two FGDs with different volunteers from each of these exhibitions. The semi-structured FGDs were guided by themes such as second-hand consumption, solidarity, ecological motivations, and changing norms and they were organized and held online on June 12, 2024, and October 27, 2024. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was audio-recorded for analytical purposes with the consent of the participants. Information about the participants in both FGDs can be found in the tables below.

Table 2: The 1st FGD (June 12, 2024)

Pseudonym	Donated/Too	Department	Grade	Sex	Age	Participation
Tülin	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	23	3 times
Çisem	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	23	2 times
Rana	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	22	1 time
Selin	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	23	1 time
Deniz	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	43	2 times
Zeynep	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	22	3 times

Table 3: The 2nd FGD (October 27, 2024)

Pseudonym	Donated/Too	Department	Grade	Sex	Age	Participation
Canan	took goods	Sociology	1st grade	Woman	21	1 time
Ayşe	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	22	5 times
Fatma	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Woman	22	5 times
Ahmet	took goods	Turkish	4th grade	Man	22	7 times
Zuhal	took goods	Sociology	1st grade	Woman	20	1 time

FGDs are composed of eleven university students, ten women, and one man, between the ages of 20 and 43. The reason for the limited number of participants in the study is that the YK is a small event with few numbers of volunteers. However, we used our years of participant observations to make up for the participant number limitation. Notably, most volunteers are women, which is why most of our FGD participants are also women. Volunteering activities are predominantly carried out by women, a dynamic that is reflected in our study findings. All the participants said that they had taken goods away from at least one YK exhibition, and two said they had donated to YK at least once. Our semi-structured FGD questionnaire was composed of the themes as (1) event preparation and background, (2) communication and horizontal solidarity between volunteers and participants, (3) ecological and economical thoughts on horizontal sharing and consumption, (4) changes in values, norms and beliefs about second-hand use. We aim to analyze the repeating themes in the FGDs in this chapter in line with Stern's (1999) value belief norm theory (VBN) and light of other theoretical discussions and research in the literature mentioned in the previous chapters.

4.1. Perceptions Towards Second-Hand Use

According to most of the participants, using second-hand items often carries a social stigma stemming from an association of second-hand goods with poverty. This can be analyzed as a stereotypical belief (Stern et al., 1999). Participants expressed that their values are gradually changing owing to the YK and said they want to break such stereotypes. Both groups underlined consistently the importance of redefining second-hand use as an accessible, sustainable, and "normal" practice for everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. A significant indicator of this stereotype is the feeling of shame the participants experienced. For instance, one participant highlighted her reluctance to openly admit to using second-hand items due to the fear of being perceived as poor despite having grown up wearing her older sibling's clothes. This example shows two different negotiations with second-hand products; while sharing within the family is culturally more acceptable, publicly sharing results in hesitations. Additionally, for the participants, persons who wear second-hand products had been associated with a certain socioeconomic profile before this event. "What made it easier for me to engage in this was seeing that others were doing it too. I was especially moved when I saw our professor wearing something from the exhibition. There's often this idea that professors should dress formally and properly, seeing her do that with the reused clothes really encouraged me—it helped me overcome my hesitation" (Fatma, 22, October 2024

¹).

Participants expressed that they intentionally put the high-quality or branded second-hand items in the more visible exhibition areas. Discussions about branded goods and items with price tags indicate value attribution to these qualities. Participants repeatedly underlined their excitement about the products having these qualities and being free at the same time. We think these exemplify changing perceptions towards second-hand use and its normalization among peers in the university environment as a social space. Indeed, the codes and meanings attributed to the phenomenon of second-hand goods change in line with reading and conforming the code socially (Baudrillard, 1999: 60).

4.2. Yeniden Kullan as a Social Space

YK allows individuals to give away and take second-hand items with more confidence and fewer misunderstandings. Volunteering together creates a sense of fulfillment and connection among participants. They stated their motivation by underlining that the event is a social space for them to get together twice a year for an ecological and collaborative environment. Since a faculty member from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature coordinates the YK, most volunteers are that department's students. They mentioned how their bonds with their instructor, their university, and also with each other are strengthened with YK. It also strengthened their identity and belonging with their university as they expressed that they would also volunteer after graduation, and one participant added, "because it helps me establish social connections while also meeting my needs" (Ahmet, 22, October 2024). This means YK enables a sharing culture and solidarity (Light and Miskelly, 2015). The participants also focused on the warm and friendly atmosphere of the event due to its taking part within the students' existing social space, the university campus: "I think this created a sense of

¹ Direct quotations from FGD participants are written in this format and order: (Pseudonym, age, date of the FGD conducted)

togetherness. For me, the strongest aspect was that feeling of being together—students, teachers, donors, and even those who came to pick up items were all part of the same shared environment. Acts of solidarity always help build that, but the fact that it happened within the university made it even more meaningful. We met people we'd never talked to before, and the way everyone looked at each other there—it was just really kind and warm" (Zuhal, 20, October 2024).

The collaborative symbolic activity of dressing up the mannequin further tightened social bonds. Participants often mirrored each other's behaviors; for instance, seeing a friend take a second-hand product from the YK exhibition motivated others to do the same. These indicate changing value attributions to second-hand in this social space while fostering new norms. For example, one participant articulated that she observed a student taking items while on the phone with his mother, asking "if she wanted a gift from the exhibition." It is noteworthy for the FGD participants and us that this practice—once seen as inappropriate—has become normalized within the social space of the YK.

4.3. Thinking about Ecological Concerns

The focus group discussions emphasized the ecological and economic impact of the second-hand initiative, framing it as a sustainable alternative to capitalist consumption and a means of redefining societal norms around waste and ownership. Volunteers are concerned about environmental degradation (Blue, 2018) and they viewed the project as a critique of consumer culture. "It feels like—I gave something I had, so now I can take something new. It eases the guilt" (Tülin, 23, June 2024). It is evident that participants are concerned about the relationship between consumption and ecological behavior.

Participants additionally focused on the agency of consumer, which is a parallel discussion with Gabriel and Lang's ways of defining the consumer (2006: 2). The topics of consumer culture and consumption decisions (Karaca, 2019) came to the fore during the FGDs. By normalizing reuse and sharing, the initiative disrupts socially produced capitalist understanding of obsolescence and prioritizes functionality over the desire for novelty.

The discussions also underscored the importance of what the participants called "ikinci el adabı" (second-hand etiquette), which emphasizes respect for donated goods and the capability to distinguish between trash and usable items. Frustrations arose over inappropriate donations, and educating donors about what constitutes a valuable contribution was seen as critical, ensuring that items with genuine utility are shared rather than discarded. Hoarding tendencies, prevalent in Turkish culture, were identified as a challenge to decluttering. Participants expressed that people struggle to part with items due to sentimental attachments or the belief they might be helpful in the future. This behavior can be changed for them with the ecological and anti-capitalist value attribution to this initiative. Indeed, YK encourages FGD participants to rethink these habits, promoting communal responsibility and sustainability. They also underlined that they rethink these habits in line with the existing parallel values in our own culture, such as avoiding "israf" (wasting in religious terms) (Baycar, 2019: 215).

4.4. Internalizing Second-Hand as a Norm

In line with our research question, our findings demonstrate that the volunteers started to question their existing preconceptions regarding values and norms about the phenomenon of second-hand use and have started to change some of their behaviors accordingly. Their

motivations for this change are related to ecological consciousness and their desire to be part of this social space, which indicates a newly forming cultural phenomenon. The YK participants' newly starting internalization process of a new norm stems from a newly emerging non-hierarchical sharing practice. A participant expressed this new sharing practice with these words: "What struck me was that every single person at the exhibition seemed to spot something they had their eye on and tried to get it. It didn't matter who they were – everyone scoped something out in advance. I did the same" (Çisem, 23, June 2024).

We argue that internalizing second-hand products as a norm produces and promotes horizontal sharing practices. FGD findings demonstrate that participants' perceptions changed when they were introduced to the horizontal nature of sharing with YK in an equal space. Some of the main motivations behind this action are ecological concerns, identifying oneself with a sharing community, and adopting a thrifty lifestyle, just like our FGD participants said and experienced. With the sharing practice YK introduces, the central aim is helping nature and sustaining solidarity between peers; thus, the nature of this sharing action indicates horizontality. On the other hand, the vertical type of sharing practice – to which the predominant understanding of sharing in Türkiye resembles more – is a one-way type of sharing action often practiced by wealthy individuals to people experiencing poverty. Exemplifying motivations behind a vertical sharing behavior can be associated with a traditional charity understanding, helping disadvantaged individuals, according to the FGDs we conducted.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The focus of sociology has shifted from production to consumption, emphasizing the agency, responsibility, and role of the consumer. This shift has spurred various studies on consumption habits and their impacts on social, economic, and ecological structures. Sustainable consumption and ecological awareness have been explored as responses to excessive consumption and production, emphasizing social solidarity and the preservation of nature. In Türkiye, consumption habits reflect the sociological order, with second-hand use traditionally linked to poverty and a vertical solidarity model. However, sustainable consumption concerns have expanded the meaning and purpose of distributing and using second-hand goods, transforming it into a broader ecological and social practice.

The "Yeniden Kullan" (YK) project exemplifies how grassroots university initiatives can foster ecological awareness, redefine norms of second-hand consumption, and promote a culture of horizontal sharing. Through qualitative analysis of participant observations and focus group discussions, the study highlights a gradual but meaningful shift in perceptions of second-hand use, overcoming societal stigmas traditionally linked to poverty. By integrating ecological, economic, and social considerations, YK has begun to establish second-hand use as a normalized and sustainable practice. In our study, the YK initiative serves as a critical platform for redefining consumption as a collective and ecologically conscious act, aligning with the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory. This theory demonstrates how changing values and beliefs about consumption, driven by ecological concerns, can transform social norms to protect ecological balance. YK exemplifies this process by fostering horizontal solidarity and promoting shared values of sustainability and community engagement. Through its egalitarian model, YK challenges traditional charity frameworks and establishes new norms of second-hand consumption.

The study explores volunteers' perceptions towards second-hand use, revealing a shift in attitudes as they began to challenge the societal stigma that traditionally associates second-hand items with poverty. Volunteers emphasized the need to redefine second-hand consumption as an accessible and sustainable option for everyone, supported by practices such as showcasing high-quality items to normalize their value. The YK events emerged as a social space that fosters collaboration, connections, and solidarity among volunteers. Symbolic activities, such as dressing mannequins, strengthened social bonds and inspired others to adopt second-hand practices. The volunteers of YK found a sense of social solidarity rooted in ecological concerns while also cultivating a stronger sense of belonging to their university, as they engaged in this initiative as a collective university activity. Ecological concerns were a key focus for volunteers, who recognized the environmental and economic advantages of YK. They criticized consumer culture and embraced second-hand etiquette, while also stressing the importance of educating donors to ensure the utility of shared items. The initiative promotes decluttering and challenges hoarding habits, encouraging sustainable communal practices. Finally, the findings reveal that volunteers began to internalize second-hand use as a norm, driven by ecological awareness, a sense of community, and economic thriftiness. The horizontal sharing framework introduced by YK emphasizes equality and mutual support, marking a departure from the hierarchical charity models that have traditionally shaped sharing cultures in Türkiye.

Key findings suggest that the collaborative nature of the YK events creates a unique social space where ecological concerns intersect with collective identity and solidarity. Volunteers' motivations are shaped by ecological consciousness, social bonding, and cultural critique of consumerism, signaling the potential for broader societal change. Although these shifts remain limited and emerging, the project challenges vertical charity models and introduces an egalitarian sharing culture. The findings contribute to the understanding of sustainable consumption by exploring its sociocultural dynamics. This study exclusively explores a specific university in Ankara in terms of its scope research, thus, findings from this inquiry are needed to be studied further within the context of other second-hand markets in Türkiye and other countries' culture contexts. Therefore, this exploratory glimpse towards shifting sociocultural dynamics requires more extended research and a wider fieldwork to observe the potential of change in the sharing practices and patterns in Türkiye, where traditional and modern consumption practices converge. The YK initiative provides a valuable model for replicable strategies in other university and community contexts, showcasing the importance of localized efforts in global sustainability challenges.

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