Driving Digital Change in Resale: UTAUT-Based Insights from Software Adoption in Underserved Consignment Retail

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Introduction: Fuelled by growing demand for affordable, sustainable, and distinctive fashion, the global resale market is projected to reach $367 billion by 2029 (ThredUp, 2025). Consignment stores sit at the heart of this surge, offering circular alternatives to mass-produced clothing (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Mukendi et al., 2020). Yet many still rely on handwritten logs, manual inventory tracking, and outdated processes that struggle to keep up with rising demand (Ecorn Agency, 2025; Jetpack Apps, 2024).

To remain competitive, more consignment store owners are implementing specialized software that automates inventory tracking, commission calculations, and sales recording (Bravo Store Systems, 2024). However, adoption faces barriers from limited digital literacy to infrastructure constraints as owners navigate digital transformation. Using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework, we explore software adoption among consignment stores in West Virginia, where resource constraints coexist with entrepreneurial resilience. Despite rapid resale platform growth, little research examines how independently owned consignment stores in underserved regions navigate digital transformation (Lokuge & Duan, 2021; Bae et al., 2022). This study addresses that gap by centering voices often excluded from mainstream technology adoption discourse. This study advances understanding of digital transformation in community-based retail, a context often overlooked in technology research.

Theoretical Framework: UTAUT is particularly relevant because it accounts for individual and environmental factors influencing technology adoption, such as peer influence and infrastructure support. It explains why some consignment store owners embrace digital tools while others hesitate. The framework identifies four key adoption factors: performance expectancy (perceived usefulness), effort expectancy (ease of use), social influence (others' opinions), and facilitating conditions (available support and infrastructure) (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

While widely used in corporate contexts, UTAUT takes on fresh meaning in independent consignment shops. Many owners operate without formal technical training or IT support (Sarkar, 2025). Their adoption decisions are shaped by functionality, daily realities, peer networks, and the need to maintain store culture and customer relationships (Alford & Page, 2015; Swamy & Hodges, 2022).

By applying UTAUT in this underexplored context, the study connects theory to practice, illuminating how small business owners negotiate digital change.

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Method: This qualitative study examined how consignment store owners adapt from manual to digital systems. Eleven women aged 40 to 80 who own consignment shops in West Virginia participated in semi-structured phone interviews lasting 20 to 60 minutes. These participants, selected through purposive sampling, represented a range of backgrounds, experience levels, and geographic locations within the state, and all had adopted management software. Saturation was reached by the 10th interview, with recurring themes emerging across participants, allowing for depth over breadth. Conversations centered on adoption motivations, implementation experiences, and operational impacts. All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis organized around UTAUT constructs.

West Virginia was selected for its high density of independently run resale shops (IBISWorld, 2025) and its status as a digitally underserved region (Broadband Office, WV, 2023), providing insights into adoption in resource-constrained communities. We maintained reflexivity throughout, focusing on participants' experiences rather than assuming digital benefits.

Results: Findings revealed compelling patterns across all four UTAUT constructs, as shown in Figure 1.

Performance Expectancy Participants consistently highlighted the practical benefits of management software, particularly in streamlining inventory and improving operational efficiency. Amy, owner of ABC Consignment, remarked, "I observed that many consignment shops were still using manual methods like handwritten records, and I knew that was not the path I wanted to take. ConsignPro stood out as a user-friendly software that met my needs." For many owners, software adoption was necessary to maintain competitiveness and professionalism.	**Effort Expectancy** Ease of use emerged as a significant factor in the adoption process. While some owners preferred manual systems for familiarity, most acknowledged the need to transition. Eli, owner of EFG Consignment, noted, "I still rely on pen and paper because I genuinely enjoy the process of writing. However, I am actively working on transitioning to software solutions." This theme reflects the cognitive and emotional aspects of shifting long-standing business practices.
Social Influence Peer recommendations played a key role in shaping perceptions and decisions regarding adoption. Owners frequently cited the success of peer businesses as a key influence on their adoption decisions. As Amy explained, "Hearing about the positive experiences of other consignment store owners who	**Facilitating Conditions** Access to reliable technical support and training was central to a smooth transition. Jolly, owner of JKL Consignment, emphasized the importance of vendor assistance: "The support and resources provided by the Consign Pro team were instrumental in making the transition smooth.

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were using Consign Pro influenced my decision to give it a try."	Whenever I had questions or encountered challenges, they were responsive and helpful." For many participants, external support determined the success and sustainability of software implementation.

Figure 1. Thematic Findings Based on UTAUT Constructs

Several owners expressed concerns about maintaining personal customer relationships, suggesting that successful digital adoption requires preserving store culture alongside operational improvements.

Conclusion: This research reveals valuable insights into how consignment store owners embrace digital tools to thrive in the evolving resale economy. Grounded in UTAUT, findings underscore the critical role of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions in shaping adoption decisions. These factors prove particularly nuanced in consignment stores, where operational constraints, personalized business models, and community ties influence digital transformation.
For consignment store owners, the study highlights the importance of leveraging peer networks and prioritizing software with strong vendor support. For software developers, findings emphasize designing intuitive, customizable solutions backed by responsive technical assistance. Policymakers can foster digital literacy and infrastructure in underserved retail sectors.

Limitations: The limited sample size and regional focus restrict generalizability, suggesting future research should examine diverse adoption patterns while supporting accessible digital solutions for consignment stores will strengthen the broader circular fashion ecosystem.

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