The impact of identity meaning and voluntary simplicity on second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption from the consumer's perspective.

Service Management Master's Thesis (SMMM-40)

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Shopping for second-hand clothes is a phenomenon that has been on the rise, especially for the last twenty years. Second-hand clothes (SHC) consumption is a consumer-generated shopping trend whose consumers are discursively creating new identity meaning(s) for themselves out of their consumption. It has changed the outlook to become a fashionable trend in the last 20 years and is positively influenced by the emergence of another consumer-generated consumption movement, voluntary simplicity. This thesis takes a keen interest in the identity meaning and voluntary simplicity associated with SHC that are remapping the marketplace discourse about consumption and countervailing overconsumption with pleasurable identity meanings that do not feed on consumerism and craving for new fashion. The thesis aims to investigate these two trends and how they are affecting the marketplace as well as consumer discourse about the meaning of consumption from the consumers' point of view.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

In this section we outline our themes and give a historical background of second-hand clothing (SHC) and its recent normalization as a shopping phenomenon. In the process we introduce some of the concepts and terms that will recur and offer their definitions and relevance to our topic. We proceed to problematize our research and define our research purpose and question(s). We conclude this section by outlining the structure of our thesis.

1.2 History of SHC and Research Background

In this section we give a historical background of second-hand clothing (SHC) and its recent, normalization as a shopping phenomenon.

The pace of fashion has changed, and Western fashion in particular is increasingly characterized by greater and faster changes, which led to an overconsumption of clothes (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). There has been a boom in SHC consumption globally, especially in the Western world (Ferraro et al., 2016; Guiot & Roux, 2010; statista.com; ThredUp; urwlab). The growth can be attributed to a series of swings in markets as well as in consumer behaviour. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, SHC presented a solution to consumers to continue shopping for clothes, but at reduced prices (Ferraro et al., 2016). To have a general idea about the size of global trading in SHC, it was 27 billion U.S. dollars in 2020, and predictions for it suggest that it will be almost doubled in the years 2020-2023 (statista.com). As a result, SHC consumption started to develop an image of being fashionable and lose the negative associations of poverty it had previously acquired (Ferraro et al., 2016).

SHC is trending, especially with young consumers (statista.com). The majority of Millennials and Gen Zers, 80%, show no stigma attached to wearing second-hand clothes (ThredUp), while 90% of them shop for SHC, especially when their finances decrease (greenqueen.com). They are buying more second-hand clothes *a)* because of the financial crunch (Ferraro et al., 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015) and *b)* because of concerns over greenwashing (Middlemiss, 2018). In Europe, Sweden in particular, second-hand clothes (SHC) consumption has become normalized unlike in other countries where it is still relatively stigmatized. However, this last reality is changing fast with SHC consumption making inroads in countries that traditionally still find second-hand clothes objectionable (Ferraro et al., 2016; Na'amneh & Al Husban, 2012).

Prior to the industrial revolution, only the landed gentry of the European population wore new clothes. Due to the high cost that went into the manufacturing of fabric and hand sewing the clothes only a few people could afford to wear them. In that bygone era of fashion history, SHC were not frowned upon. Rather, these items were largely traded as a general practice for the majority of the population. A change in the meaning of SHC evolved in the era after the

industrial revolution with the manufacture of ready-to-wear clothes becoming the norm and clothes becoming affordable to the rising middle classes. It is around this time that SHC started to be rejected in favour of new ones and the former gained their negative reputation of being the trademark of poverty. The narrative around SHC changed again starting with the 90s of the 20th century. This coincided with the rise of popular interest in retro-style clothes when old clothes started to rise to the ranks of vintage (Ferraro et al., 2016; Jenss, 2015; Kiehn & Vojkovic, 2018). It started to develop an image of being fashionable and losing the negative associations of poverty it had acquired in the aftermath of the industrial revolution (Ferraro et al., 2016).

1.3 Identity, Identity Meaning and Consumption

Broadly speaking, identity is our capacity, embedded in language, to recognize who we are vis-à-vis others - our similarity to and difference from others (Larsen & Pattersen in Kravets et al., 2018, p. 3). The concept of "identity" has been exhaustively researched in the area of consumption and across many disciplines (Kravets et al., 2018). Along the same lines, Jackson (2004), holds the position that consumption is as vital to social interaction as it is to identity formation (again through social interaction) and the garnering of culture. The view of Cova (1997) is that we need to construct our individual identity via consumption, the needed equilibrium between individuals and the groups they belong to.

Furthermore, other scholars have elaborated that our sense of belonging to a social group has come to be mediated via consumption as well (Miles, 2018). The end result is that "[s]elf-identity is now derived not so much from work and production, as from consumption and where we do not simply consume according to what we are, but we become what we consume" (Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018, p.3). Social scientists are constantly trying to find an alternative to (over)consumption, one that would be ecologically viable and still satisfy our need to prove the self via acquisition. Consumption and the strive for consumer identity have such a tenacious hold on societies and individuals in this day and age. Commodities and the offerings of the marketplace have come to replace the "other" we psychologically need to frame the "self" (Cova, 1997). Accordingly, post-modern societies are entrenched in identity formation via consumption because the traditional communities that functioned as a framing to the self are no longer present (Cova, 1997). Given that our modern societies offer few chances for individuals to feel they belong to a community (Cova, 1997), consumption steps in to offer a transient sense of belonging. Consumption, thus, has become vital to our survival as social creatures (Miles, 2018). In this regard, researchers who hold consumer culture theory view the study of consumer projects as an exercise in exploring the plethora of contexts where consumers have the chance, albeit temporary, to use the offerings of the market in the construction of their identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Kravets et al., 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Accordingly, in our research, we will investigate the identity meaning of the consumer, since most people really don't understand the meaning of identity in second hand clothing consumption . This is the area that will be explored in this research.

1.4 Taste Regime (Voluntary simplicity) and SHC consumption

Many sociologists have studied the effect of taste on people, which Arsel and Bean (2013), have defined as an activity that regulates and directs consumer choices. It, thus, acts as a base that guides consumers' meanings through evaluation and product selection. The researchers also explained that the taste system is affected and changed with time and with each practice. For a deep understanding of this, they integrated taste systems into the practice of consumption, as taste provides the meanings of consumer orientation in choosing the product. In the context of consuming second-hand clothes, people reveal their taste, identities, and purchase method. According to Warde (2005), activities, objects, and meanings are integrated into consumer practices.

SHC is one, of many, visual signifiers we use to motion to others our allegiance to the new taste regimes. Furthermore, while SHC consumption is becoming more and more normalized—a taste regime such as voluntary simplicity is anticipated to go on providing discursive normalizing contexts around fashion consumption in general and SHC consumption in particular. Moreover, voluntary simplicity is also trending as a consumer generated movement. According to Elgin and Mitchell (1977), a definition of the movement dates back to 1936 as a lifestyle marked by balance, one that calls for moderation in consumption and values inner growth. As early as 1977, the authors predicted that the movement will have "*an increasingly powerful economic, social, and political force over the coming decade*" (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977, p. 1). Back then, the movement was becoming more pronounced in response to the excessive materialism that characterized the late 70's of the previous century. In its present reincarnation, the movement is gaining force among consumers who are rejecting the overconsumption characteristic of this late capitalist age. Thus, it becomes a powerful tool in examining consumer behavior and shifting habits (Iran et al., 2022). The movement is characterized by "*ecological awareness*" and a concept of "*welfare*" that goes beyond material self-interest to care for all the human race and the environment (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977, p. 7). Beyond the stress on aspects of decluttering one's life and simplifying living conditions, the movement has discursively influenced shopping language and behaviour. There exists, now, subcultures of shoppers proudly identifying as voluntary simplists, while a number of influencers promote decluttering and simplifying one's wardrobe and other material possessions (Iran et al., 2022).

 Voluntary simplicity has also been studied by the previous researchers addressed in research (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977; Cervellon et al., 2012; Middlemiss, 2018; Woodhead, 2021; Iran et al., 2022). More recently Rahman's (2018) study comes to the conclusion that voluntary simplicity positively affects SHC consumption and vice versa. Our argument is that voluntary simplicity has a positive influence on SHC consumption. It functions as a discursive

normalizing system that orchestrates the meanings of consumption, especially in the area of identity creation.

For Bardhi and Arnould (2005), shopping for SHC is motivated by the tug and pull of two apparently juxtapositional drivers: the hedonic pleasure of self-indulgence versus the moral pleasure of being thrifty. Their position is not unlike that of Middlemiss (2018) in viewing thrifters as trying to have more for less. The same applies to voluntary-simplists who are seen as valuing moderation and harmony and in doing so show a good deal of concern for social and environmental equity (Middlemiss, 2018; Woodhead, 2021). The aforementioned researchers find that regardless of the causes behind such lifestyle choice-based consumer behaviour, the effects of their practices share the commonality of being considerate to others (Woodhead, 2021).

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Figure 1: Source: (urwlab.com)

SHC retailing has become a high return business (see figure 1 above) model especially online (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015; Kiehn & Vojkovic, 2018; Sorensen & Johnson Jorgensen, 2019; Bohlin,2019). However, it is important to keep in mind that as an industry SHC is not directly invested in saving the planet nor is it trying consciously to stall new fashion because of the latter's impact on the environment (Ferraro et al., 2016). Accordingly, we reiterate that our interest lies first and foremost in SHC consumers and the lifestyle choices in choosing the SHC.

1.5 Problematization

Here, we proceed to problematize our research topic vis-à-vis current research in the field.

Academic literature has already tackled the rise in the exchange of second-hand goods. Still, there remains a gap in research in addressing the trend as a consumer-generated alternative to new clothes, one that necessitates a hybrid consumer identity that equates trendiness with being a conscious consumer. Researchers tackled several aspects related to SHC consumption. These spanned the drivers behind SHC consumption (Ferraro et al., 2016; Guiot & Roux, 2008; Guiot & Roux, 2010), the change in the perception of SHC consumption (Na'amneh & Al Husban, 2012), and the transformation of SHC clientele into younger and wealthier consumers who are endowed with social and cultural capital (Kiehn & Vojkovic, 2018). Roux (2010) grounds her investigation of SHC in identity content whereby she examines the "*appropriation or rejection processes of previously worn clothes*" based on the ambivalent relationship the self has to the "other" and fear of engulfment (Roux, 2010, p.2). While seminal in explaining why some consumers have no problem wearing other peoples' clothes, it stops short of investigating the mushrooming of the trend and the normalization process that has reinstalled SHC side by side with new clothes in terms of acceptable consumer choices.

Corvellec and Stål (2019) investigated a subcategory of SHC, the "in-store take-back systems" used by (Swedish) retailers to cash in on the growing trend. They took the practice to exemplify "*means-ends decoupling*" whereby "*firms respond to societal expectations by adopting formal structures without implementing corresponding practices*" (Stål & Corvellec, 2021, p. 858). Here, we add that SHC consumption is a larger phenomenon than the take-back systems deployed by fast fashion retailers. It is one that involves myriads of trading posts ranging from charity stores and yard sales to online resale sites and second-hand marketplaces. Moreover, our inquiry highlights the actual practices of consumers and not that of firms.

We squarely place the relevance of our thesis within ongoing research on consumer behaviour and attitudes in response to the socio-cultural discursive offerings of the marketplace

(Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

Moreover, we acknowledge that our consumer is a reflexive social being who due to the prevalence of *taste regime* is both active and reactive to the discursive arrangement of his/her relations to objects and doings at a given historical junction (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Again, this position is vital to consumer agency and a positive indicator of change and evolution. Accordingly, this research views individual consumers as neither totally rational nor completely structure bound, rather as more or less free agents who are bound and reflexive to the systems they are embedded in (Arsel & Bean, 2013).

1.6 Purpose of Research and Research Questions

This section is dedicated to our research purpose and questions.

Keeping in mind how SHC consumption, along with another consumer-generated movement i.e. voluntary simplicity, is on the rise, we wanted to investigate how this phenomena is shifting the meanings of consumption in the construction of consumer identity. The

above-presented research purpose is answered by looking into the following research questions:

1.   **What are the identity meanings specific to SHC consumers?**

2.   **How is the taste regime movement of voluntary simplicity discursively impacting on the shopping behaviour of SHC consumers?**

1.7 Structure of Thesis

This section outlines the main structure of the thesis to guide our readers to how the research will proceed.

To answer our research questions and investigate the problems highlighted above, we started with a first section that introduced our themes and purpose of research. In our second section we mapped out the literature review relevant to our topic and its themes and concepts. In the third section we introduced our analytical framework. The fourth section is dedicated to our research methods as well as the rationale for choosing them. In the fifth section, we introduce our results and analyse them via our theoretical framework and in conjunction with relevant literature. The sixth section of our thesis comprises the conclusions we draw from our findings vis-a-vis our research questions and purpose. We dedicated a section for critical reflection, the limitations and direction for the future research in the end.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this section we outline the major literature relevant to our thesis where we delineate our major themes and concepts and situate them within a current research tradition while referring to seminal works from earlier times whenever necessary. Here we identify axial areas of research within this field: 1) SHC meanings and motivation, 2) Identity meanings of consumers in SHC consumption, and 3) Changed Consumers' Meaning*, 4) consumers of SHC as voluntary simplists .*

2.2 SHC meanings and motivations

In this section we situate our research within the scholarship on SHC in terms of general definitions, meanings, and drivers.

Bagozzi et al., (2021) contend that SHC have, recently, become a viable option for consumers especially since most retailers as well as peer to peer resellers have capitalized on this business model and as a result the market for SHC is now as vast and diversified as that of new clothes.

To Bagozzi et al., (2021) people shop for clothes in general to satisfy two identity dimensions: 1) how individuals use material possessions to project the self to others, and 2) how individuals weigh and imitate others via material possessions. Roux (2010), dives deep into the psychological drivers that distinguish SHC consumers from others and finds out that these individuals feel no repulsion toward wearing clothes that have been the identity markers of other people. In line with Thompson and Haytko's (1997) seminal work on identity seeking consumers, Roux (2010) contends that certain consumers find specific meanings associated with used clothes and have an intimate relationship with them contrary to market and fashion hegemony that valorises newness in material possessions.

Herjanto et al., (2016), using identity theory, explains the predisposition toward shopping for SHC and argues that individuals use material possessions to show their degree of belonging within a social group. Previously, shopping for SHC used to be a mark of poverty and people hid the fact from others but now, SHC denotes uniqueness and creativity, and individuals are flaunting their SHC. The added advantage of taking pride in this kind of consumption is that it shows how much an individual is supportive of other factors such as being friendly toward the ecology (Herjanto et al., 2016).

However, as past research demonstrates, the drivers behind shopping for SHC are not always in line with an altruistic self. The earlier research into the expansion of the SHC market attributed the growth to economic factors: individuals' need to save money during times of reduced finances (Williams & Paddock, 2003).

Other authors located the interest in this form of shopping for clothes to stem from the thrill of hunting for bargains and finding hidden treasures among piles of clothes (Yan et al., 2015; Bardhi, 2003). For Bardhi and Arnould (2005), shopping for SHC is motivated by two drivers that oppose each other: self-indulgence and being thrifty. Furthermore, Guiot and Roux (2010) argue that the consumer's pleasure stems from being visually stimulated by the piles of clothes abundantly lying about. In the light of Ferraro et al., (2019), the list of motivations behind opting for SHC is a long one ranging from economic to aesthetic factors. The same applies to other authors who contend that the primary reason for shopping second hand lies in an individual's need for aesthetic uniqueness of style (Cervellon et al., 2012; Einollahi & Kim, 2020). For Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019), removing the excessive stuff from one's life so that the person spends less on other products voluntarily can be another factor that inspires SHC. Moreover, according to Zaman et al., (2019), shoppers who are conscious of their own style of clothing tend to shop for SHC because they can mix and match from a wider variety of styles. The drivers for SHC consumption remain firmly anchored in the individual consumer's search for self-adornment and social belonging (Larsen & Patterson, 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The motives for choosing SHC over new clothes fall into several categories ranging from the need to save money, to the self-styled identity of the consumer who is unique in style to that who is conscious at the same time (Ferraro et al., 2016).

In summary of the above, we conclude that the meanings of SHC vary depending on the angle explored by the author in question. The most prominent meanings are to being a money saver (Zaman et al., 2019; Cervellon, 2012), being a conscious consumer (Yan et al., 2015), and being a unique consumer (Einollahi & Kim, 2020; Herjantoet al., 2016; Cervellon et al., 2012).

2.3 Identity meanings of consumer in SHC consumption

In this section we identify previous literature regarding the identity meanings consumers

derive from consumption.

Clothes are the visual manifestation of how we communicate ourselves to others. They are visual and social at the same time, they cannot be separated from the discourses about the commodities around us as well as our bodies (Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018). Additionally, self-making via the consumption of clothes goes beyond shopping for them and encompasses their symbolic and cultural meanings (Kravets et al., 2018). Thus, though situated in the individual, these acts of consumption are also locked into their given social context. When we consume certain items of clothes and reject others, we skilfully negotiate the social meanings (Kravets et al., 2018). Meanings of consumption have shifted for all around us, and the new taste regime is for practices that are mindful of the social environment around us. Accordingly, our identities shift along with the objects and meanings that involve us in practices of consumption.

Identity meaning making owes a lot, in modern society, to consumption where individuals through choosing and taking action can materialize the self-vis-à-vis social others. This, according to Barnett et al. (2005), has been demonstrated across many social science disciplines. In the same way, the authors find that the increase in consumption in cultural research helps to highlight the active and practised role individual consumers take in creating and recreating their identities on a daily basis (Barnett et al., 2005). Consumers cannot escape their reflexivity to the social apparatus they are embedded in (Askegaard & Trolle Linnet, 2011).

Consumers develop the narratives of the symbolic and cultural discourse of the marketplace by choosing a collage of adapted and tailored stories (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) to fit their own sense of identity. Here we speak of plural identities (Middlemiss, 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997) that are transient and adjustable. In connection with SHC consumption, identity meanings can be switched on and off from a variety of available discourses: self-indulgent, thrifty, and other (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005). Being the most intimate to our possessions clothes are perceived as extensions of the self (Einollahi & Kim, 2020), as well as the visual expression of identity, thus making the fashion industry quite capable of steering consumers in the direction of certain identity meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Thompson and & Haytko, 1997). However, consumers' response to market discourses is not always in line with the mainstream narrative. Consumers can also construct their own narratives rejecting market discourses or they can take an alternative path (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). SHC consumers construct an alternative identity to the one that equates fashion with newness and constant change by forging a composite identity, an identity cusped between the past and the present. Moreover, since the emergent taste regimes dictate a new market myth, consumers can align with this identity unconsciously while agentically consuming.

Larsen and Patterson (2018) note that individuals use consumption to forge "*collective identities*". Integral to identity is the need for by being part of a group, and social integration (Warde, 2005; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). SHC consumption can make us feel as part of a group of similar consumers especially when digital platforms of SHC where the expert thrifters/SHC consumers share their finds online (Miles, 2018). The emergent market myth is that consumers are drawn to it.

In identity work, there exists an equipoise between individual and collective social identity that have become inseparable and where variation in one necessitates a counterbalance in the other (Larsen & Pattersen in Kravets et al., 2018). By confirming marketplace bylaws individuals could go with the flow and accept the collective identity of consumers that is dictated by broader social structures and their economic and marketing weight (Murray, 2002; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Otherwise, individuals could rebel and form, in groups, counter/subcultures that also get their weight from the power of the "group variously referred to as subcultures of consumption, consumer tribes, and brand communities" (Larsen & Pattersen in Kravets et al., 2018, p. 3).

Askegaard and Trolle Linnet (2011) maintain that consumption too gives rise to social conversations with our peers whereby the objects individuals consume are imprinted with other people's opinions and value positions as well as the being of these others. This is what the authors view as the context within which the so-called free choice of consumption takes place. Accordingly, consumers cannot escape their reflexivity to the social apparatus they are embedded in.

2.4 Changed Consumers' Meaning

Consumers are not just reflexive to marketplace offerings; they are proactive in the meanings generated via consumption. The changed meanings they generate via unconventional forms of consumption, such as shopping for SHC, are in line with our premise that identity meanings are adaptable to consumers' mode of consumption. According to Warde (2015), consumption has three phases, the 3As of acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation (Warde 2015, pp. 118-126). To this formula, Evans (2019) adds three more phases, the 3Ds of devaluation, disinvestment, and disposal (Evans, 2019, p. 507). This equation of 3As and 3Ds is not conformist in the case of SHC consumption. Once bought, a second-hand item is reordered in terms of moving from a register of unwanted (disposed of) to being wanted (given a second life). Furthermore, in shopping for SHC, consumers relive the consumption experience but not in a linear process of acquisition that ends necessarily in disposal (Carbo et al., 2018; Middlemiss, 2018). Circularity could be achieved if we rewrite the script and make the disposed-off items objects of acquisition by encouraging and practicing: sharing, flipping, servicizing, and buying second-hand (Eden, 2015).
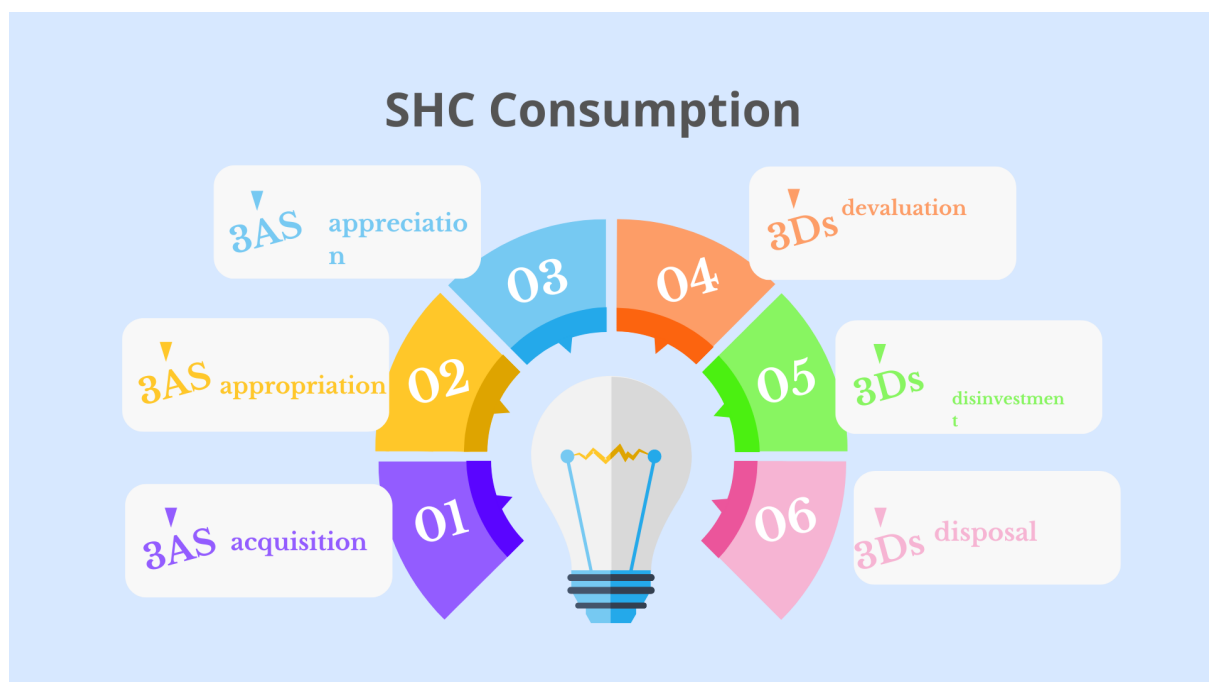

Figure 2: Based on Evans 2019 And Warde 2015

The above is in line with what Connolly and Prothero (2003) consider a cause-and-effect relationship whereby *"consumer motives for consumption and possession stem from the meaning of consumption objects and the value that meaning provides"* (Connolly & Prothero, 2003, p. 278). Thus, when the meanings of the objects shift to a positive register, the value content of the act of consumption changes accordingly. Moreover, this tallies with what Askegaard and Trolle Linnet (2011), label as the context within which consumers exercise what resembles free choice, whereby the objects they consume are not freely chosen since they are infused with other people's opinions and judgments. This interaction with social peers via objects of consumption can give rise to consumers making meaning differently. Roux (2010) argues a case for such consumers who in choosing second-hand items are partaking of the identity content of the "other."

SHC consumers and voluntary simplists make meaning differently along the same lines proposed by Connolly and Prothero (2003), when they argued a case for reusing and de-consumption can be pleasurable in the same way the marketplace flaunts the joys of consumption. That will be discussed in the next section.

2.5 Consumers of SHC as voluntary simplists

Here we introduce a type of consumer, voluntary simplicity, and their characteristics *who are involved in SHC consumption.*

Voluntary simplistic lifestyle "can be explained as a way of life in which individuals who minimize their consumption" and do not equate their self-interest with having more (or better or cheaper) stuff and "cultivate non-materialistic resources of satisfaction and meaning" (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019, p. 5). In an essay written in 1936, the philosopher Richard Gregg coined the term voluntary simplicity to denote a lifestyle that balances personal growth with material possessions. Followers of the movement contend that the less they consume the better their inner growth can be achieved (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977). Voluntary-simplists are usually active in recycling and reusing and limit their consumption to the bare essentials (Woodhead, 2021). The motivating factors behind their minimalist lifestyles vary from the personal to the ecological aspects, but the effects of their practices share the communality of being clement to others and the surroundings (Woodhead, 2021; Elgin & Mitchell, 1977).

To Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019), voluntary simplists' clothing consumption ties in with their mindful goals and is characterized by self-regulation and responsibility for others. They are likely to shop in their own closets and repair items they have not been using to make them functional again. Voluntary simplists are people who never throw away their clothes, but repurpose them, resell them or donate them to friends or charities (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). Additionally, when it comes to clothing, voluntary simplicity is one of the motivations to be involved in SHC is not to buy the clothes that cause further harm to the environment or those that carry a lot of carbon footprint in shipping. Their clothes consumption usually comprises few items that are locally sourced.

To Iran et al., (2022) another characteristic of voluntary simplicity is minimalism whereby the individuals involved in this trend bring about a process of decluttering to simplify their living space and wardrobes. The items decluttered are never thrown away, rather they are handed down to friends and family, resold, or donated to charities (Iran et al., 2022). Once this is done the minimalist will live by cautious shopping behaviour and a gravitation towards clothes that are basic in style and can be mixed and matched to make up several outfits (capsule wardrobe).

Those who are invested in voluntary simplicity (minimalism) derive mental pleasure from simple living. This means finding clothes items that are few in number but are versatile and serve multi purposes. This requires developing a wardrobe that is organized while avoiding excess (Iran et al., 2022).

In another article that aims to investigate the purchase intentions of second-hand products, Rahman (2018) contends to become a voluntary simplist, one starts by shopping for second-hand items. The article goes on to glean how consumers of second-hand items veer unconsciously towards voluntary simplicity (Rahman, 2018).

Consumer movements that generate less waste and reject overconsumption by reusing, reducing, and recycling achieve personal growth from their practices and cite personal effects of contentment and pleasure from their practices (Woodhead, 2021; Steffen, 2020) and thus blur the boundary between personal gains and social and ecological ones. Furthermore, voluntary simplists ethos and the language it is couched in has the potential to stimulate a shift in the market discourses that equate fulfillment and quality of life with consumption (Woodhead, 2021; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Warde 2015; Warde & Shove, 1998).

Lay people and researchers even conflate voluntary simplicity with another consumption capping movement, frugality. As a lifestyle, frugality is characterized by restraint in buying stuff and in being creative in the use of commodities and services. Frugal consumers watch how they spend their money and thus refrain from acquiring unnecessary commodities (Cervellon et al., 2012; Steffen, 2020). To Middlemiss, (2018), frugality is another name for voluntary simplicity which starts from an ethical position and is not about being value conscious or price conscious. Her position is not unlike Eden's (2015) in which the trend is sustainable in practice and has evolved creative strategies for use and reuse, sharing and flipping, turning commodities into services, etc., in short models for circular economies and slow production (Middlemiss, 2018). Self-expression can be based on the opposite of consumption, in a frugality and minimalistic self-discipline that becomes a lifestyle to be emulated (Warde & Shove, 1998).

Moreover, the lifestyle consumption behaviour of voluntary simplists is further eroding the marketing discourse of equating fulfilment with buying more. By buying just what they need, voluntary simplists are shifting the balance in favour of a discourse on taste that does not involve overconsumption. Both voluntary-simplists and SHC consumers are giving publicity to reducing waste as a result of the overconsumption of new commodities. Both groups cite personal effects of contentment and pleasure from their practices (Steffen, 2020) and thus

blur the boundary between personal gains and social and ecological ones. This taste regime has the potential to stimulate a shift in the market discourses that equate fulfilment and quality of life with consumption (Woodhead, 2021; Jackson, 2004). SHC consumers were and still are referred to as thrifters and their practice of buying second-hand clothes is thrifting. In this sense, we can see a downside to SHC in that it encourages consumers to buy more for less, one that feeds the modern addiction to having a lot of stuff. Still, the aesthetic and emotional labor of the influencer adds value to the garments and offers them a place in someone else's wardrobe (McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020).

Middlemiss (2018) considers frugality as another form of voluntary simplicity and approves of the movement viewing it as a philosophy on top of being a lifestyle, since according to her, frugality starts from an ethical position and is not about being value conscious or price conscious.

Chapter Three: Analytical Framework

3.1 Chapter Overview

Here we introduce Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) by giving a brief historical background to the theory and proceed to outline its applicability to our research aim: the meanings of SHC consumption and other consumer generated movements. Then we introduce the configuration of taste and explain how these two theories combine to explore the meaning of consumption.

3.2 Introduction to Consumer Culture Theory

In the 90s research arena, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) started to take hold as a result of the excess of the decade before where the 80s witnessed a political conservatism that promoted consumption and consumerism as essential drivers to push society and the economy forward. In this historical context CCT emerged as a critique of consumerism and an attempt to understand the drivers behind consumption (Kravets et al., 2018)**.**

In CCT, the concept is mediated through the market, not only in the material goods it offers, but also in the symbolic and cultural significance of consumption.

Because consumer culture has become fairly established and across many disciplines, it has not one single definition and it as such lends itself to become easily bowdlerized. Still, it is safe to say that CCT is the study of consumerism and consumption as social, cultural as well as economic phenomena. By digging under the surface for drivers for consumption, especially in the area of identity creation and recreation, CCT postulates that the impact of the marketplace goes beyond structuring and shaping our social realities, it colours our value systems and the meanings we manufacture and are manufactured from (Kravets et al., 2018).

The consumer culture is developed by their beliefs, practices and the patterns of their consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). CCT investigates consumerism and overconsumption as a social and cultural activity that emerged out of the economic liberalism of post capitalistic societies. According to Kravets et al. (2018, p. 2), markets become a vital signifier in our modern world where it governs our social worlds *"through beliefs, values, and meanings created around commodities and acts of consumption in relation to lifestyle and identity"*.

Actual shopping consumer activities, whether individual or collective, take a prime place in CCT but not as much as their symbolic and cultural meanings, the phantasmagorical realm where consumers are made to crave that magic product that will tick all the boxes. Consumer culture is more than the actual buying of stuff. Rather, it is about the pleasure (Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018) associated with owning, displaying and fulfilling the crave for social approval of social peers. Conversely**,** individual consumers use the symbolic and fairy tale attributes of commodities to construct the selves they want to present to their social peers.

CCT's close examinations of these projects not only favours individual consumers but also see them as active and proactive in their own dramas. In doing so, CCT stays close to the lived experiences of individuals who in a world of uncertainties can maintain a measure of self-expression by consuming stuff (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). See figure 3 below.

CCT is credited for valorising the consumer as a central figure in social and cultural studies. With the cultural turn, the idea of the consumer was transformed from an ignominious and passive dupe to market machination to "*a central principle of social order and a realm for individual agency and choice*" (Warde, 2015, p. 120).

Reductionists see CCT to frivolously stress the individual consumer to the detriment of social structures, but CCT's celebrated consumer identities are social currency whereby individuals negotiate their relationship to social norms and others around them. CCT researchers are increasingly viewing consumers within their social and professional contexts and scaling up and down their interpretations accordingly. CCT is not merely the study of consumer behaviour, but rather it is about what influences decision making in consumption. It has to do with cultural meanings expressed in and via consumption not just by individuals but by also the structuring social context that shapes their behaviour (Kravets et al., 2018).

Figure 3: Based on Arnould & Thompson, 2005 & Thompson and Haytko, 1997

3.3 Critical Reflection

CCT is criticized for its focus on consumption and of seeing individuals primarily as consumers *"across social domains and institutions, including education, health care, and politics"* and for invariably opting for *"unquestionably market solutions for social ills and improvements"* (Kravets et al., 2018, p. 3).

Also problematic is the point regarding CCT's stress on consumer identity projects, which while not ignoring the outward aspect of identification remains embroiled in self-symbolism. Thus, the free will and agentic power of the consumer is exalted for its creativity and nonconformity. In reality, consumers are constrained by the market and its normalizing discourses, and accordingly their identity projects are not totally free nor are they creative (Larsen and Patterson, in Kravets, 2018).

CCT must also take account of how unsymmetrically globalized the world we live in is. Thus, the spread of consumer society beyond affluent Western countries must be considered by taking into account the diversity of cultural manifestation of consumption and consumerism in societies and regions across the world (Kravets et al., 2018).

3.4 Configuration of Taste

Here we introduce another alignment to our analytical framework, the configuration of taste as outlined by Arsel and Bean (2013).

Taste regime is defined as *"a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates practice in an aesthetically oriented culture of consumption"* by Arsel and Bean (2013, p. 899). They are the first to investigate configuration of taste and use the concept of *taste regime,* to demonstrate how *taste regimes* continue to regulate practices of everyday life by shaping meanings, preferences and other factors that provide a certain identity to these objects (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Moreover, a distinction of *taste* is not the prerogative of all individuals since it is underpinned by cultural capital and requires education and engagement with artistic and aesthetic objects on a long-term basis (Arsel & Bean, 2013).

A *taste regime* is not just disembodied normative discourses that regulates and reinforces class distinctions. In fact, for it to be functional it requires practical skills and knowledge via which it is enacted. In this sense *taste* can be converted into a practice (consumption), one that, following Shove (2003), Arsel and Bean (2013) posit as a cultural practice that orchestrates other practices, but also changes in the process when the meanings attached to it are changed. Thus, there is a need to study how individuals convert taste into practice, and how in this process the practice and the meanings associated with it evolves and affects other practices associated with it. Accordingly, the authors argue that "taste, as well as the practical knowledge", is a mix of unconscious and *"agentic"* practices within a culture. (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 900). Thus, *taste* can be viewed as a practice (of consumption) that normatively orchestrates other practices, but one that is *"discursively constituted and continually performed"* (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 912).

3.5 Combination Framework CCT and a Configuration of Taste

Here we explain how the two axes to our analytical framework CCT and configuration of taste work together to delineate meanings of consumption

Our analytical reference combines CCT on the social and cultural discourses of consumption and consumer identity (see figure 4 below) to unveil the drivers for SHC consumption and the social identities of its consumers. We also draw on Arsel and Bean's (2013) conceptual configuration of taste to demonstrate "how discursive systems normatively shape consumption" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 902) and act as boundary to certain integrative practices. With this combination analytical tool, we explored how SHC consumers are reflexive to and active in manipulating the socio-cultural discourses of the marketplace, within particular taste regimes that guide their replication of certain practices (Arsel & Bean, 2013), more specifically how individuals convert taste into practice.

By studying consumption as a socio-cultural as well as an economic phenomenon, CCT digs under the economic surface for drivers for consumption, especially in the area of identity creation (Kravets et al., 2018). CCT proposes that the discursive configuration of market structures guides our social realities and colours our value systems. Thus, individual consumers use consumption to re/deconstruct the meanings of the social realities they are constructed from (Miles, 2018)**.** CCT's close examinations of identity projects not only favour individual consumers but also views them as active and proactive in their own dramas (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). In doing so, CCT stays close to the lived experiences of individuals who, in a world of uncertainties, can maintain a measure of self-expression by means of the commodities they consume (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Consumer culture theory is based on a number of problematic issues around the interrelationships between consumers' individual and social identities and the discursive systems the former are embedded in. The theory investigates consumers' experiential realities and the "sociological categories through and across which these consumer culture dynamics are enacted and inflected" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 870). A core tenet of CCT is that individuals agentically shape and materialize their identities via consumption, but in reflexivity to the discursive offerings of the marketplace (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Kravets et al., 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Even consumers' bodies are shaped by discourse whereby their physical objectivism is more and more subject to modification, especially in the field of fashion. When it comes to the assertion of identity via the visual and social clothing signifiers, fashion becomes an important discourse that individual consumers react to and alternately reinforce (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Conversely, a taste regime allows for individuals' search for meaning via consumption but adds a boundary to this configuration. By offering "shared meaning and values," taste regimes act as a context of contexts (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Taste is referred to as "experiential action" where the people involved develop by their own socio-cultural norms in their own social contexts and their engagements. According to Arsel and Bean (2013), an investigation

of taste regimes is "parallel" to investigate consumer practices as these are similar to each other. Furthermore, the authors use Thompson and Haytko's (1997) investigation of fashion as a practice that is bound but also reinforced through "socio-historically contextualized discursive systems" as an example of a discursive system acting as a taste regime (Arsel & Bean, 2013).
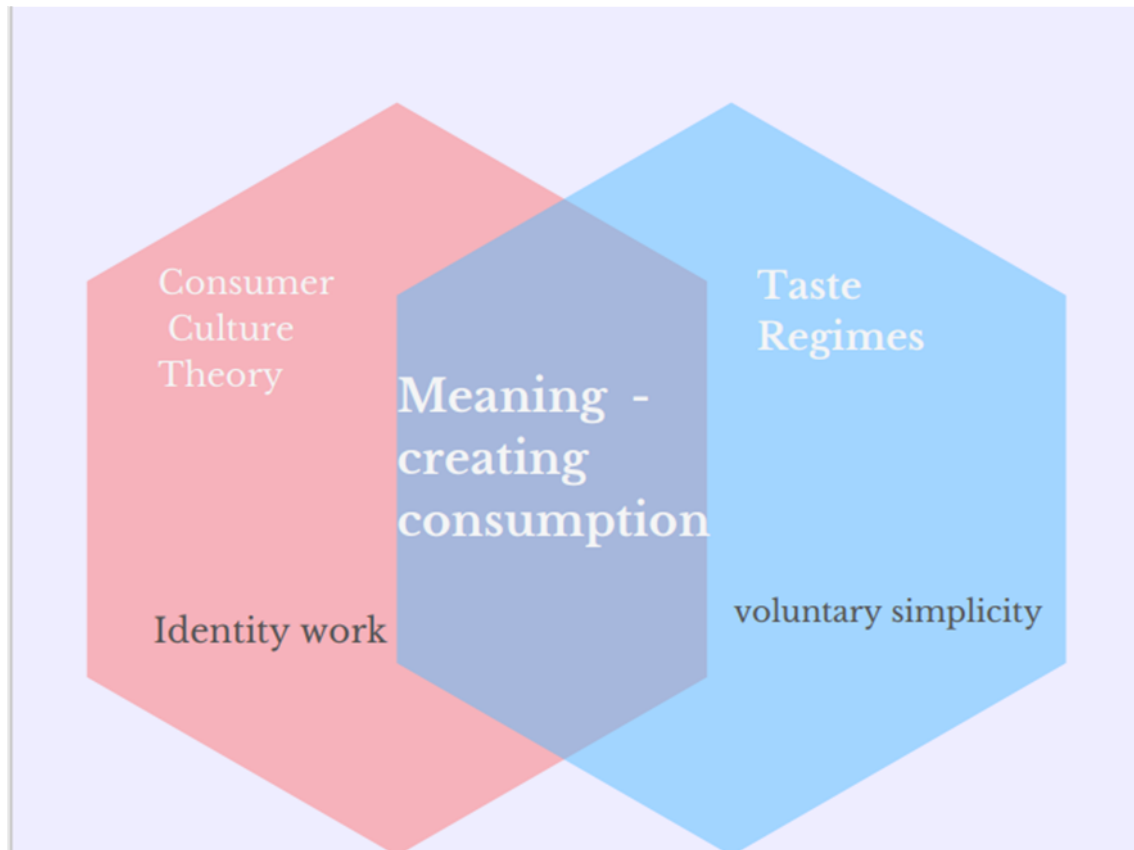
Figure 4: Based on Karvets et al., 2018 and Arsel and Bean, 2013

Meaning making, and consumption, are where both theories, CCT, and the conceptual configuration of taste intersect. Viewed from a CCT perspective, consumers of SHC use this form of consumption to create meaning (Askegaard & Linnet; 2011; Arsel & Thompson, 2010; Arnould & Thompson, 2005) by fashioning a self that could fall into one of three categories 1) is unique, 2) is a money saver, 3) is a conscious consumer, or a combination thereof. Viewed through the configuration of taste prism, the community of the consumers of SHC are bounded by a system of taste where they are reflexive to its normative social codes of certain identities that are socio-historically embedded (Arsel & Bean, 2013).

We purposely examine consumption viewed through the lens of the consumers of SHC: their motivations and their consumption practices. This approach captures the intentions and outcomes of SHC consumers who are fashion conscious but who, out of economic, aesthetic preference, opt to buy second hand clothes. In doing so, these consumers are searching for a collage identity that mixes mainstream discourses of consumption with an alternative way of thinking (Eden, 2017; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). These consumers use the cultural discourses of the marketplace (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Arnould and Thompson, 2005;

Thompson and Haytko, 1997) to redesign an identity that is fashionable by hand selecting resale garments that, often, belong to others in fashion history.

By situating the research within the theoretical framework, we have provided a synopsis of the theories used, designed the appropriate method and, accordingly, arrived at the appropriate analysis of our data. Furthermore, a profound understanding of the concept of taste as well as the link between consumer behavior and a certain taste regime has been useful in constructing the interview questions and later in arriving at the proper findings.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, we will highlight the appropriate methodology for our research by defining our ontology and the epistemological design used in approaching it. We present the reasoning behind choosing the methods and define them to elaborate the flow of our research. Since our data collection is done through different methods, we will present a comprehensive overview of each method as well. How we took ethical consideration and had the informed consent of the people involved in the interviews is also mentioned towards the end of the chapter.

4.2 Research Strategy

To shed new light on the meanings of SHC consumption and their underlying currents of trending *taste regimes*, this thesis has gathered data without a prior hypothesis. Accordingly, we analysed the collected data in an inductive manner. Induction places the accent on examining the participants' own interpretations of their social worlds (Flick, 2014; Bryman, 2012; May, 2011). Induction relies on an interpretive epistemology grounded in a relativist ontology that investigates social reality as constructed by individuals (Flick, 2014; Bryman, 2012; May, 2011). To investigate the meanings of SHC consumption and their intersection with trending consumer movements, we stayed close to the experiential perspectives of participants whereby we gained knowledge through contact with the shoppers. Our method of inquiry remained open ended since we simply wanted to explore the meanings generated by these individuals since we were not trying to prove that consuming SHC is better or worse for the individuals or the environment.

Our research design is based on considerations related to constructivism as we wanted to discover the constructed reality of our respondents to understand their negotiations of the meanings of the discourses of the marketplace. By positing that social phenomena and meanings are accomplished through interaction, we adhere to the position that external reality is interpreted by individuals. In the words of Fay (1996) "all knowledge is a constructive activity in which knowers are contributors" (Fay, 1996, p.76). Accordingly, constructivism takes the stance that participants in social phenomena construct their own social realities via their own cognitive processes (Andrews, 2012; Fay, 1996).

Our ontological stance in this research is, thus, to critically ascertain the phenomenon under study as well as the different meanings generated by the individuals who partake of it. This constructivist reality is buttressed by the idea that any examination of the social world must rely on its participants' interpretations of that world (Flick, 2014; Bryman, 2012; May, 2011). Interpretivism acknowledges the differences between individuals in their approach to social phenomena. Thus, our perspective is that reality is made up of the different and various interpretations individuals avail themselves of to make sense of their living experience. This

research approach forms the backbone of our choice of method, as it allows us to understand nuances of difference among individual consumers. Furthermore, it is an epistemological stance that is in harmony with the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section. In this connection a triangulation of methods, interviews and documents from different sources, gave us the different meanings and interpretations (Bryman, 2012) that are likely to be present when consumers choose SHC over first-hand ones.

The overall inquiry in our research questions centers on the "how," i.e. "how the consumption of SHC is becoming more and more trendy; and how this phenomenon is related to other consumption practices: "Voluntary Simplicity." This necessitated the use of a qualitative approach, which helps introduce a multiplicity of social perspectives (Flick, 2018). The adoption of the aforementioned approach gave us insights in SHC practices that go beyond consumer choices as it enabled us to learn themes and decipher meanings from our social phenomenon. For this end, a quantitative approach will not have resulted in the kind of findings we were interested in and hoped to arrive at (Yin, 2011). We also felt that a qualitative approach would allow us more freedom by allowing us to mix methods of data collection as well as to rely on different sources to gain a rounder picture of our social phenomenon. However, we kept in mind the limitations of our qualitative approach and the fact that it lacks statistical representation and that because its responses are perspective they cannot be measured (Bryman, 2012). We used two qualitative approach methods that cohere with each other: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Choosing a combination of document analysis and semi structured interviews, best suited our purpose in gauging meanings of consumption across many actors: consumers, staff members, providers, and media personnel. Furthermore, the two methods combined quickly yielded data and allowed us to proceed to analysis in a short period of time which suited the requirements of our research. Accordingly, we interviewed, coded, selected documents, and analysed textual and visual content for emerging themes to become more acquainted with the specific meanings associated with our social phenomenon. A qualitative method is most appropriate for the purpose of this study: an exploration of consumers, their practices vis a vis SHC within the context of a particular taste regime. Not only does it offer a deep understanding of the diversity and richness of people's lives as filtered through the context of a prevalent taste regime, it allows us insights of what constitutes a conscious shopping behaviour. Thus, we studied our respondents' points of view vis a vis a prevalent taste regime keeping in mind their own practical contribution to further honing current research in the area of taste regimes while at the same time gaining a deeper knowledge of individuals' consumption practices.

 In this qualitative study, we keep in mind several aspects pertaining to our social pheromone: the meanings of people's lives as manifested by the words and points of view of our respondents as well as the context within which our respondents operate, are framed by and respond to in their daily social practices. This will help us gain insight into prevalent notions and attitudes that can explain people's behavior as they go about their lived-in experience (Yin, 2011).

4.3 Collecting the empirical data

This thesis follows an exploratory research method, which helps to understand the opinions of consumers about the meanings of SHC consumption and its place in a more informed lifestyle. To collect the data, we used three types of documents to assure both comprehensiveness and detailed selectivity as well as semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011).

Recognizing that the author and audience are important in document analysis, we chose documents that address the consumers whose experiential reality was the focal point of our research. The authors of our chosen documents varied in type and perspective since they comprised: consumers/prosumers, industry infrastructure websites, and media coverage texts. The content chosen rather gears the audience towards supporting charities since the biggest retailers of second-hand in Sweden are attached to charities that recycle and upcycle second-hand clothes and sell them to support their projects.

The first step in interviewing was a pilot interview designed to test the relatability of our questions. Our interviewees were a mixture of international students and resident Swedes. This insured that we had perspectives from various backgrounds (See appendix 1 for an overview of interviewees including alias, age, sex, occupation, and length of interview). We interviewed 12 respondents all of whom shopped for second hand clothing, some for more years than others. The interviewees were also chosen to represent different age groups with the youngest being 29 years old and the oldest being 63 of age.

We started by identifying several second-hand stores in our vicinity, Southern Sweden, which happens to be a hub for SHC shopping in providing several second-hand clothes precincts (Myrorna, Pingstkyrkan, Erikshjalpen, etc.). While visiting these precincts we were on the lookout for interviewees who would be willing to take part in our research. The first respondent who had the time to take part pointed us to others among her friends. Thus, our consumer interviewees were identified following a snowballing sampling technique (Kozinets, 2010) whereby the first customer who was interviewed led us to the other purveyors of second-hand clothes.

The purpose of this mapping was to obtain an integrated and rounded narrative spanning different points of view and positions about the meaning of SHC consumption. This has helped enrich our research and facilitate a compare-and-contrast analysis of our findings (Flick, 2014).

4.3.1 Conducting the Document Analysis

Here we define the method of document analysis as appropriate to qualitative research and configure its functionality to our proposed research aim. We explore in depth the reasons for choosing this method, and the advantages of its use as well as the disadvantages whenever necessary. We also outline the rationale behind choosing our documents vis-à-vis their suitability to our aim.

Document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic". It requires that "data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p.2). It is a method that is efficient, readily available (especially with online content), cost effective,

stable, exact, and provides coverage (Bowen, 2009). In sum, it is a method that is immersive being obtrusive. It has the added advantage of being compatible with other qualitative methods such as interviews, to which it adds complexity and roundedness. As such it is often used with other qualitative methods in order to provide triangulation whereby the researcher gets data from different sources in order to limit bias while ensuring credibility (Bowen, 2009). It is a method with two important properties - the textual and contextual that make it suitable for our focus on the experiential reality of consumers vis-à-vis the meanings of SHC consumption and its intersection with other consumer-generated movements. It is a methodology with a built-in critical approach since when selecting documents to be analysed, the researcher must determine how relevant these are to the research question and aims (Bowen, 2009). The documents in question could offer either a broad and comprehensive approach by covering the topic from all sides, but in general terms, or a selective one by covering some aspects and going into details and nuances (Bowen, 2009). As mentioned earlier, we collected the data from three different types of documents for our research.

Recognizing that the author and audience are important in document analysis, we chose documents that address the consumers whose experiential reality was the focal point of our research. The authors of our chosen documents varied in type and perspective since they comprised: consumers/prosumers, industry public websites and media coverage texts. The first category of authors are consumers/prosumers who address other consumers, but in doing so hope to garner subscribers and thus earn some money through their online labor. None advertises one brand or another as expected since consumers have become more and more wary of online content with obtrusive advertising and biased to one brand or another (McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020). The content is chosen rather to gear the audience towards supporting charities since the biggest retailers of second hand in Sweden are attached to charities that recycle and upcycle second hand clothes and sell it to support their projects. The industry websites were examined for the sole purpose to verify if they pick up on consumer demands and if their language and content give consumers vocabulary for the meanings of their type of consumption. The same applied for the media coverage which would reach even a wider audience than those that engage in shopping for second hand.

Again, following Bowen's formula, we pondered on how many documents to use in order to ensure that our research question and aims were corroborated by the data collected. We finally decided that 12 documents should be sufficient with these falling into the following categories: 6 personal documents, 4 infrastructure provider (commercial) documents, and 2 media coverage documents. Of course, we use these documents to ascertain the findings of our interviews and vice versa. But in this we are also aware of some of the limitations of document analysis whereby the documents can be biased depending on the author and purpose of the document as well as tending towards selectivity (Bowen, 2009). We controlled for this setback by choosing documents from three different sources (personal, commercial, and media) and included in our analysis disclosures about the author and context of the document in question (Adu, 2019; Bowen, 2009).

We homed on online content because of its almost instantaneous response to changes in consumer behaviour, especially when it comes to fashion and the clothes industry. The BBC video on the rise of second-hand clothing and its environmentally friendly outcome led us to search for similar content in the context of Sweden and its fame for being a leading nation when it comes to being environmentally and socially aware. We came across many similar online contents (mostly YouTube videos) where prosumers toured the second-hand stores that abound in Sweden and gave advice on bargains and support for charities. We also perused second-hand shopping platforms such as Sellpy and Myrorna etc. to see if the specific themes that emerged from the prosumers find an echo in the industry. The documents we analysed presented us with textual (by switching on auto generated subtitles) and visual content, powerful tools in popularizing trends and spreading discursive regimes of taste (Arsel & Bean, 2013). The documents in question gave us a broad picture of how second-hand shoppers negotiate the meanings of their shopping behaviour as well as how the industry and the media reflect on, mirror, and reinforce certain themes and meanings. In short, the documents examined not only provided us with background information, but also presented us with further questions for our interviewees, ones which we tested in our pilot interview (Bowen, 2009). This is not to forget that the documents we analysed gave us the voices of the consumers which were our prime target group for the study of the meanings of consuming SHC (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Kravets et al., 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

The documents we chose were all gathered from online content (Blogs, Vlogs, News Items, and Webpages) and fell into three categories: those designed by consumers/prosumers (personal documents) and others designed by infrastructure providers (commercial documents) with a third category for media attention to the phenomenon (two BBC videos: one of second-hand clothes in general and a BBC story on Anna Bergstrom, manager of Retuna Mall in Eskilstuana, Sweden). The choice of online documents was not accidental since we wanted to follow trends in meanings of consumption. When people take to the internet, they record their immediate perspectives about emerging social phenomena, and these were the positions we wanted to harvest. We also intentionally chose a variety of sources to ascertain that the meanings we were looking for can be found across different perspectives. The overarching goal was to find if the meanings generated by consumers find an echo in the sellers' promotional material and vice versa as well as being picked up by the media (complete list of Documents analysed in Appendix 4).

We specifically chose not to examine documents to do with voluntary simplicity as we found these available to have a very specific audience. These documents while interesting and worthwhile for a focused study on voluntary simplicity would have detracted us from the focus of our work, the meanings of SHC consumption, simply because they engage with their audience either by addressing the practical details of decluttering and simplifying one's life or by tackling abstract issues about inner growth and harmony with nature. Thus, we opted, rather, to glean from our SHC documents for any implicit or explicit link to be found between SHC consumption and voluntary simplicity.

We started our data bank by viewing and reviewing our documents. We considered all questions we wanted our documents to provide answers for and categorized the documents accordingly. Here, at this junction, it made sense to create a code frame for the categories that initially drew our attention (see Table 1 below). Then we selected the excerpts that presented us with interesting themes and embodied some of our categories. At this stage we generated codes and assigned them to excerpts. Final step was to sort the codes into thematic categories as befits an inductive analysis searching for interpretations and patterns. We kept in mind who produced the documents in question and for what purpose as well the intended audience: mostly consumers of SHC and those interested in similar practices. All the way through, we recorded our impressions in field notes and copied visual content by means of screenshots.

Table 1: Coding of Documents based on (Adu, 2019)

Themes	Being Unique	Being Simplist	Being Frugal	Being Conscious	Being Swedish
Codes Represent what a thematic meaning is derived from shopping for SHC	I have my own style I don't have to follow the trends	I try to consume less I try to give a second life to products	I get good value for money I shop for what I need	Think of the less fortunate Avoid commercial outlets	Buy good quality. Keep using stuff for a long time. Donate rather than throw away

The final step of the document analysis process was to perform an in-depth analysis examination of the themes that emerged and to assemble them side by side with the themes that emerged from the interviews: to find similarities and differences. At this stage we found that some findings in the document analysis were not reflected in the interview scripts and the

other way round. We accounted for this randomness in findings by creating the code "Being Swedish" which accounted for the specific meanings derived from shopping for SHC in Sweden and the cultural context whereby Swedes take pride in their historical tradition of being mindful of the environment and others.

4.4 Designing and conducting the semi structured interviews

Here we define the method of semi structured interviews as appropriate to qualitative research and configure its functionality to our proposed research aim. We also give a detailed description of the steps we took before, during, and after interviews that encompass an overview of our interviewees (complete list to be found in Appendix 1), our interview questions, the manner with which we conducted the interviews, and how we handled the data generated.

This thesis follows an exploratory research method, which helps to understand the opinions of consumers about the meanings of SHC consumption and its place in a more informed lifestyle. For this purpose, we relied on semi-structured interviews for the collection of some of our empirical data. (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). We chose this type of interview because they allowed us the advantage of answering what and how questions central to our research. This type of interviewing allowed our respondents the liberty to divulge their thoughts, expansions, and feelings. At the same time, by offering an outline of topical matter that needs to be elaborated, semi structured interviews deliver data systematically and in a comprehensive fashion. With semi structured interviews we get data systematically but in a free and informal fashion. The chatty manner with which the interviews were conducted made our respondents feel at ease, and it allowed them the liberty to speak freely. This has allowed us to gain insights about their views and attitudes that would not have been arrived at otherwise. The aim of the interviews was to elaborate on consumers' attitudes towards and their own understanding of the practice of shopping for SHC in relation to a prevailing taste. Within this overarching objective further insights were gained of how our respondents' reconfiguration of taste and the changes they contribute to its further deployment as manifested in the process of acquiring, using, and disposing of the products in question: SHC. The questions were scripted in advance.

We started by identifying several second-hand stores in our vicinity, Southern Sweden, which happens to be a hub for SHC shopping in providing a number of second-hand clothes precincts (Myrorna, Pingstkyrkan, Erikshjalpen, etc.). While visiting these precincts we were on the lookout for interviewees who would be willing to take part in our research. The first respondent who had the time to take part pointed us to others among her friends. Thus, our consumer interviewees were identified following a snowballing sampling technique (Kozinets, 2010) whereby the first customer who was interviewed led us to the other purveyors of second-hand clothes.

The respondents we interviewed numbered 12 consumers of SHC, some of whom have been doing so for the last 10 years. They were divided evenly along gender lines but represented

different age groups. A third of our interviewees were international students at Lund University, but the rest were Swedes. This combination gave us the diversity of backgrounds we were looking for (See appendix 1 for an overview of interviewees including alias, age, sex, occupation, and length of interview). The purpose of this mapping was to obtain an integrated and rounded narratives spanning different points of view and positions about the meaning of SHC consumption. This has helped enrich our research and facilitate a compare and contrast analysis of our findings (Flick, 2014).

We started off with a pilot interview to gauge the relevance of our questions. As a result, we noticed that while our questions were in line with our research aim and problematic, they were rather far too many. After our pilot interview we realized that we must cut down on some of our questions since they were far too many (originally, we had 33 questions). With the help of our first interviewee, a student at Lund University, we pared down the questions to 12, a manageable number that can be covered in between 25 to 32 minutes. We conducted the interviews following the guidelines stipulated for gathering data in a qualitative manner with an emphasis on giving our interviewees the freedom to answer questions without our intervention or prompting (Flick, 2014; May, 2011). Accordingly, we got candid answers with no interference on our part, which ensured that our findings were authentic and impartial even when they did not support the purpose of our research. Three of our interviewees had a limited time to offer us and preferred to be emailed the questions which they answered at their convenience.

During interviews, one of us would ask the questions and the other would take notes. We took turns in asking questions and taking notes to ensure partiality and lack of bias. The note-taking we found kept us focused and allowed our participants to flow with their narratives. We found out that some of our interviewees also participated in this note-taking and felt actively responsible for the points they wished to highlight. Some of the notes that were taken were the ones that took place after the interview was officially concluded (Flick, 2014; May, 2011) by turning off the recording. Accordingly, our respondents' narratives emulated the authentic flow of oral speech where participants felt they had to go over a certain point and elaborate it once again.

We conducted our interviews in English, in a chatty informal style to put the respondents at ease so their responses will follow naturally in an unsolicited fashion. The interviews were done virtually online. Participants were asked via a media publication, and interviews were conducted via video meetings online (Braun et al., 2017). We used instructions sparingly but made them clear to make it easier for our participants and us to equally exchange questions and answers via the virtual medium. Three of our participants did not have the time to schedule meetings online and preferred to answer our questions in writing via email. One participant, who responded via email, answered our questions in Swedish which we translated into English.

To understand SHC consumer experience and its underlying currents of meanings, especially those that are positively influenced by the emerging *taste regime* of voluntary simplicity, we used open-ended questions that were easy for our respondents to relate to. Our interview

questions centred around the different practices and habits of SHC consumers on site and online whereby the manner, frequency, bulk, rationale, and motivations were explored in depth. The questions were divided into the following categories: a) why chose second hand clothes, b) clothes in relation to personal style and lifestyle, c) clothes in relation to prevalent public opinion, social awareness and values, and d) questions about voluntary simplicity.

4.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded after we obtained the informed consent of the respondents. Listening to the recordings several times and transcribing them allowed us to go deep into examining the plethora of points of view from the different answers. At first, we chose to transcribe the audio recordings digitally to ensure that the scripts were independent of our views as researchers. However, upon noticing that the auto-transcription misread some of the words or did not discern the negative in certain sentences, we resorted to partial transcription by ourselves. We took turns to listen to the same excerpts so as to be sure that not just one human set of airs translated the oral words into text. This also meant that the scripts are reproducible and can be independently analysed for veracity (Flick, 2014; May, 2011).

We considered the process of analyzing qualitative data as "iterative" (Tracy, 2019; Flick, 2018; Miles,, 2018). As interpretivists, we compared the recording of each interview with a transcription produced by Otter, a transcription program powered by artificial intelligence. Final transcripts were carefully gone over several times with the purpose of familiarizing ourselves with them since "we start knowing something at least the second time when we encounter it" (Latour, 1987, p. 219). This step made it possible to code the data in an Excel sheet.

We used open coding by classifying the text according to categories or keywords that describe the reasoning behind and features of the responses (Williams & Moser, 2019; Miles, 2018). Additionally, it enabled us   to spot trends in the text, including variances and parallels in word usage and responses to specific study questions. In addition, we were able to focus and simplify the data such that we could perform a theme analysis.

We coded the results according to our three identity contents 1) being unique, 2) being a money saver, and 3) being conscious consumers to distinguish the relevant answers to the research questions. The coding distinguishes similarities, differences, and repetitions in the answers. The key concepts and topics discerned in the answers related to our main concepts: mainly, identity, consumption, and major trending consumption movements (voluntary simplicity). Some data were found to be clear and pertain to the theme of this research, but some were not. Still, we recorded every point accordingly and took into account its relevance if not to our findings, then to future research. The results vacillated between rich and interesting to unconstructive for our research. We obtained repeated similar results and repeated dissimilar results vis-a-vis our research question.

4.6 Ethical Consideration

Here we demonstrate our compliance with research ethics in conducting our data collection.

We showed appropriate respect to research ethics, which were considered laws that cannot be bypassed throughout the entirety of our research (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). As researchers, we were keen not to harm or cause the participants any kind of discomfort. Moreover, our participants were reassured that our research was motivated solely by our desire to gain new knowledge about the studied research phenomenon, and that, as such, their contribution was highly valued while remaining confidential (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). We were honest with the participants as well as open to all of our research findings. From the outset, we made sure that voluntary participation was obtained and that participants could withdraw whenever they wanted (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). First, we explained the objective of the research and described the study.

Secondly, after the respondents accepted to participate and agreed to take part in the interviews, we obtained their informed consent. Before each interview, participants were reassured that we honoured their right to confidentiality, privacy, and non-disclosure of their identity—each interviewee was, accordingly, given an alias name (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). Moreover, participants were briefed on how we intend to use the data obtained from the interviews and how its content is for research purposes solely (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2014; May, 2011). The audio files and transcripts are stored at Lund University as protocol dictates and will be deleted once we are done with our research.

4.7 Informed Consent

Here we outline the steps we took to properly acquaint out interviewees with their rights and get their informed consent to take part in our research.

The form was given in two copies which were duly signed. We began each interview with a short briefing on the nature of our research and reassured our participants of their right to their information which will be used for research purposes only.

In the previous methodology section, we have outlined our chosen methods for collecting data, their rationale and the various steps required in conducting each of them.

To summarize we have chosen to gather qualitative data using two methods: document analysis and semi structured interviews in order to diversify the sources of our findings, test them against each other, and consolidate them in accordance with formulas specific to qualitative methodology of social sciences (Flick, 2014; Bryman, 2012; May, 2011). Our combined methods of document analysis and interviews (12 in total) resulted in 24 hours of viewing and reading online content (Vlogs, Blogs, and Websites), 5 hours and 10 minutes of interview audio material, and a total of 50 pages of written transcripts.

In the following section we put our empirical data to a rigorous analysis that will be concluded by interesting findings relating to our research aim of finding the meanings underlying the phenomenon of consuming SHC.

Chapter Five: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

In this section we lay down the findings of our document analysis, which comprises several documents from different sources, and those generated by interviews using two means of classification: first divided along the source and method lines, and second along thematic lines. With these two types of classification, we aim to display similarities as well as differences in our findings. This is so since the themes generated by the data sometimes overlapped across the two methods and several sources used, while diverging at other times. Throughout the whole process we documented every detail whether it supported our research aim, the meanings of SHC consumption, and their intersection with another consumer generated movement: voluntary simplicity, or not.

5.2 Document Analysis, Media Coverage

Here we examine two BBC documents: one a story about Anna Bergstrom and the other which is a coverage of SHC consumption.

The first document in this group is a BBC news story by Dougal Shaw titled "Welcome to my high-fashion, trash shopping mall" (Shaw, 2019). It tells the story of Anna Bergstrom who manages the Retuna Mall, a Swedish state-of-the-art commercial outlet where everything is second hand, recycled, and/or upcycled. According to the author, Anna Bergstrom went against her early upbringing when she chose a career in fashion. Anna's narrative about her upbringing in rejection of consumerism and her eventual work for the fashion industry serves as an example of how we can easily become trapped in the world of consumerism. Her choice to make a role model out of Retuna shows her personal and nationalistic drive whereby she as the daughter of Hippie parents and a Swede wants the future generations, exemplified by her daughter, to choose more mindful modes of consumption.

5.2.1 Consumers adopting Voluntary Simplicity to reject consumerism

Anna's passion "for ethical, sustainable shopping goes back to her upbringing with her hippie parents. She was born in a commune, though her family moved out to the countryside to pursue a simple life when she was three years old" (Shaw, 2019) . Now that she is the mother of three daughters, she aims for a lifestyle that is simple and is not based on acquisitions, hence the interest in the recycling mall.

5.2.2 Consumer's thoughts on voluntary simplicity

Anna's motivation to adopt Voluntary Simplicity as a lifestyle is influenced by some other factors as well. For example, she says, "I realised that I needed to become a role model for my children" (Shaw, 2019). Anna's family rejection of consumerism is a voluntary simplicity move that as a young woman Anna did not identify with. She is aware about the

local culture of Sweden and wants to create a lifestyle combining both, as she says, "Swedes love the concept of living sustainably and doing things for the planet, if you can have a trendy, fashionable way to do sustainable living … I think mainstream customers can follow that - in high heels." This Swedish lifestyle can be classified as a unique cultural identity since it combines fashionability and doing good for the planet.

The second document is a video news item (BBC Inside Out- The Rise of Sustainable Fashion & The Second-Hand Clothing Industry) presented by Owain Wyn Evans who for Oxfam's initiative of second-hand September (2019) starts the video by "*I've never worn anything second hand and you know what I am not about to change.*" Eventually the TV personality is won over and does a cat walk in the second-hand clothes chosen for him from the Oxfam donated items. He admits that the clothes he was offered are items he would consider to fit him for his own unique style. The media coverage of this event is to encourage people that by buying second hand clothes each and every one of them can find something to cater to his/her unique fashion sense. Finding the perfect item that fits a particular fashion style is important to shoppers: "I like the sort of the thrill of the chase almost, in finding that perfect item. I'm not a regular shopper or consumer of clothes, really, but I hope to be an inspiration (Glass Onion Vintage, 2019). In line with our aim concerning how shopping for second hand clothes has become normalized, we discovered that SHC business models such as Glass Onion have become successful. John Hickling who started when he was a student to re-sell clothes online has turned his start up, Glass Onion, into the biggest vintage wholesaler in Europe. Talking about the change in the perception of SCH, John Hickling says: "*For the first time in my lifetime ... The stigma (towards SHC) is gone. It's been removed.*" (Glass Onion Vintage, 2019).

 Furthermore, and according to the BBC presenter "*secondary market is set to become enormous, recent statistics say that it could be bigger than fast fashion over the next 10 years and it's starting on. the site of a next coal mine in Barnsley there's a business that's getting second hand clothes into mainstream shops it's one of the biggest vintage wholesalers in Europe*" (Glass Onion Vintage, 2019). The image of SHC is changing with consumers as well as demonstrated by the Oxfam initiative which interacts with clients by suggesting not shopping for new items for one month (Glass Onion Vintage, 2019) and thereby giving a second life to used clothes.

For our aim, the meanings of SHC, the documents popularize second hand retail and show its fashionable side as well as capture its other potentials for making and saving money and creating a unique style. All in all, documents like above further normalize SHC retail and contribute to more discourse on the meaning of consumption that countervail market dictates (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) based around frequent purchases of new items. The discourse on taste is also alternative as the fashionability and trendy meanings validated will function as integrative practices that in turn change other practices (Arsel & Bean, 2013) into more adopted content.

5.3 Document Analysis, Commercial Websites

Here we outline major retailers of SHC in Sweden, specifically in connection with the discursive elements, language they use to market their difference from other first-hand retailers. The following are descriptions of four major providers of SHC in Sweden, two are attached to charities and two are resale marketplaces.

5.3.1 Secondhand.se

It's a website for a chain of physical second-hand stores run by Erikshjälpen Foundation. a Swedish NGO that promotes the rights of the child. According to the Facebook page of Secondhand.se (translated from Swedish), the website offers "*Hand-picked treats for your unique style. Lovely second-hand clothes, trendy vintage. Used books to love again, vinyl records you were looking for. And what you pay gives children in the world a brighter future!*" This amounts to a promotion of a unique identity as characteristic of clothes picked from different time periods (vintage). For good measure, the Facebook page promotes money saving through buying Shc.

Image source: https://secondhand.se/miljo-socialt-bistand_1

5.3.2 Sellpy

The "about" page states the *taste regime* it is promoting outright: the goal is to enable customers "*to live circular,*" i.e., an identity content of a conscious consumer. Thus, the "*easiest way to reduce emissions is to make better use of what already exists.*" Accordingly, consumers can ascertain their environmental contribution via a metric that delivers their CO_2 and or water savings.

Images source: https://www.sellpy.se/about

5.3.3 Blocket

According to the about page of the website, the online market firmly espouses the values of the environment and prides itself that the Swedes' have a local culture of that second hand trade that saves the planet 0.8 tons of greenhouse emissions per year. This Swedish characteristic amounts to a national identity of being conscious and wanting to do good for the planet.

Image source: https://begagnateffekten.se/

5.3.4 Myrorna

The business model is run by the Ants who, "*are pushing the concrete circular agenda forward*." Again, here circularity is aiming for an environmentally positive practice, one that is "*concrete*." Thus, the business model prides itself on collecting "*almost 30 tons of clothing and furnishings every day*." The ants also espouse environmental and social agendas (they offer employment to people outside the labour market) and their surplus profit supports the Salvation Army in Sweden. The identity content here refers to being conscious.

Myrorna is Sweden's oldest chain of stores when it comes to collecting clothing and furnishings that can be reused. With stores all over the country, we work daily for a more sustainable and humane world. The anthills are owned by the Salvation Army and all financial surplus goes directly to the Salvation Army's social work, approximately 30 million per year.

Image source:

All above excerpts are, in language and discourse, committed to environmental and social causes of saving the planet and helping the less fortunate. Sellpy and Blocket choose a quantitative measurement (CO_2 and water savings) as proof of their ethical stand. The other sites, on the other hand, use the qualitative thematic language of social and environmental engagement with a stress on these charity work within and outside Sweden. As documents, they market several identity types that tie with our findings: being unique, saving money, and being conscious of the added cultural content of these as being Swedish characteristics (national identity of frugality, circularity, and uniqueness). As discursive content they further naturalize second hand consumption and give it ethical meanings of being mindful of the environment and of others, including future generations. These texts function as the context within which consumers exercise what they think of as free choice, but in fact they are buying into market practices (Askegaard & Trolle Linnet, 2011).

5.4 Document Analysis, Personal Documents

Here we examine several Vlog documents that are based in Sweden and prosume Swedish second-hand markets.

5.4.1 Being a Money Saver

Kamenberg: Shopping in Sweden for cheap second-hand items in a Red Cross thrift store. Some very interesting things …. Rare items with interesting facts around them.

Stefan Thyron: In this episode my roommate Dereck and I do a little bit of thrift shopping in Stockholm, Sweden. Thyron visits Beyond Retro only to find it expensive … "Myrorna," on the other hand, is pretty much anywhere … and has unique clothes for super cheap.

5.4.2 Being Unique

Scandinavian Design 101 states that**:** *In Sweden there's a rich tradition of thrift shops and second-hand stores ... flea markets were a place for the poor and needy but in recent years they have become a place for everyone when second shopping is trending*.

5.4.3 Being a Conscious Consumer

Study in Sweden avows that: *By buying second hand we give longer life to clothes we reduce labour in third world countries we cut down on manufacturing demands fewer chemicals less fuel and less water*, and that *Sweden is a leading country in second hand shopping*

The personal Vlogs also document journeys into the world of second hand, but they are more down to earth and concentrate on the second-hand items: their variety, reasonable prices, ease of access, and the unique items one can find among them. The vlogs show the practical side

of buying second hand. They do not use jargon of language, rather they showcase the advantages of buying second hand for both Swedes and newcomers. What transpires from the vlogs is that Swedish second-hand shops are found in just about every corner in urban centres and are stuffed with more variety under one roof than what is to be found in a mall of first-hand shops. There is a particular penchant the Swedes have for owning good quality items (often handmade) and of keeping them in good shape so when they are donated to be sold for charities, they make such good bargains. Accordingly, in Swedish second-hand markets many consumers can find second-hand items of superior quality to first-hand products.

The discourse in above is typically Swedish in its pragmatism and care for object-person relations (Einollahi & Kim, 2020). Swedes are shown to choose good quality products and thus display cultural capital (Arsel & Bean, 2013). They also take care of their products, thus infusing them with mindful meanings (Roux, 2010). Finally, when the objects no longer serve their purpose, they are donated while in a good shape, and thus display good will and care for others.

5.5 Interviews

Here we enumerate the responses to our interviews' questions (list of questions in Appendix 3).

All of our respondents shopped for second hand clothes, with some having done so for the last 10 years. The international students started shopping second hand in Sweden not just to save money, but because of the availability and variety of infrastructure. Shopping for second hand clothes in Sweden is not just normalized but is also considered hip (one might venture to say it has become gentrified even, but this issue does not fall within the scope of this thesis). A good percentage of our respondents shopped on site with some frequenting both SHC stores and online sites for their shopping. The ones who shopped solely in stores wanted to examine the clothes before buying and liked window shopping and pleasure browsing through items. Those who used online sites found them convenient for shopping anytime. Our respondents did not shop a lot, on average 2-3 times every 2-3 months, and when they did, they bought an item or two. Some of them frequented SHC stores often to browse but did not buy all the time. The clothes bought were used over a period of 2 years with shoes lasting a year, on average.

5.5.1 On being unique

Leila: *I don't look for any special brands or materials. I look for style and unique pieces.*

Emma: *As a plus sized woman I can confirm that I want to be stylish and have curated unique pieces in my closet just like straight sized people*

Elisabeth: *SHC are exactly what I was looking for especially knowing the unique style bundles, down to my measurements, even existed*

Kim: *I have discovered that second hand stores here in Sweden have more distinctive clothes than you find anywhere else.*

5.5.2 On being a money saver

Roberta: *I don't see any problem with higher prices (for vintage items). It's still cheaper than buying new.*

Riitta: *For the most part the clothing is so cheap! My friend Y desperately needed sneakers for cheap. She does not have a lot of money.*

J.R.: *Second hand items are cheaper. Choosing to buy second hand is cheaper and easier to access.*

Kim: *I buy clothes I have not previously bought for myself, given that they are often cheap price and have good materials.*

5.5.3 Being a conscious consumer (mostly related to environment)

Leila: *to take part in giving a second life to clothes, yes! All part of a more sustainable lifestyle… I mostly go to second hand stores where the money goes to charity in some way.*

Kim: *To save energy and resources: yes, absolutely – sustainability for the win!*

Jacob: *I pride myself on wearing only pre-loved clothing.*

Riitta: *we need as many resellers and people shopping at Thrift stores as possible to give clothing its maximum life. The Thrift stores are there to support local communities, and hire people for employmen*t.

The interviews' scripts are also personal narratives, but they are not glamorous nor pretending to be fashionable. They are just the stories of common people who find meanings in second hand clothes' consumption that is more in line with their identities: unique, money savers, ethical, sustainable, and socially aware. They do not use high fashion language or do cat walks but are certainly as passionate about their choice of consumption as any fashionista. They document various identity meanings that consumers of SHC are in harmony with, such as a money saving consumer identity that seeks to maximize profit by getting a good bargain. The fashionable content is one that seeks uniqueness of style and outlook whereby a shopper such as Emma is one who knows her size is not mainstream and still finds unique pieces that fit her physique in second hand shops. Jacob on the other hand is sustainably aware and wants to keep clothes out of landfills but is happily surprised to find special (unique) pieces along the way. For Kim, her money saving identity makes her experiment with second hand clothes that do not cost much, and she thus buys things that she does not normally buy. The identity contents bleed into each other and our consumer interviewees switch on several identities while shopping for second hand clothes: being a money saver, being unique, and or being conscious (Middlemiss, 2018). This is not different from what Anna Bergstrom

successionally summarizes when she says: "*If you can have a trendy, fashionable way to do sustainable living … I think mainstream customers can follow that — in high heels.*"

In response to our voluntary simplicity questions most of our respondents were aware of the movement but would not classify themselves as practiced adherents. However, a good number of interviewees did feel attracted by the ideas of simplifying one's life and valuing inner growth over material acquisitions. As to their shopping habits they felt that by choosing SHC they were already generating positive outcomes by keeping clothes out of landfills and giving objects a second lease of life (Rahman, 2018; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). They also stressed that since they buy SHC their shopping behaviour is more balanced and less impulsive since the shopping experience in SHC stores is different since one is not bombarded by hordes of clothes in all sizes and colours or as Leila puts it. "*I honestly get a bit nauseous from shopping in 'ordinary' stores with new items. The lighting is often too bright, and it's like walking around in the centre of climate destruction with all the new productions and stuff. I hate going to H & M or places like that. It's just not interesting or fun in any way.*"

5.6 Identity Meanings

Here we analyse our data based on meanings pertaining to identity content: being unique, being a money saver, and being a conscious consumer.

Based on the CCT's tenet of the consumer as both agentic and reflexive to market discourses and on the configuration of "*taste regimes*" that "*normatively shape consumption*" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 902), we analysed our empirical data with an eye to pinpoint the several social contexts where our respondents draw on market discourses in the shaping of their consumer identities (Askegaard & Linnett, 2011) as well as the discursive elements which structure and are embedded in their shopping practices. We did this keeping our aim in mind: to discover the meaning SHC consumers derive from this type of consumption and how these meanings are translated into identity content. Central to this is how consumers discursively deploy fashion as a "*an intimate experience, which allows for the surface of our bodies to appear convincing, appropriate both to others and to ourselves*" (Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018, p.5). The self-image we project to the outside world ultimately hinges on how we view the self.

The motivations for SHC consumption fall under many categories with only one of these being conscious consumption, however, this does not mean that a combination of drivers or all of them are active in the background (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Ferraro et al., 2016; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Steffen, 2020). Four of our respondents, who happen to be international students, made the interesting point that thinking sustainability is generalized, in Sweden. This mindset encourages people to shop more mindfully. One respondent (Adam) said "*It's only six months that I have really transformed, like, transitioned myself into second-hand shopping… yes, it has become a certain part of my personality or identity.*" Shopping for SHC is accepted in Sweden while in Adam's home country it is reserved for the poor and needy. Adam's changed practice, as well as identity content, constitutes evidence to his

reflexivity to a changed *taste regime* (in Sweden as opposed to back home) whereby his shopping behaviour and choices became more in line with those of his host country. Here, and by virtue of the change in cultural context, meanings of objects (SHC) have shifted towards a more positive register thereby necessitating a change in the value of the doings (consumption) and normalizing the latter (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Connolly & Prothero, 2003).

Our findings support earlier claims that drivers for SHC consumption remain firmly anchored in the individual consumer's search for self-adornment and social belonging (Larsen & Patterson, 2018; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Moreover, individuals' consumption patterns are not consciously dictated by their values (Middlemiss, 2018), rather they are governed by prevalent *taste regimes* that ensure the replicability of certain practices (Arsel & Bean, 2013). We, therefore, followed three axial self-images that our respondents related to as consumers. Here, we bear in mind that each of the following identities are not mutually exclusive whereby consumers deploy identities on and off according to context (Middlemiss, 2018).

5.6.1. Being Unique

… "objects represent an individual's self, an object represents the degree of the individual's need to be unique" (Einollahi & Kim, 2020, p. 2).

Searching for a unique identity via clothing is a concept that some of our respondents related to. When asked why she shops for SHC, Emma, replied:

As a plus sized woman I can confirm that I want to be stylish and have curated unique pieces in my closet just like straight sized people.

The rationale for SHC in the above is to do with the consumer's *style*, her uniqueness. Plus, Emma accents the fact that, as a plus sized woman, she has no problem finding her unique pieces, in her measurements, in second hand stores. The variety available in SHC stores means that customers can find the styles they are looking for regardless of their measurements as Elisabeth confirms:

SHC *"are exactly what I was looking for especially knowing the unique style bundles, down to my measurements, even existed"* (Elisabeth)

Our findings confirmed that SHC wearers tend to be people whose sense of style does not always go with mainstream fashion. They are people who know what to look for and what items accentuate their body measurements. The human desire to be unique among others is an extension of the need to impress social peers while standing out from the crowd. To stand out from the crowd, individuals project their desire for uniqueness through clothes (Cervellon et al., 2012; Einollahi & Kim, 2020). Accordingly, this need for uniqueness propels consumers to search for objects/clothes that go against or are unpopular with mainstream fashion (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Herjanto et al., 2016). Thus, it seems natural that the *"need for uniqueness relates positively to overall motivations toward second-hand shopping"* (Guiot & Roux, 2010, p. 363). Besides, one of the advantages of SHC is that wearers can mix fashion styles

from different eras and thus express a unique self-identity (Johansson, 2011). Unique clothes are not often seen in retail shops, nor are they worn by many people (Cervellon et al., 2012; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Edwards & Eriksson, 2014). Thus, what might come across as unpopular commodities (used clothes) are moved to a different register (unique) while the practice itself (SHC consumption) is normalized.

In line with the aim of this thesis: to discover the specific meanings consumers derive from SHC, we can detect in above two meanings that fit in with our analytical framework: 1) a consumer attitude that countervails fashion marketplace ethos with its continual churning out of new clothes in new styles (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), and 2) an object-consumer relationship that projects the uniqueness of the object on the wearer and vice versa in a configuration of taste that remains bound by marketplace culture but orchestrates the doings differently (Arsel & Bean, 2013) by buying used clothes rather than new ones. In above, the idealized unique self is one that is equated with the clothes worn (Miles, 2018; Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018), in a two-way traffic whereby uniqueness is projected onto the commodities while these, in turn, provide the wearer with a unique identity (Einollahi & Kim, 2020).

An interesting extra was offered us by our international respondents who noted the unique aspect of Swedish second-hand stores:

I have discovered that second hand stores here in Sweden have more distinctive clothes than you find anywhere else (Kim)

This extra finding was confirmed by our document analysis of personal Vlogs about second hand stores whereby we discover that Swedes take good care of their stuff and the items you find on resale often are either handmade and or of good quality brands so they last longer. This is reiterated, albeit in another country (UK), by Owain Wyn Evans who, when he tried some of the second-hand items curated for him by the Oxfam specialist, said that some of these pieces could have been items, he would have bought on the first-hand market in terms of quality and fashionability. So, a unique style sense while speaking of creativity and thinking outside the box, predisposes certain shoppers to look for quaint items that are of a better quality and or handmade in a classic style. The SHC items are "*curated*" just like timeless and artistic museum pieces (Herjanto et al., 2016; Cervellon et al., 2012). This means that in the long run our SHC consumers are checking two items on their consumer identity list just as Jarred puts it as *"you're also keeping clothes out of landfills by giving them a new life and discovering unique and special pieces along the way"*.

SHC, particularly in Sweden, offer their wearers many chances to exhibit their creative and unique identities as well as provide them with good quality items that last a long time. The meaning(s) available via this kind of consumption sidestep fashion marketplace culture with its demand on individuals to conform to a certain look, and size too, and hunger after unsustainable fashion that is increasingly becoming disposable. An original and unique identity meaning is one that is covered by individuals who search the marketplace to create their own narratives via the clothes they wear.

5.6.2. Being a money saver

The other factor high on the list of shopping decisions is to do with saving money (Bardhi, 2003; Bardhi & Arnould, 2005). Most of our consumer respondents listed saving money as a factor in choosing SHC. The cost of living is high in Sweden, so people prefer to make rational budgetary choices. When this factor meets available alternatives that are cheaper, it becomes easy for people to switch to their money-saving identity. Moreover, the Swedes practice shopping for SHC without any stigma; rather it is viewed as a thrifty choice. For the latter, SHC consumption has become accepted as part of a particular lifestyle rather than a necessity; a reflection of a certain cultural capital (Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Shopping second hand is very common here in Sweden where people find the cost of sustainable fashion is too high. Well,..., second hand is sustainable fashion and I can build a wardrobe that is sustainable for a third of the price tag. (Elisabeth).

For the most part the clothing is so cheap! My friend Y desperately needed sneakers for cheap. She does not have a lot of money (Riitta).

Second hand items are cheaper. Choosing to buy second hand is cheaper and easier to access (J.R.).

I don't see any problem with higher prices (for vintage items). It's still cheaper than buying a new (Roberta).

SHC consumers are generally looked upon as people who consider the price tag thoughtfully by looking for bargains. Second-hand clothes are cheaper than first-hand ones by at least 50%. This applies even to vintage items of clothing of designer labels that are reasonable in price compared to contemporary ones (Fischer, 2015; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). The practice of shopping for SHC is commonly referred to by YouTube influencers as thrifting, presumably because SHC would suit a thrifty consumer. Thrifty consumers, whether driven by necessity or on principle, can always count on an SHC outlet for a bargain (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Einollahi & Kim, 2020; Ferraro et al., 2016). These are consumers whose configuration of taste places value on objects that are comparatively low-cost and accordingly gravitate towards consumption behaviours that are easy on the pocket. This orchestration of objects (SHC) and doings (SHC consumption) is not an unpopular one. To Warde (2015), they are individuals who fall into the category of "customer consumers", "ones *who seek primarily to maximize their personal economic interests in the marketplace*" (Warde, 2015, p.127). They are consumers who draw upon available market resources to reshape an identity content that is compatible with their values (Askegaard & Linnett, 2011), an identity they are keen on signalling to others (Warde, 2015) via the clothes they wear.

Money saver or thrifty consumers can be said to be rational consumers, ones who use the marketplace to maximize their gains. This identity content can be found in each and every individual, even among those who can afford to splurge. This is the identity content that marketers try to titillate via their campaigns of "buy two and get one free" or "two for the

price of one." This identity content when it meets with heaps of cheap SHC runs the risk of overconsuming, a valid criticism hailed against the trend of thrifting, especially among affluent young consumers. Critics denounce them for raiding the stores and leaving scraps for the poor, for making providers raise the prices, and for over-consumption. While an interesting line of investigation, this thread falls outside the scope of this thesis.

5.6.3. Being a conscious consumer

In a prevalent taste regime, the meanings of consumption have shifted in favour of a more conscious content, whereby most individuals nowadays would profess to trying to, or aspiring to shop consciously. Our respondents were quite articulate about this aspect of their identities that they want to signal to themselves and to the outside world. In this sense, they are not only going against the discourses of a consumerist culture, they are also helping reshape the discourse around what constitutes value to them and to their community.

I buy SHC "*to take part in giving a second life to clothes, yes! All part of a more sustainable lifestyle… I mostly go to second hand stores where the money goes to charity in some way* (Leila).

To save energy and resources: yes, absolutely – sustainability for the win! (Kim)

I pride myself on wearing only pre-loved clothing (Jacob)

We need as many resellers and people shopping at Thrift stores as possible to give clothing its maximum life. The Thrift stores are there to support local communities, and hire people for employment (Riitta)

Accordingly, we found that our respondents were in an advanced stage of realizing the relation of SHC to positive and conscious practices. Being environmentally and socially conscious is part of their self-image/identity, something quite apparent in their choice of words: giving a second life to clothes, a more conscious lifestyle, to save energy and resources, and donating to charities. Awareness is greater today, and while it is not the main motivation for buying SHC, it has infiltrated the identity content of SHC shoppers whose meanings of consumption are counter discursive to dominant consumer culture (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). This is corroborated by our document analysis of the media coverage of second-hand shopping where Orsola De Castro, Fashion Revolution and Anna Bergstrom, manager of Retuna, both assert the need to live consciously and reject the materialism of consumer culture as detrimental to the environment.

Murray's (2002) re-examination of Thompson and Haytko (1997) unveils how the agentic identities of clothes consumers are ultimately bound to the politics of the fashion and textile industry and their continued monopolization of the discourses of style (Murray, 2002). Accordingly, certain consumers choose to distance themselves from the mainstream market for a variety of reasons that can be personal or political (Ferraro et al., 2016). Those driven by political objections see the marketplace as a site for exploitation and money-making at the

expense of social equity and environmental wellbeing (Ferraro et al., 2016; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Steffen, 2020). For the most part, consumers of this type are "*material green*" ones, who have "*green opinions about very diverse issues and these are directly related to their lifestyles*." Material green consumers usually buy "*into a particular image in their consumption practices*" (Connolly & Prothero, 2003, p. 275). However, they are consumers whose consumption has a positive outcome regardless of their image. Stemming from a configuration of taste in practice, the consumers concerned are acting within "*a form of reflexivity bounded by socio-culturally constituted*" practices and buying into the discursive content of the latter (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 900). Their position might not be totally conscious in terms of motivation, but the practices they are replicating contribute to an overall discourse on being a conscious consumer and thus orient further shifts in *taste regimes* towards more mindful consumption.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

6.1 Chapter overview

In this section we outline the conclusions we arrived at after analysing the findings from our empirical data. Most of our conclusions about the meanings of SHC consumption fall into the three categories referred to earlier. We have mentioned the limitations of our research and highlighted the direction for future research towards the end of the chapter.

6.2 Discussion of finding

As outlined earlier, SHC consumption, in Europe, has changed meaning in the last 20 years and lost its undesirable associations. (Einollahi & Kim, 2020; Herjanto et al., 2016). Our findings point in the direction that the meanings of SHC consumption have coalesced into a form of consumer-generated consumption trends that are changing the discourse of the fashion market. Furthermore, a taste regime such as voluntary simplicity is anticipated to go on providing discursive normalizing contexts around fashion consumption in general and SHC consumption in particular. We, thus, anticipate that the momentum of SHC consumption will continue to accelerate as more consumers will adopt SHC with increased levels of awareness about their consumption practices and lifestyle. Many such resellers and people shop thrift stores to make it possible to give clothing its maximum life as SHC stores are there to engage local communities more than ever. In short, our research reveals that most of the SHC consumers are, what Barnett et al. (2005), referred to as responsible consumers, those who care for distant others as part of caring for the self. The meanings of consumption for individuals include awareness of the uniqueness, social aspects and regard for others and the environment. Moreover, they may not be voluntary simplists in the sense of buying less and simplifying their belongings, but they are simplists in the sense of being people whose inner growth is tied to certain economical, personal and social concerns for themselves and the others. Our findings also show that people's preference for SHC consumption varies depending on attitude, access, availability, and need, i.e., socio-economic factors within specific cultural contexts (Middlemiss, 2018). This, we gleaned from the international students, who found themselves in Sweden and started to shop for SHC. These students stressed that SHC is not stigmatized in Sweden, and that people shop for them equally often as they do first-hand clothes. So, an availability of a diversified infrastructure (both physical and online) as well as a prevalent taste for shopping habits with sustainable content are also factors that incentivize shopping for SHC (Rahman, 2018; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). A good number of our respondents stressed a unique identity content to be a motivation behind choosing SHC since they valued objects that are special, handmade, unique and timeless. In line with the analysis of the previous section, and in answering our research question about the meanings of SHC consumption, our findings have unveiled three identity meanings that SHC consumers experience: being unique, being a money saver, and or being a conscious consumer. Common people, especially the international students, adopt different kinds of tastes and practices but most of them are not very much aware/enlightened about these terms. Rather, their intentions are generally established from a broader perspective of ethical

consumption, saving the environment, helping the needy, contributing to society and other such things. This does not mean that they are not part of such taste regimes, trends or practices. Rather, they are participating indirectly towards the development of such trends which, sometimes, may get embedded in the culture. While these identity contents remain grounded in the personal vis-à-vis the consumers themselves; they are also discursive contents that individuals relate to in reflexivity to the socio-cultural contexts they are embedded in. Our findings also point to consumption practices and meanings that display elements of social responsibility and caring for others. These discursive meanings are orchestrated by a configuration of taste that has, in Sweden, normalized consumer practices with SHC consumption.

6.3 Conclusion

One of the conclusions, being Swedish, is an identity meaning that was strongly presented side by side with the other meanings attached to SHC consumption. Consumers who style themselves uniquely from others usually have an effective relationship with objects which they endow with their identity content (Einollahi & Kim, 2020; Roux, 2010). Their personal tastes highlight a reflexive two-way traffic vis-à-vis object-person relations. So, when a certain taste regime that orchestrates relations with objects and doings favours a minimalist frugal style, they will follow suit (Rahman, 2018; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). These are individuals, in whose experiential reality, sustainability is an outcome of their practices rather than a motivation. Still, we did not detect that the meanings of consumption: being a money saver, being unique, and being conscious were mutually exclusive for our respondents who derived different meanings from different shopping experiences. We found out that our SHC consumer respondents who are active in pursuing their money saving meanings concede that SHC items are different in style and can be qualified as unique, and thus offer another meaning to their shopping experience. Both identity meanings are anchored in the individual who searches for material and discursive market offerings in the pursuit of maximization of self-interest (Warde, 2015). The voluntary simplicity meanings, on the other hand, were present with some of our respondents and aspired for by others who would like to be more active in limiting consumption and simplifying their lifestyle. At occasions, it was not voluntary simplicity in the strict sense, but it encompasses aspects of it: recycling, reusing, restoring. Mostly, the respondents were aware of different movements that call for mindful consumption and rejection of consumerism and use their language "need" vs "want," "repair" and "restore," etc. Whether individual or collective, consumer identity is complex and complicated and is plural rather than singular (Middlemiss, 2018). Moreover, the multiple consumer identities in question are not always harmonious and can be conflicting depending on the social context (Middlemiss, 2018). To understand people's consumption behaviour and by extension how they can be active responsible consumers we need to keep in mind that the former is embedded in broader social factors and contexts. People's motives for consumption are driven by their class, monetary power, gender, and ethnic group—factors that also structure their identity (Middlemiss, 2018). Individuals' consumption patterns are driven by access, need, affluence, and by emotions to nurture, provide for and give, all of which are social factors (Middlemiss, 2018). The personal Vlogs also document, the media documents,

and the providers' websites corroborate the existence of a discursive taste regime that orchestrates an identity content that consumers aspire to/are asked to aspire to. What we did not anticipate from our research is the emergence, unsolicited, of another theme: being Swedish. Behind the nationalistic fervour of our respondents, the accolade of the media for Swedish initiatives, and the practicality of the personal vloggers there emerged the identity meaning of being Swedish as going side by side with the other identity content, especially that of being consciously selective. On a final note, our investigation into the meanings of SHC consumption has served to bring to the surface the creative meaning of the practice. SHC in its continual involvement of customers in the handling and selection of goods can be considered an act of presumption, one that involves the consumers differently by asking for their active involvement (Eden, 2015). Moreover, SHC prosumers bring to the table a number of personal qualities: patience, perseverance, sense of adventure, and skills: eye for design and knowledge of fashion history (McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020). What is being deployed here is cultural capital that is the property of certain consumers: ones that can play a leading role in influencing their peers in making meaning differently (Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Middlemiss, 2018).

6.4 Critique, Limitations & Directions for Future Research

Although this study broadens our grasp of the meanings of SHC consumption and the rise of the phenomenon in recent years, it has its limitations.

While we bear in mind the specificity of our findings to a Nordic context where recycling, reusing, and mindful consumption are a normalized lifestyle for almost all citizens, we also note that some of the research we consulted revealed similar connections between SHC consumption and normalizing taste regimes that include voluntary simplicity and frugality in other countries (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019; Herjanto et al., 2016; Zaman et al., 2019).

One study in particular encompasses six countries that include Switzerland, Hong Kong and the UK where a shift towards frugality, minimalism, and other sustainable forms of consumption including SHC was noted as an after effect of the pandemic (Iran et al., 2022).

Our study collected data from residents in Sweden: our interviewees were all either Swedish or based in Sweden and the documents we examined were all about a Swedish context. Thus, we bear in mind that our findings should be prudently used by other researchers. Future research can tackle this limitation by broadening the scope of data to include multiple ethnicities as well as different countries.

Lastly, we think that a quantitative analysis will be a step in creating a framework for identifying the relationship between SHC consumption behaviour and the various reasons for adopting it. Such research can make it possible to pinpoint the key relationships between SHC consumption practices and different taste regimes.

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YouTube content

BBC Inside Out- The Rise of Sustainable Fashion & The Second-Hand Clothing Industry - YouTube

Swedish second-hand stores are unique 🇸🇪 | CC - YouTube

Why Swedes Love to buy Second Hand - YouTube

Let's take a look inside some Swedish second-hand stores, flea markets and thrift shops! - YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXd27EwRYy0&t=22s

THRIFTING IN MALMÖ CITY! - YouTube

Two Americans Visit A Swedish Thrift Store (Vlog) - YouTube

Appendix 1

Overview of participants

	Date	Timing	Participant	Length of Interview	Age	Gender	Occupation
1	04-07-2022	13:00	Kim	32min	29	Female	Student
2	04-07-2022	14:00	Leila	30min	29	Female	Student
3	05-07-2022	18:00	Jacob	30min	36	Male	Job Holder
4	05-07-2022	19:00	Adam	25min	28	Male	Student
5	05-07-2022	21:00	Firuz	25min	32	Male	Student
6	06-07-2022	20:00	Jarred	35min	46	Male	Job Holder
7	06-7-2022	18:30	Emma	32min	50	Female	Job Holder
8	06-07-2022	11.23	Mo	35min	52	Male	Job Holder
9	06-07-2022	12:00	J.R.	32 min	57	Male	Job Holder
10	07-07-2022	22:00	Riitta	30min	57	Female	Entrepreneur

11	14-07-2022	by email	Roberta		60	Female	Job Holder
12	2-07-2022	by email	Elisabeth		63	Female	Retired

Appendix 2

Interview Guide

Information sheet for participation in a research study

Researchers: **Rawah Younes, Faheem Ahmed Chaudhry**

Study Title: The Meaning of Second-Hand Clothing Consumption

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research for a thesis study. You are being asked to provide consent to participate in research, which is conducted as a part of a method course in the master's program of Service Management at Lund University. Please read this document before giving consent (in writing or verbally) to participate.

We (Rawah and Faheem) are writing our master thesis in service management, sustainability, and tourism.

This research aims to investigate the meanings of second-hand clothing (SHC) consumption as a social trend. More precisely we are examining how consumers of SHC find alternative meanings that are more in line with lifestyle that is more sustainable. Conceding that more and more people are buying SHC, we want to investigate the meanings these individuals, and the social community they are part of, derive from this manner of consumption.

We are studying this phenomenon because it is on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century and has experienced an image change as well in the age group and social class of consumers. This phenomenon, particularly in Sweden, is closely linked to increased awareness of the environmental fall out of fast fashion and the social exploitation of outsourced workers.

The clothing industry is the second biggest polluting industry globally. To arrest its mushrooming growth and negative impact requires an 'out of the box' thinking for a sustainable future. SHC is an alternative middle ground for people who want to be sustainable but wish to remain fashionable.

Privacy

All data and responses are anonymous and will be treated as confidential. All data and information gained in this study will be stored so that the participants are not identifiable and cannot be linked to you. Data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per the research data policy of Service Management. Your name will be anonymized, and the recording will be destroyed after transcription.

The Interview

To elicit your thoughts on the topic, we would like you to be interviewed. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw the participation before, during, and after the interview has taken place. The interview will be conducted in English, online via video a call application - specifically Zoom. You will be interviewed by one member of the research. There could be a follow-up interview if deemed necessary. The interview will be recorded for transcription. The interview will be recorded but only after gaining the participant's consent. Its duration is between 30-45 minutes knowing that you can withdraw at any time if you wish to. We are grateful to you for offering us your valuable time. Should you have any questions about our research, we will be more than happy to give further information about SHC.

First, we will ask the interviewee if she/he has any concerns related to the consent form or has any other questions concerning the manner of the interview. We then assure the interviewee with the following statement: "We believe there are no known risks or inconveniences associated with the research, however, you can refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw your statement afterwards in case of discomfort."

We then request the interviewee's consent to record the interview. After the consent is given, we will start with asking some social questions to break the ice and make the person comfortable. The next step is to inform the interviewee of what s/he is to expect: "If you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to answer questions about your lifestyle. Interview questions will mainly be about SHC, e.g., how many times do you shop for SHC? How many items do you usually buy? How long do you keep wearing the clothes? etc." Lastly, we inform our interviewee: "You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we truly hope that your participation in the research may increase the awareness of SHC; sustainability (awareness and practical steps to achieve it), and its effect. Once again, we would like to thank you for accepting to take part in this study. We will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study at any time. If you have any further questions regarding the research process or your rights, do not hesitate to contact any of the researchers via the contact information below."

Contact Information

Rawah Younes

rawahyounes772@gmial.com

Faheem Ahmad Chaudhry

 137airborne@gmail.com

Consent form for participation in a research study

Researchers: Rawah Younes, Faheem Ahmed Chaudhry

- I have read and understood the information sheet provided by the research group

- I have been given opportunities to ask questions about the research and its procedures

- I had time to consider my decision on participation before the consent was taken

- I understand that participation is voluntary

- I understand that participation included being interviewed and recorded

- I understand that my contribution to the research will be anonymous, and my name will be anonymized.

- I understand that my personal details will be confidential and treated with caution

- I understand that my wordings can be quoted in the research paper.

- I agree that the copyright of the material related to the research is assigned to the research group.

- I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time and no question will be asked regarding the withdraw

- After reading the information sheet and the consent form carefully, I agree to participate in this interview with a good understanding of the research and my rights.

Participant Signature: Print   Name:

Date:

 Signature of Person: Print Name:

Date (Obtaining Consent):

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

<u>Please try to answer all the questions because that will help our research, but you are also welcome to skip any you do not wish not to answer</u>

Why choose SHC

1. Tell us about your shopping for SHC experience? What Styles, brands, quality, materials, and prices do you look for?

2. What are your reasons for shopping for second hand clothes: To save money, to find clothes that have a unique style (not found in new clothes markets), to give a second life to clothes, or to help charities? If you have other reasons, please specify?

3. How is the experience of shopping for SHC different from that of shopping for new items?

4. Do you think there is variety in SHC equivalent to new ones? Do you usually find what you are looking for easily?

Clothes in relation to identity and lifestyle

5. Do you follow the changes in fashions or you have your own specific style?

6. How do your clothes reflect your personality? Values? Lifestyle?

7. What do you do with the items you no longer use? Keep them, sell them, give them to friends or donate them?

8. How many items of clothes are enough for your needs? Do you buy more than what you have occasion to wear?

Clothes in relation to public opinion, awareness, and values

9. Do you like discussing your SHC with others, like exchange advice about places to shop, quality to look for, etc.?

10. Do you consider the impact of your clothes (textile and fashion industries) on others and the environment?

11. Do you think that you have a responsibility to the planet and others and that it affects your clothes shopping decisions? Like it makes you buy second hand, sustainable labels, or simply buy less?

Voluntary Simplicity

12. Do you regularly declutter the clothes you have to keep your wardrobe simple? How do you do that, throw stuff away, swap with friends, donate or what?

13. Tell us about the outfits that you have: number of items and the occasions you wear them for?

14. The clothes that you have are all serving you well in terms of being worn and used regularly? Or do you have clothes that are just sitting in your closet?

15. Do you need a lot of clothes to feel content, or do you feel better when you have less? Explain why.

Appendix 4

List of Documents Analysed

Type of Document	Web Address
6 Personal Documents	[Swedish second-hand stores are unique 🇸🇪 | CC - YouTube](#) by Kamenberg [Why Swedes Love to buy Second Hand - YouTube](#) by Hailey in Stockholm [Let's take a look inside some Swedish second hand stores, flea markets and thrift shops! - YouTube](#) by Scandinavian Design 101 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXd27EwRYy0&t=22s Why is second hand shopping sustainable? By Study in Sweden [THRIFTING IN MALMÖ CITY! - YouTube](#) by Let's Go Thrifting [Two Americans Visit A Swedish Thrift Store (Vlog) - YouTube](#) by Stefan Thyron
4 Infra-structure Provider Documents	https://secondhand.se/ https://www.sellpy.se/ https:/myrorna.se/ https:/blocket.se/
2 Media Coverage Documents	[BBC Inside Out- The Rise of Sustainable Fashion & The Second-Hand Clothing Industry - YouTube](#) BBC 'Welcome to my high-fashion, trash shopping mall' **By Dougal Shaw,** BBC Stories https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-47001188