

MASTER'S THESIS

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# **Against the Script**

## *How and Why Consumers Counter Consumption on Circular Platforms*

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Master's Thesis for the  
*Master of Science Programme in Service Management – Retailing and Consumption*

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**Abstract:** Research has shown that circular platforms can produce the opposite ecological outcomes they were designed to address by feeding into overconsumption their linear counterparts have been criticised for over the years. This is partly due to their interface's design that actively nudges and often pushes consumers to spend more money and time on these platforms by removing friction between browsing and purchasing and making the user experience similar to social media. However, prior research has largely overlooked the ways in which consumers regain control over their consumption on these platforms. This study investigates how consumers actively resist platform nudges by developing counter-strategies that limit their own shopping on circular platforms in light of their awareness of potential implications of following circular platform design. Drawing on practice theory and socio-technical scripting, we employ qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and netnography) to examine how these counter-strategies develop. Findings reveal that consumers, upon critically reflecting on platform design, delegate their agency, develop strategies to reintroduce friction into otherwise seamless interfaces, and establish self-governing consumption rules. Crucially, consumers also reframe the role of circular platforms, shifting their perceived role from 'sustainable' to 'pushy' and 'worthy of using with caution', thereby undermining the platforms' acquisition logic. This study contributes to critical circular platform literature and, more specifically, provides concrete strategies for consumers to critically use circular platforms.

**Keywords:** circular platform, circular consumption, practice theory, socio-technical scripts, rebound effect, netnography



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## Introduction

This thesis centres upon consumers' critical approach towards shopping on digital platforms that aim to enable sustainable consumption and facilitate the transition towards a circular economy (Evans, 2024). Collectively, throughout the thesis, we refer to these as circular platforms. In essence, these platforms provide an array of possibilities to consumers to support their sustainable goals by applying circular business models that aim to mitigate waste generation and extend the lifetime use of products (Bocken et al., 2017). The number of circular platforms has increased significantly in recent years, with an estimated growth of more than five new platforms per year in Europe (Evans, 2024), making them increasingly available for consumers. These platforms are primarily located within the food (e.g., Too Good To Go or Olio), mobility (e.g., RYDE or BOLT), and apparel sectors (e.g., Vinted or Sellpy), but can be found in a broader context as well (e.g., Shopgun App). Commonly, platform providers market them as green, convenient and hassle-free, facilitating circular consumption (Chrispim et al., 2026; Eggert et al., 2025; Schwanholz & Leipold, 2020; Sörum, 2025).

Resulting from their market proliferation, academic interest in the ways in which sustainable, circular consumption can be enabled by digital platforms has grown (e.g., Blackburn et al., 2026). More specifically, a group of researchers has shifted towards the practice of consumption and how digital platforms can be integrated into it. Several studies have examined how mobile devices and digital platforms – such as smartphone applications – support circular consumption, including, for example, in domestic settings (Schuster et al., 2022) and during commuting through ride-sharing services (Guyader, 2018).

In contrast, extant research focusing on circular platforms showed that, due to structural and psychological factors, their use may backfire (e.g., Dekhili et al., 2025). Furthermore, the layout of digital platforms, similar to physical stores (Fuentes, 2014), is designed to promote shopping and keep users engaged and within the platform's infrastructure (Bae et al., 2022; Koh & Seah, 2023). Thus, as platforms are created by designers, there is an intended usage – represented by so-called socio-technical scripts, which users can follow or reject (Akrich, 1992). The intended usage may take several forms (Eggert et al., 2025), many of which support consumption by a range of functional, social, and personalised features

(Bae et al., 2022; de Rivera et al., 2017; Eggert et al., 2025; Sörum, 2025), like saved search filters, product recommendation algorithms, and user profiles. As a result, users generally perceive digital circular platforms as convenient (Sörum, 2025; Korsunova et al., 2025; Turunen & Gossen, 2024; Chripim et al., 2026). This setup, however, promotes “fast shopping” on platforms – aligned with their commercial nature (Juge et al., 2022). More specifically, for example, secondhand fashion platforms (e.g., Vinted) were shown to feed into fast fashion consumption (Dekhili et al., 2025) or overconsumption (Parguel et al., 2017), and facilitate secondhand purchases in ways that mirror fast fashion (Eggert et al., 2025). Circular food platforms, moreover, were shown to increase food waste despite aiming to reduce it (Michellini et al., 2026). Effectively, together these represent the conflating interest between platforms and users (Ramizo Jr, 2022). The former aim to develop platforms characterised by a smooth and commercially-driven experience, making slippage from browsing to purchase more likely. In this thesis, we develop our argument following this critique on the efficacy of circular platforms; however, we do so by shifting our focus from the platforms to the consumers, similarly to Eggert et al. (2025). The authors present that the promoted “fast shopping” can be countered by “going against the script”, engaging in “slow shopping” characterised by a selective, restrained mode of consumption (Eggert et al., 2025). As a result, following Eggert et al. (2025), we are interested in consumers’ critical understanding and usage of circular platforms.

Building on the insights on consumer counter-strategies to the inscribed mode of consumption by Eggert et al. (2025), understanding the ways in which consumers critically use circular platforms in more detail may hold great potential for developing practical knowledge. Furthermore, strategies of critical shopping within the circular platform literature, to our knowledge, are largely under-researched. However, a similar line of inquiry can be found, for example, within anti-consumption or consumer resistance literature (e.g., Cherrier et al., 2011; Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022) as they have developed an understanding of intentional non-consumption or abstinence (i.e., strategies to refrain from or resist consumption). These arguments often consider the act of not consuming as a result of one’s sustainability goals; nevertheless, they have not involved digital platform usage in their studies. In relation to digital platforms, a limited number of academic articles have identified ways in which consumers use platforms in novel ways, often “going against the script”. For example, Nguyen et al. (2025) identified so-called bypass strategies employed by platform users, circumventing the script by avoiding the payment system. Similarly, Ramizo Jr (2022) presented strategies on how ride-hailing consumers protect their interests in the face of algorithmic power. Nonetheless, the above inquiries examine users’ active use of platforms primarily relying on the

utilisation of services – albeit in non-conventional ways. Similarly, in more recent approaches of studying circular consumption from a practice-theoretical perspective, scholarly interest (e.g. Eggert et al., 2025; Fuentes et al., 2021; Sörum, 2025) has largely remained on consumption, rather than the act of limiting or developing strategies to refrain from it. Different strategies applied by consumers to slow their personal consumption as a result of their critical understanding of circular platforms thus remain underexplored.

Collectively, this problematisation highlights a relevant research gap: to our knowledge, prior research has largely overlooked – or not explicitly examined – how consumers critically analyse and, as a consequence, actively limit their consumption via circular platforms. Therefore, it presents us with the opportunity not only to fill this gap but to develop practical knowledge on how consumers can and do limit their consumption on circular platforms that can serve as a groundwork for future inquiries on their possible effects.

Consequently, our intention is to address and conceptualise a phenomenon with real-world applicability. To support our efforts, we adopted an actor approach that attributes a pragmatic aim to social inquiries. As a problem-driven approach, it aims to address issues within a particular context from a perspective of “actors” (Flyvbjerg & Sampson, 2001). As we will detail in this thesis, platforms (the context) are designed in ways that lead to consumers (the actors) being pushed into, or at least, nudged towards shopping. Therefore, we perceive “actors” as platform users who have been at least partially stripped of their agency by the platform design, which they may regain (at least, partially) by a more conscious and critical usage of circular platforms. This approach is further supported by the application of practice theory that helps guide the analysis by using actions (i.e., what people do) as the smallest units of analysis (Shove et al., 2012). As a result, we can develop an understanding of what people do that counters the design of circular platforms.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to and extend critical circular platform literature by exploring the strategies consumers employ to limit their consumption via these platforms and critically engage with them. We thus go beyond presenting risks and rebound effects highlighted in extant literature, and show how users act against the script of circular platforms. Consequently, we formulated the following research questions:



1. *How do consumers critically analyse circular platforms?*
2. *What strategies do consumers develop to refrain from or limit shopping on circular platforms in relation to their critical understanding of them?*

The thesis is built as follows. Chapter 2, following the introduction, provides a theoretical background on circular platforms usage, followed by the conceptualisation of theoretical perspectives applied in this study, namely practice theory and socio-technical scripts in Chapter 3. In the methodology section, Chapter 4, our approach of conducting semi-structured interviews in combination with netnography is presented. In addition, broader methodological considerations that shape the nature of this study, such as ethical considerations, in particular in the case of conducting netnography, are discussed. The findings section, Chapter 5, presents the analysis of our collected data. It first covers the recognition and critical analysis of circular platform scripts by users and then presents users' critical strategies to limit shopping via circular platforms. The final Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings and discussion in relation to existing literature. We propose theoretical, practical and societal contributions and, finally, directions for future research.

## Theoretical Background on Circular Platform Consumption

In this chapter, we present existing literature on circular platforms and review the different forms of usage of circular platforms. We also present our key critical angle, namely, how the critical use of circular platforms requires a degree of reflection from consumers, given the consumption-driving nature of circular platforms.

We start by turning to circular platforms and scrutinising them from two angles: first, by presenting arguments suggesting that the design of such platforms can – and often does – amplify consumption, an axis that considers the socio-technicality of platforms, that is, how their interface is designed to promote usage. Second, we present that consuming on these platforms often leads to the opposite of the intended outcome. As a result, our reasoning should clarify from a consumption perspective that although circular platforms promote a form of consumption worth embracing, the ways in which they push consumption via their designs should not only be scrutinised by academia, but also recognised and acted against by consumers themselves.

### Consumption through Digital Circular Platforms

Today, we are experiencing the rise of the platform economy, in which digital platforms increasingly shape economic and social interactions in the areas of consumption, communication and work (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). This “digitally based new economy” (p. 61) is built on platforms, algorithmic arrangements which mediate both social and economic interactions, often through apps (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). Platforms are often discussed in the context of the circular economy (Blackburn et al., 2025), which is “an economic system that replaces the ‘end-of-life’ concept with reducing, alternatively reusing, recycling and recovering materials in production/distribution and consumption processes” (Kirchherr et al., 2017, p. 229). This is due to the rise of digital platforms with the aim of enabling circular consumption in the past two decades. Evans (2024), for example, defines such circular platforms as “a digital marketplace, exchange, or online platform that enables and accelerates the transition towards

a circular economy” (p. 3). Services provided by these primarily revolve around re-principles such as the reuse, repair, refurbishing or recycling of products (Bączyk et al., 2024), with presence in the areas of mobility, clothing, books, electronics, and general consumer goods.

Transaction-oriented platforms are particularly relevant in a circular economy context as they enable a wide range of activities that can be considered to fall under circular economy principles, as shown by Chasin et al. (2018). Overall, they are concerned with targeting the circulation of goods and extension of product lifetime, ultimately addressing resource efficiency (Blackburn et al., 2026). Today, a point of strong differentiation has been reached with the availability of niche platforms specialising in specific product categories, for example, *Buycycle.com* for used road and mountain bikes (Evans, 2024).

## Circular Platform Usage

While the use of circular platforms and applications exists alongside other socially- and locally-embedded strategies, such as social media groups, group chats or online forums, they play an important role in consumers’ circular consumption (Korsunova et al., 2025; Ulrich et al., 2024; Philip et al., 2019). Consequently, to a large extent, research on users’ interaction with circular platforms focuses on how they are used by consumers to buy, sell, swap or share goods. Eggert et al. (2025) examined circular shopping through digital platforms, enabling users to circulate secondhand clothing through a cycle of purchasing and reselling, often at a high pace. Korsunova et al. (2025) found consumers using platforms to rent rather than acquire, with examples ranging from household items to vacation rentals. Swapping platforms provide consumers the opportunity of continuous acquisition of objects (Philip et al., 2019) without users having to spend money on the products themselves. The use of circular platforms, however, does not necessarily rely solely on transactions. Their role as a source of fashion inspiration (Sörum, 2025), a place for curation (Eggert et al., 2025) as well as knowledge sharing (Korsunova et al., 2025) and a community for building social contacts (Philip et al., 2019) have been acknowledged in the literature.

Existing literature has also examined how circular platforms become embedded in the routines and everyday lives of consumers. Users develop routines for browsing, desiring, acquiring and re-selling (Sörum, 2025) or renting (Ulrich et al., 2024) fashion and use platforms on a recurring level, with multiple log-ins per day (Philip et al., 2019). Rental platforms, for instance, allow consumers to equip themselves with clothing for daily use, with possibilities to bring rotation into users’ wardrobes and test new looks, without having to buy items (Ulrich et al., 2024). Users’ constant connection, rooted in platform features and structure (Juge et al., 2022), reveals the considerable presence of platforms in

consumers' lives. These notions stand in contrast to Rabiou and Jaeger-Erben's (2022) review of the literature on circular consumption practices, revealing that practices are often depicted as momentary happenings in consumers' lives.

Reasons for using circular platforms vary and range from utilitarian to emotional motives. In their study on consumers' motivations to engage in collaborative consumption, Kim and Yoon (2021) focus on the three dimensions of enjoyment, sustainability and economic benefit – dimensions that resemble those identified and applied in research on secondhand consumption at large (e.g. Roux & Guiot, 2008). Users of circular platforms enjoy using these for various reasons, such as the social media-like user interface and user experience (Bae et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024) or the browsing (Denegri-Knott, 2011) and curating activity (Eggert et al., 2025). The enjoyment experienced on circular platforms is comparable to that on e-commerce shopping platforms (Cerio et al., 2025). Sustainability motivations are rooted in users' desire to extend the lifetime of goods (Balińska et al., 2024) and avoid their disposal and waste (Philip et al., 2019). Lastly, users of circular platforms are motivated by economic benefits such as the possibility of finding bargains (Balińska et al., 2024) or saving money and finding better prices (Palomo-Domínguez et al., 2023). The social aspect of the online community on the platform is another reason motivating consumers to engage with circular platforms, albeit not a primary one (Philip et al., 2019).

Digital platforms enabling circular consumption are commonly highlighted for their role in reducing waste, extending product lifetime and incentivising sustainable behaviour (Evans, 2024), in areas ranging from textiles to food (Sörum, 2025; Ulrich et al., 2024). Furthermore, Balińska et al. (2024) argue that platforms like Vinted contribute to the popularisation of sustainable behaviour among Generation Z. However, consumers' reasons for using these platforms do not fully reflect this sustainability-driven narrative. Research has shown that personal economic reasons outweigh environmental motives (Balińska et al., 2024; Ek Styvén & Mariani, 2020; Kim et al., 2025). When participants of a focus group hosted by Palomo-Domínguez et al. (2023) were asked about connotations with secondhand platform Vinted, "sustainability" appeared after utilitarian and self-interested connotations, with "making money" or "decluttering" leading the list. These findings mirror the ways peer-to-peer platforms primarily promote their services by highlighting the economic benefits (Chasin et al., 2018). These findings reveal a contradiction between the sustainability narrative circular platforms communicate and the economic logic that both platforms and their users appear to prioritise in practice..

## Rebound on Circular Platforms

Circular consumption is not only enabled by platforms, but also shaped by them (Eggert et al., 2025; Sörum, 2025). Platform providers apply a wide range of technological strategies that facilitate communication and transactions via platforms (Bae et al., 2022), ultimately making circular consumption convenient and accessible (Korsunova et al., 2025; Sörum, 2025) and reducing consumption-related burdens (Ulrich et al., 2024). However, making use of circular platforms and their features can equally lead to unwanted, less beneficial outcomes – a theme that a growing group of researchers has dedicated attention to (e.g., Parguel et al., 2017; Dekhili et al., 2025). Several of these outcomes occur in the form of rebound effects. While rooted in energy economics, and originally applied to energy consumption (Greening et al., 2000), the rebound effect, “a behavioural or other systemic response to a measure taken to reduce environmental impacts that offsets the effect of the measure” (Hertwich, 2005, p. 86), is equally relevant in the context of sustainable consumption. Extended from the linear to the circular economy, the circular rebound effect describes “consumer behaviour lead[ing] to offsetting environmental gains from circular business models” (Bączyk et al., 2024, p. 285). It can occur in various forms, both direct and indirect, for example, through savings of using circular services and products being spent on additional consumption or consumption accumulation, adding circular products to existing goods, rather than replacing them, thus increasing consumption at large (Bączyk et al., 2024).

A recurring finding across studies on circular platforms is a speeding up, rather than slowing down of consumption. The features of circular platforms can hamper slow usage, resulting in fast consumption cycles characterised by repeated buying and selling (Eggert et al., 2025). This is not a new phenomenon and had been discovered in the use of eBay by Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2009), before the proliferation of today’s largely mobile platforms. Similar notions of sped-up consumption on circular platforms have been voiced by Dekhili et al. (2025) and Juge et al. (2022), the latter identifying a speed-based competition between users, rooted in various features of the platform such as rating systems, notifications, shipping deadlines and saved searches. Other features, such as bundling, which allows users to buy multiple items from one seller at a discounted price, have been found to risk overconsumption on secondhand platforms (Dekhili et al., 2025). Platforms offering free shipping above a certain order value were found to make users buy items in bulk (Eggert et al., 2025), encouraging overconsumption and causing additional impact through subsequent returns of unwanted items. Looking at the counterside of shopping, that is, selling, the revenue made through items sold on circular platforms is at risk of being spent in further transactions (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009; Eggert et al., 2025). Referring to the

nature of resale platforms, Mizrachi and Sharon (2025) propose that items' low prices and fast inventory turnover strengthen rebound effects among users' consumption and are thus built into the fabric of network-based platforms. In establishing an understanding of platform design and features that significantly impact users' consumption through circular platforms, these studies treat users as being exposed to these effects. An examination of users' conscious reaction to circular platform design remains underexplored.

As a result, several studies have argued that there is an overlap between the script of circular and conventional, linear platforms. Comparisons of features such as search functions (Sörum, 2025) or the engaging app interface (Cerio et al., 2025) have been drawn, with some arguing that circular platforms employ similar strategies to promote continuous consumption (Eggert et al., 2025). Platform users not only show similarities in usage of circular platforms, at times they are aware of the resemblances between circular platforms and their linear counterparts (Sörum, 2025). Beliefs in users' self-awareness differ, however. While Eggert et al. (2025) found that Sellpy users partially show awareness of the platform design's role in pushing consumption, other scholars have questioned users' awareness of the potential overconsumption through circular platforms (e.g., Dekhili et al., 2025).

Finally, the circularity promoted by platforms has been scrutinised in existing literature. Drawing on the conceptualisation by Bergmann et al. (2025), Eggert et al. (2025) apply the notion of weak circularity to the secondhand platform Sellpy as consumption levels remain high in many cases. Korsunova et al. (2025) argue that many circular platforms are designed with individual users in mind, resembling a circular economy that is rooted in "capitalist principles and fast-paced value creation" (p. 310). Consumption enabled by circular platforms is thus not inherently sustainable (Bączyk et al., 2024) and can pose several challenges to consumers. This study builds on the notion outlined above that users show awareness of risks associated with platform usage similar to those encountered in linear contexts, including rebound effects and overconsumption, and extends it by acknowledging that users can act upon that knowledge to critically use circular platforms.

## Theoretical Framework

Our approach to qualitatively studying how consumers critically shop via or use circular platforms draws on two established perspectives in the study of consumption and system design: practice theory and socio-technical scripts. Their combination is motivated by the angle of our thesis, which is inherently twofold – namely, understanding the ways in which platforms promote purchases via their design (socio-technical scripts) and the processes through which consumers reject them (practice theory). The framework opens with an introduction to practice theory; its philosophical foundations and its demonstrated applicability to the study of everyday life. Then we show a simplified version of the otherwise complex approach that practice theory proposes that our analysis will more closely follow. To conclude our framework, in the last part, we present socio-technical scripts.

### What is Practice Theory?

Following that interpretive turn in the social sciences around the 1970s, a range of philosophical stances shifted attention to or foregrounded the notions of practice in their social inquiries (Reckwitz, 2002), largely interested in the questions of structure and agency (Warde, 2015). In their views on social life, authors such as Bourdieu, Giddens, and Foucault considered human action as purposeful rather than automatic, and shared an interest in the ‘everyday’ (Reckwitz, 2002). Following these earlier groundworks leading to practice theory, its interest in understanding social life has remained unchanged (Schatzki, 1996, 2002). More specifically, practice theory is regarded as a framework for empirical research in the field of social sciences; it provides a certain way to evaluate social phenomena (Reckwitz, 2002), that is, it aims to explain and understand actions taking into account symbolic structures of meaning that, at any given moment, make certain courses of action intelligible to those who enact them (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002).

In essence, a practice is a “bundle of activities” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 71) composed of sayings and doings (Schatzki, 1996). These activities are often future-oriented and historically rooted (Schatzki, 2010) and are linked through various elements to form practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002; Warde, 2005). Together, as the widely quoted summary by Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) asserts, a practice “consists of

several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.”

Bodily activities – encompassing mental, emotional, and physical alike – are, in Reckwitz’s (2002) account, performances through which practitioners skillfully bring certain actions into being. Such performances are what Schatzki (2002) referred to as practical understanding. These bodily activities are connected via know-how, ways of interpretation, particular aims (or ends), and emotions (Reckwitz, 2002). Bodily activities need to be extended with mental activities, as without the combination of the two, Reckwitz argues, an agent (the practitioner) could not perform the practice as it demands both knowing what to do and knowing how to do it. Schatzki (2002) calls for the awareness of material configurations within practice, a concept Reckwitz (2002) approaches as ‘things’. He argues that ‘things’ are often necessary elements of a practice and that such ‘things’ need to be used in a certain way to perform certain activities. For example, to shop online, a device connected to the internet is needed, whose user needs to skillfully use the device in ways that lead to the purchase, which may include, but are not limited to, browsing, adding items to the cart, adding a payment method, planning delivery, etc. Finally, the knowledge element of a practice is understood as a historically and culturally rooted implicit way of understanding objects, humans, and oneself (Reckwitz, 2002).

A practice, then, is not reducible to any one of these elements, as their existence is largely dependent on their interconnectedness to one another (Reckwitz, 2002).

### The Three Elements of Practices: Meanings, Competences, and Materials

As an attempt to simplify the broad philosophical stances that practice theorists introduced, Shove et al. (2012) proposed a three-part framework. They argued that the numerous concepts presented within practice theory can be understood as being part of either of the following three groups: competence, meaning, or material. Similar to the proposition by Reckwitz (2002), the scholars argued that in order to form practices, connections between these groups need to be established.

*Competence* combines the concepts of bodily and mental activities (Reckwitz, 2002) and practical understanding (Schatzki, 2002) to reflect multiple forms of knowledge, including performance as well as skills to perform (Shove et al., 2012). Another simplifying step by the authors was the introduction of *meaning*, a concept related to the argument on mental activities, background knowledge and emotions by Reckwitz (2002), which emphasises “the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one



moment” (Shove et al., 2012, p. 23). Participation in a practice also signals one's position within a social order, made legible through which practices one enacts and which one does not (Shove et al., 2012). Finally, *materials* refer to objects, tools, etc. – ‘things’ in the words of Reckwitz (2002) and ‘material configurations’ in the words of Schatzki (2002) – whose integral role in constituting practices has received growing recognition in the literature (Røpke, 2009). Reiterating extant arguments, Shove et al. (2012) highlight the importance of material configurations in practices and argue their integral role therein.

What separates the approach by Shove et al. (2012) is its proposition that these elements are not only interconnected, as proposed by earlier scholars, but that they shape each other, allowing the de- and re-classification of themselves and the relationships between them. Using the example of Nordic Walking, the authors propose that by de- and re-classifying the practice from one associated with frailty to one linked to health, “old connotations ha[ve] to be shaken off and new connections made” (p. 53) – a reconfiguration of meaning that necessarily pulled competence and materials along with it. Furthermore, practices may share elements amongst themselves. The authors offer the case in which driving is associated with masculinity, and that two associated practices, driving and repairing, may be linked via the same meaning, masculinity, whilst the competence and the materials that compose the associated practices remain specific to the separate practices themselves.

In the aim of developing a practical understanding of how consumers refrain from shopping while using circular digital platforms, we will more closely follow the framework proposed by Shove et al. (2012).

## What are Socio-Technical Scripts?

The bundles of materials, meanings and competences established by practice theory can guide our understanding of the practice of consuming through digital platforms. Circular platforms and their design form an essential material – albeit intangible – part of digital circular consumption. While practice theory acknowledges the importance and integration of materials, it does not enable us to analyse the root assumptions and intentions inscribed into the platform design, which significantly shape the formation of practices. Therefore, the application of the theoretical lens of socio-technical scripts (Akrich, 1992) allows us to zoom in on the essential material aspect itself – a root of forming consumption practices. Moreover, users’ ways of critically using circular platforms that lie at the core of our study target the platform design and thus have the potential to shape and change the overall makeup of existing practices.

In social studies of technology, a script can be understood as the totality of motives, competences and tastes inscribed into objects and technologies by its designer (Akrich, 1992). While applicable to tangible objects such as hotel key fobs and train toilets, the notion that the design of an object shapes the interaction with its user has been applied to less tangible relations between human and technology (Ingram et al., 2007).

The socio-technical understanding of scripts, which differs from more deterministic approaches to technology, displays certain characteristics which include a focus on the user-technology relationship and a perception of humans, that is, users, as social agents possessing a scope of action when it comes to engaging with the script (Ingram et al., 2007). Thus, users' actions are shaped and guided by a script, rather than prescribed. Scripts are also acknowledged to be multiple due to the variety of ways users engage with a technology (Ingram et al., 2007). The way users react to and read the provided script is understood as de-scription, with possibilities ranging from following to ignoring to rejecting it (Akrich, 1992). Their degree of force, that is, the opportunities the script leaves to users to escape from it, ranges from strong to weak and depends on the design. Besides actions that are encouraged by the script, it inscribes those actions with morality and moral messages (Jelsma, 2003). Ethical consumption apps giving advice on greening everyday consumption, for example, are inscribed with "a specific type of green morality" (Fuentes & Sörum, 2019, p. 139), potentially having direct effects on how and what its users consume. In other cases, morality is delegated to the system or machine directly, freeing the user from moral responsibility when using it.

Circular platforms are designed with not only various consumption-enabling, but also consumption-encouraging features. As they shape users' engagement, they are particularly relevant for the examination of users' de-scription that might go against designers' initial envisioned usage. Applying the perspective of scripts enables us to examine our research questions on users' critical use of and engagement with circular platforms, acknowledging their agency to use platforms differently than envisioned by their designers.

## Application of the Theoretical Framework

Building on and complementing these two theoretical perspectives, we are equipped to analyse both the scripts embedded in circular platforms – through the eyes of the users – and the strategies through which consumers (critically) engage with them. This approach allows us to evaluate the "power" these platforms

hold to encourage repeated transactions as something consumers can contest. Motivated by prior research on circular platform use, which has demonstrated that, despite the inscribed use, consumers' ways of engaging with such platforms are rarely straightforward (Eggert et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Ramizo Jr, 2022).

Applying socio-technical scripts as a theoretical framework through the eyes of the users will allow us to understand the ways consumers subjectively feel like “being pushed”, nudged, or occasionally tricked into purchasing. By complementing the perceived forces at play by utilising practice theory, we are equipped to go beyond simply cataloguing platform features. Instead, it enables us to illuminate how the critical use of circular platforms – in particular, the ways in which consumers limit shopping via these – is assembled and sustained. By doing so, we establish one crucial stance. Namely, that limiting one's consumption via circular platforms is not an absence of action, but instead an assemblage of competences and meanings, which are always in tension with the material environment the platform provides.

Together, the two frameworks allow us to hold two things in view simultaneously: the structural pull of platform design and the agentic capacity of consumers to push back against it.

## Methodology

Now, we turn to present the methodological approach applied in this thesis. The chapter begins by shortly reflecting on the abductive scheme we applied, extended by the ontological and epistemological stances we followed. Then, we present the research design that was based on a qualitative structure, collecting data from two streams: semi-structured interviews and non-participatory netnography. We applied these two methods to crystallise the phenomenon (Alvehus, 2025), as it allowed us to develop a more nuanced and empirical understanding of consumer strategies.

## Research Design

Given the nature of our interest, we adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative inquiry allows for a way of understanding, describing, or documenting social life from what is deemed everyday and mundane to what is seen as extraordinary (Leavy, 2020). Further, qualitative research is suited for exploring new or underresearched areas such as our topic and for this, it lends us a wide range of tools for data collection (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2020). For our inquiry, considering our aim to better illuminate the ways of critically using circular platforms, we chose to rely on semi-structured interviews and non-participatory netnography (Burgess, 2023). We were therefore able to collect and analyse materials that occur naturally and thus are considered to be authentic (netnography) and create materials for the inquiry (interviews). Together, these methods allowed us to access both the accounts that consumers give of their own actions and the broader discursive environment in which those practices unfold, offering complementary vantage points on our research interest.

Overall, in our thesis, and especially during our analysis, we applied abductive reasoning. This form of reasoning “[s]tarts with an observation and tries to explain it using the most likely explanation, switching back and forth from the puzzle to the social world and the literature” (Clark et al., 2021, pp. 22-23). Throughout the development of this thesis, this type of reasoning thus allowed us to continuously refine our theoretical and analytical angles.

Moreover, to guide our understanding, we followed a constructivist and interpretivist stance. A constructivist ontological stance holds that social reality is not a fixed, objective given, but is instead continuously produced and reproduced through human interaction and meaning-making, a stance closely aligned with practice theory as well as the socio-technical script approach we applied. Approaching socio-technical script perspective from this ontological stance implies that technology and material artefacts are not treated as neutral or deterministic. Rather, artefacts are understood as shaped by, and in turn shaping, the social contexts in which they are embedded (Clark et al., 2021). Epistemologically, this study draws on an interpretivist position, which holds that the social world should be studied through understanding how people comprehend and navigate their social circumstances (Clark et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study treats consumers not as actors mechanically following prescribed roles, but as reflexive individuals endowed with agency, capable of interpreting, negotiating, critically assessing, and at times reinterpreting, resisting and bending the structures they encounter.

## Sample Selection

For our inquiry, we applied theoretical – or, in the words of Cherrier (2005), judgment – sampling to identify relevant groups of people (Crang & Cook, 2007). After getting in contact with possible informants, we applied numerous inclusion criteria. These included (1) the informants’ (present or past) usage of circular platforms, (2) they consider themselves to be conscious, ethical, or critical consumers or, more importantly, can recall having critically engaged with these platforms, and (3) that they are proficient in English. We did not limit participation in our study in terms of socio-demographic criteria like age, gender or place of residency, allowing for the inclusion of broad perspectives on critical use of circular platforms. Thereby, we were able to let participants “teach the researcher about [the phenomenon] from their various perspectives” (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 14) – which was further supported by our approach to let informants talk about their experience with any circular platforms (i.e., we did not limit our selection criteria to specific circular platforms, but instead allowed informants to let us inform about which ones they use). The theoretical sampling was complemented by snowball sampling, whereby participants in our study established contact with other potentially relevant participants whom we reached out to, resulting in recruiting further participants (Flick, 2023). We, however, did not follow a sequential sampling process: as new participants became accessible through snowball referrals, their eligibility was assessed against, thus filtered via, the theoretical inclusion criteria, producing an iterative sampling process.

We gained access to and recruited participants in various ways. Initially, an invitation to interviews was distributed in our social circles through group chats, personal contacts, and social media channels, including LinkedIn. Additionally, call-to-action flyers were distributed around Lund University's social science campus, allowing interested individuals to sign up via QR code by filling out the linked online form. As the latter did not result in participants signing up for the study, we relied on contacts from our online outreach and further participants suggested by them.

## Data Collection

We relied on two methods for collecting and creating data: netnography (online observations) and semi-structured interviews. Conducting netnography enabled us to access a wide range of naturalistic data, textual descriptions of experiences and meanings, shared by individuals that broadened the geographical and social context of our sample of interviewees. Semi-structured interviews, due to their flexible and dynamic nature (Clark et al., 2021), allowed us to explore contextual factors of consumption and refraining practices, for example, by asking follow-up questions (Bryman, 2016), efforts that are restricted in the case of non-participatory netnography.

## Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were primarily conducted online, via both the Zoom and Google Meet video meeting tools. Online interviews allowed us to include in our study those relevant participants outside our geographical reach that would otherwise not be accessible (Gruber et al., 2008). Furthermore, given their flexibility in choosing from where to partake in the interview, interviewees mostly participated from home where they were often prompted to share anecdotes related to consumption by objects they saw or were able to access in their setting's immediate surroundings – rather than relying on their memory if we had met in person. Out of the nine interviews, one interview was held face-to-face in Lund. A pilot interview was conducted, which allowed for fine-tuning of and adaptations to the interview guide. The answers provided by the interviewee, however, were seen as valuable and thus included in the analysis.

More specifically, we conducted existential phenomenological interviewing, as outlined by Cherrier (2005). We decided to apply this specific approach as we believe that the physical and cultural context, with its consumption-related complexities, embraced by this method, is crucial to understanding consumers' ways of refraining from consumption. In particular, the meanings associated with such acts, which are articulated in a restricted form in subreddits we relied on, were able to be expressed at length in

interviews. Practical steps of this method that we followed include reading up on relevant literature before conducting interviews and applying judgment sampling, selecting those who fit the study best, as described above.

As our goal is not to generalise findings to a broader population, but rather the trustworthiness (Kozinets, 2002) and transferability (Drisko, 2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of results, we deem the combination of 9 interviews with a generous amount of online data, 187 comments from 46 posts, through online observations as sufficient. Rather than following quantitative indicators of appropriate sample size, we adhered to the principle of data saturation, ending data collection when further collection did not contribute to the development of our analysis (Creswell et al., 2007).

Interviews were conducted between March 17 and May 1 and ranged between 46 and 99 minutes, with an average of 63 minutes, fulfilling Cherrier's (2005) suggestion of at least one-hour-long interviews. As participants in the interviews and we, the researchers, came from various countries with varying native languages, all interviews were held in English to enable conversation and facilitate transcription. An overview of interviewees is provided in Table 1. With the exception of two interviews conducted by a single researcher, all sessions were carried out with both researchers present. This setup was deemed appropriate as the person conducting the interview was freed from the toll of simultaneously navigating the interview guide, registering emerging topics and threads, and attending fully to the participant. The lead interviewer, therefore, could devote undivided attention to the conversation itself. This way, the secondary interviewer, meanwhile, assumed responsibility for note-taking and, at the close of each session, entered the discussion to pursue clarifications. In cases where the researcher personally knew the interviewee, the other researcher took the role of primary interviewer to avoid biases.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed (see Appendix 1) to support the interview process, with questions framed in an open way to encourage detailed elaboration by the interviewee (Clark et al., 2021), allowing the informants to expand on their consumption experience without being too directive (Cherrier, 2005). The guide included both practice theoretical issues derived from literature and platform-specific features. Relying on the guide enabled comparability between answers from different interviewees (Clark et al., 2021) while granting us a degree of interview-specific flexibility. It equally provided consistency as the interviews were conducted by both researchers with differing interviewing styles (Clark et al., 2021). While research questions of the study were not directly posed, they were addressed organically throughout the interview with the help of questions from the interview guide.

After learning about the participants and their background, the interviews began with grand tour questions (Cherrier, 2005) about interviewees' personal consumption and their perception of consumption levels at large, questions which often revealed important aspects about their personal consumption and broader life history. The introduction was followed by focusing on circular platforms, interviewees' interaction with them and their features, challenges encountered, and acts of critically using or resisting them.

While we did not explicitly ask participants to practically walk us through how they use platforms, some of them did such “digital walkthroughs” (see Fuentes & Sörum, 2019, p. 136), using their devices at hand to describe and explain their usage of a specific circular platform and its features. As their device screens were not shared with us in such cases, we relied on verbal elaborations made.

We experienced minor challenges in the form of interruptions due to connectivity issues or interviewees who were surrounded by children. At times, interviewees did not understand the questioning, and questions had to be rephrased or repeated. One more challenge is linked to the nature of questioning applied by us. We developed the questions in ways to push our interviewees to reflect on their (critical) use of circular platforms. This way, we actively utilised silences and probing questions. In relation to the latter, they were used impromptu, often slightly derailing the interview from its planned course; however, these questions often led to additional valuable insights.

Interviews were recorded with Zoom's built-in feature, complemented by external mobile device recordings to guarantee a backup version. During the one interview conducted via Google Meet, only an external recording device was utilised as we could not access the in-built recording feature.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Participants in Semi-Structured Interview*

| <b>Name</b><br>pseudonym | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Occupation</b>         | <b>Platforms used</b>             | <b>Country of residence</b> | <b>Interview date</b> | <b>Interview length</b><br>hh:mm:ss | <b>Mode</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Anna                     | female        | 28         | Student                   | Tradera, Sellpy                   | Sweden                      | March 17, 2026        | 45:53                               | Online      |
| Pamela                   | female        | 23         | Student, marketing worker | OXI, Vinted, Facebook Marketplace | Sweden                      | March 19, 2026        | 52:42                               | Online      |



|         |        |      |                                                              |                                                                 |             |                |         |           |
|---------|--------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|-----------|
| Leo     | male   | 31   | Sales manager in the music industry                          | Vinted, Sellpy, Kleinanzeigen, Too Good To Go                   | Germany     | March 20, 2026 | 1:01:23 | Online    |
| Hedda   | female | 34   | Designer, sustainable entrepreneur                           | Vinted, Etsy, Vestiaire Collective, Marktplaats, Too Good To Go | Netherlands | March 24, 2026 | 57:11   | Online    |
| Dorothy | female | 40   | Self-employed sustainability consultant, University lecturer | Vinted, Refurbed                                                | Germany     | March 27, 2026 | 1:39:00 | Online    |
| Cecilia | female | n.a. | Education, artistic researcher                               | Vinted, Marktplaats                                             | Netherlands | March 30, 2026 | 1:27:47 | Online    |
| Ian     | male   | 30   | Student, part-time barista                                   | Blocket, CeX, Facebook Marketplace                              | Sweden      | March 31, 2026 | 52:49   | In person |
| Cairo   | female | 31   | Freelance artist                                             | Marktplaats, Facebook Marketplace, Rotor DC                     | Netherlands | April 19, 2026 | 52:33   | online    |
| Klara   | female | 24   | Student                                                      | Vinted, Sellpy, Blocket                                         | Sweden      | May 1, 2026    | 53:39   | online    |

## Netnography

During the process of gathering thorough personal accounts on critically using circular platforms through interviews, we started with the second pillar of our data collection: netnography. Netnography is a qualitative research approach conducted in online settings, in particular social media, and is widely

adopted across the social sciences (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets, 2020). Inspired by traditional ethnography, its defining goal is the study of communities through sustained observation (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). For this thesis, Reddit served as the primary site for understanding what tactics consumers adopt to critically shop and use on circular platforms. Reddit operates as a community-based platform structured around user-created spaces known as subreddits, each oriented towards a particular interest or topic; publicly available interactions consist of posts and comments, with content visibility determined by community engagement. Users may "upvote" or "downvote" posts, shaping the prominence of any given contribution. The platform's content is, by design, almost entirely user-generated, making the data collected from these platforms naturalistic, which makes it well-suited to netnographic inquiry, as well as analysis. The widespread anonymous nature of user profiles on the platform strengthens the occurrence of naturalistic, authentic data.

With thousands of weekly contributions in the subreddits that we consulted, the amount of potential data to analyse on Reddit was substantial. We used several strategies to approach data collection and gain *entrée* (Kozinets, 2002) into the field. This included both the identification of relevant subreddits and discussions within those.

The platform's *Ask Reddit*, or *Reddit Answers*, feature, an AI-supported search engine that collects data across subreddits introduced rather recently (Reddit, 2024), was used for an initial overview and identification of relevant groups and discussions therein. Prompts used during the search have been documented and are found in Appendix 3. This initial search was complemented by a manual identification of posts in several subreddits that revolved around platforms, for example, *r/vinted*, *r/toogoodtogo* or *r/depop*, and groups dedicated to critical (non)consumption, such as *r/anticonsumption* or *r/shoppingaddiction*. Keywords used in the manual search of relevant posts were inspired by our research questions and literature review and included, among others, the following: "stop using", "overconsumption", and "addiction" or "addicted" (for a detailed description of the used keywords, see Table 2). Reddit posts were deemed relevant for inclusion in our study when they revolved around issues related to overconsumption (e.g., addiction), focused on specific platform features or addressed strategies applied by users to control their platform usage and shopping activity, and all of which needed to take place on a circular platform.

**Table 2***Keywords Used for the Identification of Posts on Reddit*

| <b>Cluster</b>                                      | <b>Keywords</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>(search aim: avoiding, reducing consumption)</i> | “Buy nothing” OR no-buy OR low-buy OR underconsumption OR minimalism OR “intentional living” OR “slow living” OR “conscious consumption” OR “mindful spending” OR “voluntary simplicity” OR enough OR sufficiency |
| <i>(search aim: possible frictions, obstacles)</i>  | “Too much effort” OR “not worth it” OR hassle OR inconvenience OR “listing fatigue” OR negotiation OR back-and-forth OR “dealing with people” OR awkward                                                          |
| Privacy & data concerns                             | “Personal info” OR “address privacy” OR “identity theft” OR tracking OR “data breach” OR “surveillance capitalism”                                                                                                |
| Financial reasoning                                 | “Not worth the price” OR fees OR commission OR “platform cut” OR “transaction costs”                                                                                                                              |
| Platform-specific avoidance                         | “Delete account” OR deactivate OR quit OR leaving OR “fed up with” OR “done with” OR uninstall                                                                                                                    |
| Sustainability tension                              | Greenwashing OR “not actually sustainable” OR “circular economy myth” OR “textile waste” OR “overconsumption paradox”                                                                                             |

While the extent of research involvement in the online community during netnography can range from passive, simply lurking, to very active, up to interviewing members in person (Clark et al., 2021), we carried out non-participatory observations, solely relying on working with existing content in subreddits.

Posts and comments meeting our inclusion criteria were stored and shared amongst the researchers in a shared Google Sheet, alongside relevant metadata – post links, timestamps of both publication and collection, and the subreddit of origin. The sheet also served as a space for reflective field notes and qualitative codes, allowing us to contextualise the data as it was gathered (Kozinets, 2002).

As suggested by Kozinets (2002), the collection of data lasted until no new important insights were discovered. An overview of our netnography is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3***Overview of Online Observations on Reddit*

| <b>Subreddit</b>             | <b>Weekly visitors<br/>(<math>k=1000</math>)</b> | <b>Posts collected</b> | <b>Comments collected</b> | <b>Date of collection</b>          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Platform-specific            |                                                  |                        |                           |                                    |
| <i>r/ebay</i>                | <i>295k</i>                                      | <i>2</i>               | <i>1</i>                  | <i>May 11, 2026</i>                |
| <i>r/vinted</i>              | <i>94.3k</i>                                     | <i>17</i>              | <i>87</i>                 | <i>Apr 9, 2026 - May 8, 2026</i>   |
| <i>r/vintedUK</i>            | <i>193k</i>                                      | <i>1</i>               | <i>1</i>                  | <i>Apr 12, 2026</i>                |
| <i>r/depop</i>               | <i>219k</i>                                      | <i>5</i>               | <i>18</i>                 | <i>Apr 11, 2026 - May 11, 2026</i> |
| <i>r/poshmark</i>            | <i>99k</i>                                       | <i>1</i>               | <i>4</i>                  | <i>Apr 14, 2026</i>                |
| <i>r/Toogoodtogo</i>         | <i>74k</i>                                       | <i>3</i>               | <i>6</i>                  | <i>Apr 8, 2026 - Apr 25, 2026</i>  |
| <i>r/VestiaireCollective</i> | <i>6k</i>                                        | <i>1</i>               | <i>3</i>                  | <i>Apr 12, 2026</i>                |
| <i>r/germany</i>             | <i>709k</i>                                      | <i>1</i>               | <i>2</i>                  | <i>Apr 12, 2026</i>                |
| Consumption-specific         |                                                  |                        |                           |                                    |
| <i>r/anticonsumption</i>     | <i>736k</i>                                      | <i>3</i>               | <i>13</i>                 | <i>Apr 12, 2026 - Apr 15, 2026</i> |
| <i>r/digitalminimalism</i>   | <i>142k</i>                                      | <i>1</i>               | <i>3</i>                  | <i>Apr 12, 2026</i>                |
| <i>r/shoppingaddiction</i>   | <i>22k</i>                                       | <i>11</i>              | <i>49</i>                 | <i>Apr 12, 2026 - May 11, 2026</i> |
| <b>Total</b>                 |                                                  | <i>46</i>              | <i>187</i>                | <i>Apr 9, 2026 - May 11, 2026</i>  |

## Plan for Data Analysis

Upon conducting interviews, the recorded audio files were transcribed with the help of our phones', and Microsoft Word's built-in transcription tool. More specifically, the phone was removed from any cloud services, and the messenger that we used to share the recorded files amongst ourselves was end-to-end encrypted. Only then were the texts stored in a shared cloud-based service to which, apart from the researchers, no one had access.

These machine-generated transcriptions were manually revised and redacted to ensure accuracy and confidentiality, equally removing all transcription errors (Clark et al., 2021). Reactions such as laughing, smirking or longer thinking pauses – neglected by the automatic transcription – were manually added during the revision phase. In total, 150 pages of redacted interview transcripts were imported into the qualitative coding tool NVivo (version 15) for the coding process, whereas the coding of Reddit data was carried out in a separate Google Sheets form.

The analytical method put forward by existential phenomenology was applied to the analysis of transcripts and collected online data (Cherrier, 2005). Therefore, we applied the three stages of the hermeneutical framework, as described by Cherrier (2005), to analyse our material. These consist of an intra-case analysis, an inter-case analysis and finally a "contextualization of the conceptual framework" (Thompson, 1997, p. 6).

At the initial stage, both researchers conducted the coding individually in NVivo and a shared Google Sheets file after having discussed and agreed on the above-described coding strategy. The following stages of the analysis took place iteratively, revolving around individual coding, memo writing, and reflection, with findings continuously revisited through joint analytical discussions and constant comparison of our respective readings of the data (Pryke et al., 2003). Upon approaching data saturation within each material, we shifted our focus to further our analysis by cross-material comparison – interview with interview, interview with netnographic data, and so forth (Thompson, 1997). Finally, we developed and contextualised our overarching findings. At the last stage, following our coding, the development of overarching themes was supported by the use of artificial intelligence, inspired by the approach of Kozinets and Seraj-Aksit (2024). Claude AI was utilised as a supporting tool for the development of themes, following the aforementioned hermeneutical analysis of the data collected. This way, Claude AI was tasked with and assisted our analysis in the development of theory-driven thematic labels using solely our codes (for detailed prompts, see Appendix 3).

## Ethical Considerations

In preparation and throughout conducting research, we respected and followed the main ethical principles of social research: informed consent, protecting privacy, avoiding harm, and avoiding deception (Clark et al., 2021).

Informed consent is a key element when conducting social research, and it refers to the provision of as much important information as needed for potential participants to make an informed decision about participation in the study (Clark et al., 2021). We thus provided a consent form (see Appendix 2) to each participant ahead of the interview, explaining the purpose and conditions of the interview as well as relevant privacy-related matters. They were informed about the interview's voluntariness, the right not to answer questions or withdraw from the interview if wished, and the confidentiality of personal information shared. They were equally given the possibility to ask questions about the consent form and the interview itself. A signed copy of each participant was collected and stored on our electronic devices. Moreover, interviewees were given the choice of conducting the interview online or in person. Consent for recording was retrieved once more at the beginning of each interview in verbal form. In the case of netnography carried out, we did not provide informed consent to netizens, an issue commonly discussed in literature on ethics in social media research and elaborated further down.

Privacy of the participants was protected through the following measures with regard to handling their data and personal information. We guaranteed confidentiality, not anonymity, to interviewees, as the latter could not be guaranteed considering that we collected identifying information, such as name, age, place of residence, and that occasionally personal anecdotes and industry insights were shared with us. However, despite the collection of such information, in line with data protection guidelines (Esomar, 2017), we ensured that these are kept secure and not disclosed to individuals outside the researchers (occasionally the thesis supervisor, and evaluators). For these purposes, the recording devices (researchers' phones) were delinked from cloud services and the aforementioned information was redacted upon uploading the transcripts to Google Docs. To deliver on our communicated conditions of participation, pseudonyms were given to participants from the point of transcription on and adhered to throughout the analysis. Other recognisable information about participants, for example, their current and past employers' names, street names or neighbourhoods in participants' proximity, was changed and made unrecognisable.

Particular considerations were required for the netnography part of our study. Initially, rather strictly proposed ethical considerations for netnography included communicating one's researcher identity, that is,

conducting research overtly, and collecting informed consent when quoting members (Kozinets, 2002). These have developed and become more flexible over time (Anne-Marie et al., 2017). In this thesis, we have followed the stance applied in a netnography conducted by Kozinets and Seraj-Aksit (2024). As we did not directly interact with members of the online communities and solely relied on their publicly available content, we neither disclosed our researcher identity nor sought informed consent. Furthermore, we redacted user names in the case of screenshots taken on circular platforms.

The type of questions we asked, particularly those of a sensitive nature, relates to the principle of avoiding harm – in this case psychological – to the interviewees. Potential issues could arise by blaming or making interviewees feel guilty for certain stigmatised actions, for example, overconsumption or fast fashion consumption, by way of our questioning. Such topics were thus approached with care, and responses handled with understanding and empathy. Moreover, we engaged respectfully and carefully with personal, shaping experiences that were revealed by the interviewees, for example, reasons or events that led to individuals changing their consumption habits.

Adhering to research ethics principles, we did not intend to deceive participants. However, the fact that we did not clearly state in interviews what we are after to avoid the anchoring of interviewees' thoughts might be a form of deception and was mitigated by us informing informants about the concrete goals of our study after having conducted the interviews.

## Findings

In this section, we present the findings of our study, drawing on data from both netnography and semi-structured interviews. We apply the lenses of practice theory and socio-technical scripts to develop answers to our research questions.

First, we present an overview of circular platforms considered in the study, followed by a categorisation of features that users critically analyse as encouraging them to shop, in a process we label *recognising the script*. We deemed this step crucial as developing practical knowledge requires our analysis to be grounded in consumers' understanding of their actions. For example, using the favouriting feature of a platform does not in itself constitute a strategy to refrain from shopping; however, doing so in order to generate space for self-reflection, which largely affects whether the intention turns into shopping, does. The second part of the analysis, therefore, focuses on the range of strategies that users develop to critically use circular platforms, namely *delegating agency*, *manufacturing friction*, *making self-governing rules*, and *developing their own circular practices*. While not constituting practices themselves, we argue that these strategies shape existing ways of consuming through circular platforms.

We argue that, based on recognising the script, users develop strategies in response to the critical analysis of circular platform design. Users undergo a phase of realisation of implications of following the script, which is followed by concrete action, actively going against the script, a reaction that is possible in a private script setting (Jelsma, 2003).

## Platforms under Investigation

Circular platforms and apps considered in the analysis consist of those discussed in interviews (see Table 1) as well as mentioned in online discussions on Reddit, often emerging in communities dedicated to specific platforms. Informants are experienced in using circular platforms, primarily those specialising in secondhand trading, varying in types and ranging from peer-to-peer, such as Vinted, Depop or Poshmark, to more mediated formats, for instance Sellpy, to localised platforms encouraging physical pickup of items (e.g. Marktplaats.nl). Our diverse range of interviewees resulted in the inclusion of both



international platforms and more local, market-specific players (e.g. Kleinanzeigen from Germany) that extended our pre-existing knowledge of the circular platform environment. Circular platforms in the area of food consumption, such as TooGoodToGo were discussed in several interviews, but resulted in less relevant data for answering our research questions. Other access-based services, such as Swapfiets (bicycle rental) and car sharing models perceived by informants as belonging to the circular economy, were mentioned but similarly did not contribute to our research aim.

Interviewees' and netizens' degree of involvement with circular platforms differed significantly, ranging from excessive usage to having given up platform use. We also found the use of circular platforms to be location-dependent, a flexible condition that is subject to changes in personal living conditions, such as the move to a new country, for example.

Overall, circular platforms discussed show similarities in value proposition, features (e.g., user profile, algorithmically-supported feed, watch lists), and notifications through both devices and other channels. Our following analysis is based on the sum of platforms that emerged from our data collection, discussed by interviewees and netizens.

## Recognising the Script

Users critically read the script of circular platforms as encouraging consumption and maintaining users online. We categorise their de-scription (Akrich, 1992) of features in two ways: features that facilitate transactions and features that increase exposure. While not a practice of refraining itself, recognising the script, we argue, is a necessary prerequisite for users to realise before eventually implementing steps that are actively aimed at refraining from or critically shopping through circular platforms. Recognising the script of circular platforms thus represents a main competence in developing strategies to critical shopping via circular platforms. An overview of the categorisation of features users critically recognise can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4***Circular Platform Features Recognised by Users to Promote Shopping*

| Type of feature                                  | User application                                                                                                              | Implications                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Transaction-facilitating</b>                  |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Like/save function                               | Liking item to steer/shape algorithm                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feed of algorithm leading to more customised recommendations of products</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| Saved payment option (e.g., credit card, PayPal) | Finalising purchase seamlessly with saved payment option                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reducing friction during the checkout process (e.g., having to fill in credit card details)</li> <li>- Speeding up the checkout process</li> </ul>           |
| Platform shopping credit/balance                 | (Re)using credit from sold items for purchase(s)                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fast(er) circulation of items</li> <li>- Continued consumption encouraged</li> <li>- Reduced (mental) barrier to spending compared to “own” money</li> </ul> |
| Making / receiving offers                        | <p>Potential buyers making offers for interested items</p> <p>Sellers granting a discount to potential buyers / prospects</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrance point to up: having to open app/platform to interact with (counter)offer</li> <li>- Feeding into fear of missing out</li> </ul>                     |
| “Buy now, pay later” payment option              | Using BNPL to delay payment (of secondhand goods)                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extension of existing shopping habits from linear to circular context</li> <li>- Reducing the pain of spending</li> </ul>                                    |
| <b>Exposure-increasing</b>                       |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Home feed                                        | Scrolling (for fun/entertainment, inspiration and...)                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exposure to algorithmically-suggested items</li> <li>- (Regularly) spending a significant amount of time while scrolling the feed</li> </ul>                 |
| Wish list, favourite list                        | <p>Saving as an option board for purchase</p> <p>Saving for later consideration</p>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Constant) exposure to favoured items, upholding consumer desire</li> </ul>                                                                                  |
| (product recommendation) algorithm               | <p>Source of inspiration</p> <p>Staying informed about item price and</p>                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovery of items in line with one’s preferences</li> </ul>                                                                                                 |

|                        |                                                                          |                                                                                  |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | availability                                                             |                                                                                  |
| Saved search           | Saving specific items or brands to follow new uploads                    | - Feeding need / want to check in regularly for saved search updates             |
| Notifications          | Going through messages<br>Receiving saved search updates                 | - Entry point to using the platform/app and spending time thereon                |
| Outfit creator         | Creating and potentially buying whole outfits (rather than single items) | - Acquiring and completing outfits consisting of multiple items                  |
| Follow seller accounts | Following for possible future items                                      | - Exposure to the seller's newly uploaded listings, mainly through notifications |

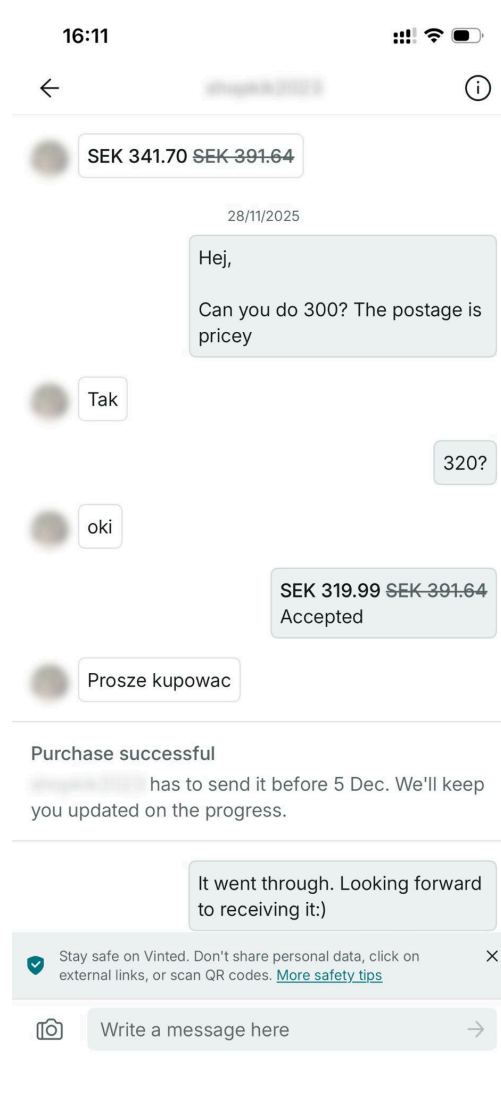
## Facilitating Transactions

The first type of features that users critically analyse can be understood as facilitating shopping by removing friction and making transactions convenient and desirable. The platform script includes various exchange-facilitating features across multiple dimensions of circular platforms (Bae et al., 2022) that users believe not only facilitate shopping but also lure them into carrying out transactions.

The possibility to make, and receive, offers allows users to bargain and potentially consume at a lower cost and is described as the “gambling side of the experience” (Interesting\_Shop\_882, 2026) on circular platforms, as put by one redditor in *r/digitalminimalism*. Messaging around item popularity, such as the number of users having made an offer for a certain product listing, increases the sense of urgency (Turunen & Gossen, 2024) and the perceived risk of missing out on an item in this competitive environment among users (Juge et al., 2022). The fact that sellers can offer discounts to users favouring their items can strengthen existing interest and lead to purchases (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Seller-Buyer Interaction via In-App Messaging Feature*



*Note.* Price negotiation, initially prompted by the seller, leading to transaction on Vinted (screenshot by researcher).

The gambling-like character is equally recognised in auction formats available on circular platforms like eBay or Tradera, as shown in findings of Denegri-Knott's (2011) study on users of the platform eBay, which has auctions at its core. Users warn against this format as it puts them under pressure to decide on the spot, leading to "impulse shopp[ing]" (Creative\_Glass\_514, 2025). The time-boundness of auctions

requires users to stay connected and, as Anna, an international student, said, “to be always on the surf side”, for instance by regularly checking in to observe the status of an auctioned listing.

Another dangerous thing is auctions. You might get a great price, but you have to decide now if you want it or you won't have the opportunity to get it again. I impulse shopped way too much!

The script facilitates consumption up until the very point of finalising a purchase. Circular platforms allow users to pre-save their payment options to facilitate and speed up transactions, removing extra steps of filling out credit card details or logging into external payment accounts. Vinted and Sellpy, for example, have additionally integrated a buy-now-pay-later (BNPL) payment option allowing users to delay payment for orders by using, for example, Klarna. BNPL as a payment service incentivises impulse purchasing (Glückert et al., 2025) and was acknowledged by both interviewees and Reddit users to be part of existing shopping habits, overlapping from regular online shopping to circular platforms. Ian, for example, is well aware of its impacts:

(Laughing) I would be like, I would buy the things and then I'd be like, oh, it's fine. And this is actually another problem I could mention is that there's this thing called Klarna, where, the delayed payments without interest, you know, 30 days. And it gives you, it does, and I catch myself doing this, of course, but it gives you this illusion of: “Oh, you can just buy and pay for it later.” [...] But yeah, I think yeah, on Blocket or on these online platforms you can definitely, especially if they are, I think as well, the secondhand thing can also kind of play a role because then you're a bit like: “Oh, but it's good. I'm reusing. It's contributing to the circular economy” kind of thing and also the price being lower than if you got it new or something. So I think that that can play into it too, I think a lot. That you kind of.. And maybe there is truth to it. I do think on the whole, it is good that you're contributing to the circular economy. But I think that a lot of the time that can also drive.. it can contribute unintentionally, perhaps, to you just impulse buying, but yeah, that's why I would say on that.

It is not only the possibility to delay payment that eases the barrier to consume. Ian's belief in contributing to the circular economy by consuming secondhand – and thus doing something good – and the relative lower prices of secondhand goods further convince him to consume, thereby risking a loss of ecological gains (Dekhili et al., 2025). These justifications of increased consumption through circular platforms (Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025, Parguel et al., 2017) are distinctive of the motivational and price rebound effect, which occur when positive consumer preference towards and the reduced price of circular products, respectively, lead to increased consumption of that product (Bączyk et al., 2024).

The platform script is also inscribed with an integration of the selling and buying experience, enabling a seamless circulation of funds. Platform-specific wallets enable users to store and re-use credit from sales made through the platform, incentivising further purchases (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009). Users critically perceive the use of this credit to ease the burden of spending available money:

I mean the money in my Vinted balance is free money, very easy to spend 🙌 (SecretHoSlappa, 2024)

The risk of respending one's available platform balance has been found in multiple cases of circular platforms – for example Sellpy (Eggert et al., 2025), Vinted and Vestiaire Collective (Juge et al., 2022) and eBay (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009) – and can be explained with the concept of resale discounting, leading consumers to see revenue made from secondhand sales as play money, thus reducing the pain of re-spending it (Armstrong Soule & Hanson, 2021). The fact that the platform script used to only allow for a total withdrawal of in-app balance, rather than a partial one, as discussed online in the case of Vinted, leaves limited options to users – distinctive of a closed script (Ingram et al., 2007) – further incentivising the spending of available balance. Our examination of the script and more recent Reddit comments revealed, however, that partial withdrawal of funds is now available, representing an opening of the script (Ingram et al., 2007).

While not determining their behaviour, the script significantly shapes the way users interact (Ingram et al., 2007; Jelsma, 2003) on the platform. Users de-script the above outlined features of the script recognising the potential consequences of following the script. Nevertheless, their critical analysis can lead to transactions being carried out. The introduction of convenience-enhancing features also results in rebound effects, as expressed by Jelsma (2003).

## Enhancing and Maintaining Exposure

Besides features that facilitate transactions, users recognise various features that create a highly personalised platform environment and incentivise them to access the platform.

The range of features enhancing exposure to the platform is fundamentally based on users having to create a user account, which not only saves conversations and one's purchase history, but also collects all related activity (e.g. browsing, liking, time spent), thus allowing a personalisation of the interface. Unlike in most conventional online shops, guest checkouts are usually not possible on circular platforms. The homefeed, often the first element a user is exposed to upon entering a circular platform, is commonly endlessly scrollable, supported by the vast number of items available on circular platforms. The feeds are

powered by an efficient product recommendation algorithm (Bae et al., 2022) that we found can lead to users browsing through items in a snowball principle way. The act of browsing alone and the consequential exposure to personalised product suggestions, netizens argue, increases the likelihood of consumption taking place, as illustrated by the following comments:

[...] And it's true, it always starts with browsing cause you never know when you could find that amazing incredible bargain and then browsing turns into buying a lot of mediocre bargains before someone else gets them until you find the magical bargain item. The app concept is genius but definitely something to stay away from for anyone that can get easily addicted. (theaudacityofthi, 2025)

I've had depop for two years now, and I am still in the same boat. I know how to fix it though – by deleting the app. The more you scroll, the more you will buy. I personally have accepted the fact that I will continue to spend money. (Maleficent\_Falcon784, 2026)

The positive effect of time spent online on secondhand platform Vinted on impulse purchases has been explored by Dekhili et al. (2025) highlighting the risk of merely browsing turning into eventual consumption. Furthermore, the fact that “the magical bargain item” (Maleficent\_Falcon784, 2026) could be only one scroll away encourages continued usage. Rather than accessing circular platforms for an alternative channel of fulfilling consumption needs, users turn them into a destination for treasure hunting, an act creating new, unidentified needs.

Scrolling through the feed is tied to the possibility to save items in a watch list (Figure 2). While having the potential to serve as a (non-transactional) curation and inspirational board (Eggert et al., 2025), the watch- or favourite item list can equally be a springboard for future purchases, as implied by the platform's explanation of the feature:

When you stumble across the item you love but you're not ready to press the 'Buy' button yet, you can mark that item as one of your favorites and come back to it later. (Vinted, n.d.)

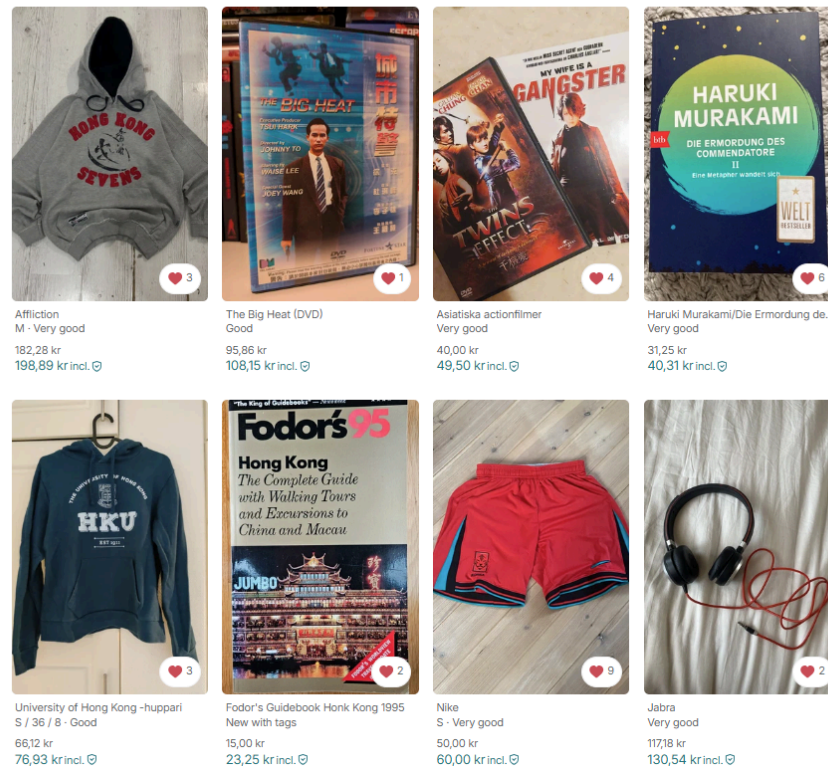
The script encourages users to save items whose availability and price can then be monitored over time. Following the script can lead to transactions as a shopping practice shared by one interviewee reveals. When Leo, a 31 year-old music sales manager from Germany, is browsing Sellpy and finds an item he likes and is willing to purchase, he adds it to his favourites and tracks its price over time, with the help of enabled app notifications. Knowing that the platform automatically performs price drops in regular

intervals (see Figure 4), he commits to a purchase once the item reaches a predetermined price threshold. (We will present this as a strategy in detail in the *making self-governing rules* section.)

**Figure 2**

### Overview of Vinted Wish List

#### Favourited items



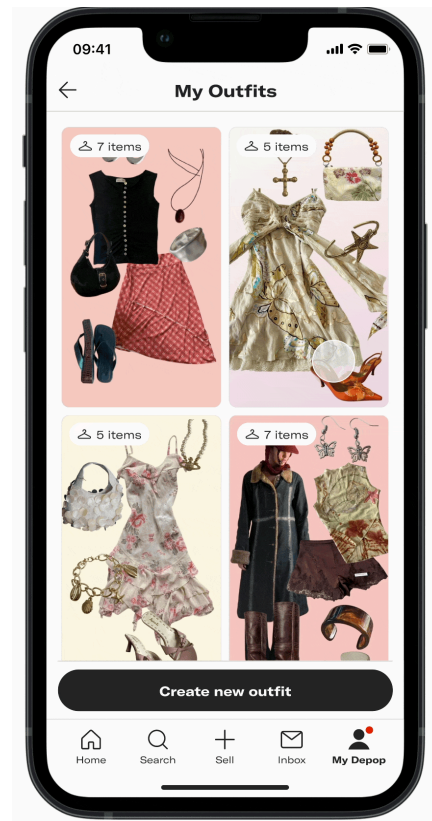
*Note.* Screenshot from researcher's own account on desktop

A unique feature found on secondhand trading platform Depop is the outfit creator (Figure 3) which allows users to curate and put together individual items (Depop, 2025), serving as an extended wish list and incentivising the acquisition of multiple items to complete an outfit.



**Figure 3**

*Depop Outfit Creator*



*Note.* Image by Depop (2025)

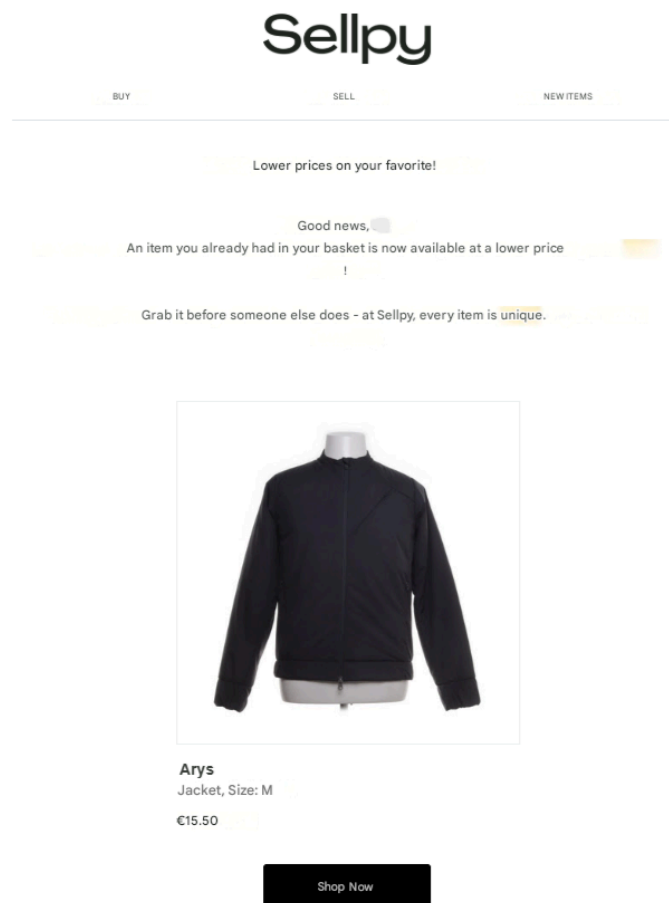
The exposure to and interactions with items thus forms a larger algorithmic cycle, consisting of users finding items they like, saving them, the algorithm reacting to their input and suggesting more similar items in return, turning users' feed into a highly personalised environment. This cycle invites users to check in for constant novelty and feeds consumer desire and can be seen as a “trigger of dormant, unfilled wishes and sorcerer of new wants” (Denegri-Knott, 2011, p. 374). The above examples reveal a degree of algorithmic awareness (Airoidi & Rokka, 2022; Gran et al., 2021) among users of circular platforms, achieved through a critical reading of the platform script.

In addition, the variety of notifications complement the platform script, reminding users of the platform and maintaining engagement. While manageable and able to be disabled, the scripts encourage users to keep notifications turned on, to not miss out, prompting users to check in regularly and thus contributing

to the speed-based environment (Juge et al., 2022). They thus serve as an entry point into the platform and spending time on it, whether through browsing, going through saved searches, checking notifications or revisiting one's watchlist. We found users to receive an abundance of notifications across devices and channels, with Leo, for example, receiving duplicate notifications from Sellpy, both through the app and via e-mail.

#### Figure 4

*Sellpy E-Mail Notification Alerting about a Price Drop of a Favourite Item.*



*Note.* The message reminds the recipient of potential competition among users. (Screenshot by researcher)

Besides the explicit features outlined above, the broader design of circular platforms equally plays a role in encouraging consumption. Netizens scrutinise the overlap between seller and buyer mode as it opens up consumption opportunities. While intended to provide a holistic circular shopping environment to users, it provides no possibility for developing a homogeneous identity as a seller or buyer, hence increasing the risk of consuming:

I've been selling stuff on Vinted which leads to going on Vinted to check my sales, staying on to browse, and then of course buying. So the cycle continues. I really need to just stay off of there altogether . (Valkyria99, 2026)

Yes :( I managed to stop myself recently by going cold turkey but I know the second I go on the app, I'll find a good deal and want to get it! I also want to start selling some stuff, so I'm scared being on the app will pull me right back in. (Lillytbb, 2024)

The script envisages users to engage with both activities, buying and selling. This structure was criticised by users, mainly those wanting to sell only without getting drawn into the buying side of the platform. Some comments expressed wishes for a clear separation between buying and selling, for example through distinct modes or separate apps, the latter being available in the case of digital creative platform Etsy.

Despite the widespread awareness and critical recognition of platform scripts among our informants the implications of following circular platforms' script are numerous. The de-scription of the platform scripts thus not only entails a critical recognition of the script's envisioned use, it equally translates to users following it.

omg i thought i was the only one addicted to the app!! finding good deals and just making offers, it's a bad addiction. cause "i just got this steal and stole from 5+ ppl that made an offer". yea i gotta calm down on that app (MissionAssistant8143, 2026)

This comment made below a post addressing addiction to the secondhand platform Depop reveals several implications of uncritically following the script of circular platforms. One of them is a self-proclaimed addiction to buying, and the platform in general, resulting in spending a significant amount of money, at times more than one can afford:

I spent my entire months allowance within the first week and that's solely on Vinted lmao (clardimensionika, 2024)

The design of circular platforms' script equally allows for hours-long usage, corroborating findings by Denegri-Knott (2011) and Cerio et al. (2025). Netizens compare their circular platform usage with that of social media, with some applying the term doomscrolling – a term that describes the act of excessive consumption of negative news, often through social media (Salamon, 2024) – to describe their browsing through the feed of circular platforms. This indicates not only users' negative sentiment associated with this act but also a certain awareness of their own excessive usage. The meaning connected to using circular platforms shifts from an enjoyable way of sustainable consumption to a despicable, guilt-laden form of spending time online. In some cases, the use of circular platforms exacerbated existing shopping addiction which spilled over from conventional online shopping into the realm of circular platforms:

Hey Vinted for me was the worst as well. It got really bad this summer when I ended buying like +10 embroidered tops I didn't need 🙄. Some I immediately donated but what a shame! For me it got really bad when the app started suggesting really nice stuff in line with what I was already buying. Like the engine so freaking nailed it that I could not not buy the suggested stuff... plus like you say, couple that with the fact that the items are super cheap... total mayhem for me! Thank God i removed it... out of all my shopping addictions lately, this Vinted one was the worst in terms of quantity bought (one after the other...) (TreeProfessional9019, 2025)

Additionally, we identified multiple posts in various subreddits addressing (self-proclaimed) addiction to selling through circular platforms, a risk of circular platform usage overlooked in existing literature. Netizens argue that the act of successfully selling an item gives “the same little buzz as buying does” (KittyGrewAMoustache, 2025), leading to regular platform visits to monitor the state of current listings. This highlights the power of the selling side of circular platforms to engage users, adding nuance to existing studies scrutinising shopping through circular platforms (e.g. Dekhili et al., 2025; Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025).

Overall, relevant subreddits serve as a safe space in which users feel confident to anonymously express their personal challenges and concerns using circular platforms. Being part of the online community and following discussions contributes to users' critical recognition of the script and allows them to question their own usage. Discussions around recognising the script and one's self-awareness garnered comforting replies addressing users' feelings of guilt. Rather than individualising the issue, netizens uncover the inscription and platform design that, they argue, contributes to excessive consumption.

Be kind to yourself. Remember it's designed to get you to do that [buying things one does not need]. And create some barriers/friction. I've deleted the app now while I'm having a selling break for that reason. Post

a lot of weight and each new item was a bargain and something I thought I needed. But I wfh and wear sweats a lot! So I cut myself off for a while xxxx but be kind to yourself, no nasty talk. <sup>100</sup> (Be kind to yourself, n.d.) – *account and comment has been deleted since collection, originally retrieved April 9, 2026*

As the comment above illustrates, Reddit users equally provide helpful advice, often based on personal experiences, on how to navigate circular platform environments and go against excessive consumption. These online discussions, complemented by insights by interviewees, form the basis for critical strategies developed by users presented in the following sections.

## Critical Strategies to Limit Shopping via Circular Platforms

The critical analysis of circular platform scripts by users presented above forms the basis for multiple strategies that shape shopping through circular platforms with the aim of limiting it. The variety of strategies through which users critically use circular platforms and take control over their consumption through them, often going against the platform script, reveals users' role as social agents rather than predictable technology-following actors (Ingram et al., 2007). An overview of strategies and their link to practices is illustrated in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Overview of Critical Strategies Applied by Consumers*

| Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Procedures / Actions                                                                                                                                                                                     | Practice Elements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Delegating Agency</b><br><i>Users achieve non-consumption not through individual restraint but by distributing the capacity to resist across other people and non-human tools, creating social and material structures that act in their stead.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involving others (incl. communities)</li> <li>- Interpassivity ("App blocking app", screen time limits, and other technology-facilitated procedures)</li> </ul> | <p><b>Materials:</b> Accountability apps (e.g. Budget Angel); ad blockers; other people's account credentials (using a partner's Vinted account for selling only); cash instead of cards.</p> <p><b>Competences:</b> Knowing one's own failure points and calibrating the socio-technical architecture accordingly; negotiating rules with accountability partners; redirecting the urge to browse toward community participation instead.</p> <p><b>Meanings:</b> Limiting consumption as a relational achievement rather than an individual virtue; self-knowledge as a competence (knowing that "I cannot be trusted"); community as a site of practice-normalisation, not just information exchange.</p> |
| <b>Manufacturing Friction</b><br><i>Set of material modifications to device</i>                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shutting off</li> <li>- Managing notifications</li> <li>- Removing payment</li> </ul>                                                                           | <p><b>Materials:</b> Smartphone apps, browser extensions (e.g. Freedom, Chrome blockers), payment cards, account passwords, device home-screen layout, screen-time OS settings.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>environments and platform relationships that re-introduce the friction the platforms systematically remove</i>                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- methods</li> <li>- Using cash instead of digital payment</li> </ul>                                                                | <p><b>Competences:</b> Knowing which specific friction to introduce for which failure mode; calibrating the level of restriction to the severity of the problem; combining multiple friction layers (delete app + remove card + block site); recognising when one layer is insufficient and layering further.</p> <p><b>Meanings:</b> Friction as self-care rather than punishment; the device as an environment to be managed rather than passively inhabited; the platform as an adversary whose design must be actively worked against.</p> |
| <p><b>Making Self-Governing Rules</b></p> <p><i>Normative “side” of frictionisation: explicit rules, calculations, and timing protocols – that govern when and how platform engagement is permitted, inserting deliberation into what the platform scripts as spontaneous.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sell-to-buy</li> <li>- Need-acquisition only</li> <li>- Price threshold</li> <li>- Mental window</li> </ul>                        | <p><b>Materials:</b> Wish-lists and basket functions; written lists of needed items.</p> <p><b>Competences:</b> Identifying triggers (boredom, emotional state, social media exposure) and pre-empting them; deploying the cart as a waiting room rather than a staging area for purchase.</p> <p><b>Meanings:</b> Deliberation as the marker of legitimate consumption; the "good deal" frame as a cognitive trap to be named and resisted; secondhand buying as governed by need rather than availability</p>                                |
| <p><b>Developing own Circular Practice</b></p> <p><i>informal social networks that circulate goods without monetary exchange and without commercial platform mediation.</i></p>                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in and developing informal swap circles</li> <li>- Joining subscription-based platforms for “human touch”</li> </ul> | <p><b>Materials:</b> physical gathering spaces; WhatsApp groups, streets; communal shelves; neighbourhood buildings</p> <p><b>Competences:</b> organising swaps; knowing who has what; social navigation of who gets a contested item; trust in community members</p> <p><b>Meanings:</b> reciprocity; friendship; anti-commercialism; the social occasion of the swap as value in itself ("a nice drinking session on a Saturday afternoon")</p>                                                                                              |

## Delegating Agency

Our data reveals that consuming through digital circular platforms is a highly individual act, rarely involving others. Platforms revolving around food consumption, like food-saving app TooGoodToGo, were often used in a familial or household setting, standing in contrast to those enabling secondhand trading, e.g. the acquisition of pre-worn fashion. Korsunova et al. (2025) argue that many digital circular platforms “are designed with individual consumers in mind, encouraging independent actions driven by self-interest” (p. 310). While this independence grants many freedoms, it equally leaves the individual being responsible for their consumption decisions – in a shopping environment that, as outlined before, encourages shopping through multiple ways. Consuming in a restrained manner could thus be at risk due to the design and script of circular platforms that many users perceive to be pushing consumption.

We found interviewees and netizens to delegate agency by using a range of artefacts, relying on human support, and, in some cases, applying a combination of both.

The active application of artefacts included the use of technologically-enabled tools to limit and control one's use of circular platforms, and exposure to consumption-enticing content at large, occurring through social media, for example. This strategy relies primarily on intangible materials such as software, both for desktop and mobile devices, and shapes the way users shop through circular platforms, strategies similarly applied by digital detoxers to reduce or avoid their digital consumption (Hoang et al., 2026). A netizen in *r/shoppingaddiction* shared using a browser extension to blacklist circular platforms and conventional shopping websites. Platforms on which the user had an active listing were given an exception from the blockage. To reduce the risk of buying through the remaining active platforms, the user preemptively removed payment details, a strategy discussed in more detail in the *manufacturing friction* section. This selective application of strategies to circular platform usage illustrates users' customised approach to going against the platform script, in this case the integrated buying and selling mode, thus developing own solutions to limitations of the platform script.

Setting screen time limits for circular platform apps, using smartphones' built-in features, is another commonly applied measure discussed in various subreddits. On his phone Ian, an international Master's student, has adopted similar measures aimed at gaining control over his device, for example turning on specific modes that block off distractive notifications or turning his smartphone screen into grayscale, whereby he reduces visual stimulation.

[Asking interviewee whether wanting to have control over his phone relates to consumption too]

Partly. Yeah, I would say it does, partly. I don't think it's just shopping consumption. It could be to do with, looking at social media, for example, or something like that, or getting distracted by even the news. I'm a bit of a news junkie sometimes. And that's something I need to, I'm trying to get better at not being like. But I do use my phone. I use different modes on my phone, like work mode or study mode, or so it has "do not disturb" or this or that...

So you have to lock yourself out of these things. I think it's a little sad, but it's true that because that's how these things function, they are designed to be colorful and they catch your eye. And even actually that's another thing is my phone can go to this grayscale mode where the color is taken away from the screen. So then I'm not like bling, bling, distracted all the time.

Ian also uses ad blockers across his browser to limit exposure to advertisements. Nevertheless, despite undertaking this measure, he remains exposed to external messaging, for example by receiving ads for the circular platform Blocket occasionally. His belief that one cannot totally shield oneself from external influences when using online networks becomes apparent in the following excerpt from our interview:

And then I think as well, it's not just that, but there's also just the advertising. I know I said I use ad blocks, but you know, YouTube somehow gets around it a lot of the time with my ad blocker, but I get adverts for Blocket. And that also is well to do with the fact that you give your location and then it's tracking. And then that gives it to a third party. And then the third party can advertise that thing to you.

Techniques of delegating agency with the help of material artefacts are not onetime actions and shape the overall circular shopping practice. Screen time limits for apps set up by users, for example, reset daily and hence impact their usage of circular platforms on a daily basis. Critically using circular platforms is shaped recurrently, rather than tested momentarily, thus shaping the larger practice of online shopping and its routinised nature (Reckwitz, 2002).

Although the use of strategies described above aims at delegating the complex work of refraining from consumption to artefacts, tools like screen time limits or browser extensions can be bypassed with little effort, a fact acknowledged by netizens. Competences like self-discipline are thus required to respect measures implemented to critically engage with circular platforms, upholding the efficacy of self-constraining strategies, as argued by Ian:

I tried to avoid them [product recommendations on circular platforms]. Try to avoid them, but you know there are, of course, there are times where you're like: "Ooh, look at that. Oh, that could be good. Maybe I'll get that as well." Yeah, so I think it's a, I think a lot of it comes down to people's discipline, self-discipline. I think it's something that we all can learn. (laughing) But it's hard because the more you try to self-discipline yourself, the more these companies really want to get around that. That's my feeling of it.. It's that I put an adblocker on my computer. So now I don't get the adverts. But then it's the adverts on the street, on the posters, or something. And then it's very inescapable. It's a totalizing thing. It sounds kind of cynical, but I think there is that element of it. No matter how disciplined you are with yourself, there's always going to be that, that thing that will be un-, un-, unchanged.

Having control over one's digital devices, including platforms therein, by self-disciplining oneself and not following the script of mobile devices and the broader online environment, pays off in the form of improved wellbeing as expressed by Ian:



And I think that this control over what I have on my phone, like what notifications I get, what platform I can look at. That is quite a yeah, that is quite a, that takes a lot of work, but I think it's something that, for me at least, it improves my well-being overall. Yeah.

Self-discipline appeared to be a competency required for reducing consumption at large, beyond the context of circular platforms. Dorothy, a self-employed sustainability consultant with year-long experience in auditing in the textile industry, is permanently applying self-discipline rather than following temporary challenges:

[upon answering the question “Have you ever participated in any social media challenges like the no buy challenge on TikTok?”]

No, I mean, it's my constant challenge, right? Um, not to buy anything. Um, or better not to buy anything. I do have a list. I document what I buy. That I do. I have, like, an Excel file, like, um, hardware and clothing, right? I don't document what I buy for food. Ehm.. But, um, for clothing, yes, I do. One, on one point for like just financial, you know, like literacy and transparency because I want to see, you know? Uh, where I put my money and on the other side also like, uh, what I supposedly need, obviously, I don't need uh, 95% of the clothing I buy and other hardware either. Um, yeah. [...] But I never participated in challenge. I mean, I'm a yoga teacher. I, also, I would never participate in a stupid yoga challenge. Yeah, you know, on the internet. I think it's like, um, yeah, I do understand market research, um, organizations or even brands to create community to sell more. I do, I do get all of that. And again, I think it's in some cases, really interesting social experiments, depending what indicators and parameters you compare and evaluate. But no, no interest in being part of that stupid internet community.

Whereas this discipline is highly individual, it occurs in a shared form when refraining from consumption involves others. Besides using material artefacts, users delegate agency to others, mainly close interpersonal relationships, such as significant others. Including others in one's critical usage of circular platforms results in complicating shopping and limiting exposure to platforms – rather than facilitating or turning it more cost-efficient, as in social strategies applied by ride-hailing users (Ramizo Jr, 2022). Complicating shopping is achieved by targeting the platform design that integrates buying and selling in one account, for instance by outsourcing one's Vinted selling activity to another person's account:

Yeah i sell things via my boyfriends vinted now as I can't stop myself from buying (Wh4ty0ue4t, 2022)

While this limits the user's access and flexibility, it eliminates the need to have the mobile application on one's phone or being logged into one's personalised account and thus reduces the temptation to use, browse and purchase, while allowing the user to make use of the selling features. Not all advice shared in

subreddits, however, was deemed appropriate by the online community, with the advice of letting a boyfriend set the password to payment services, like PayPal, to counter an addiction to online secondhand shopping, undergoing serious scrutiny:

This is terrible advice! Putting someone else in charge of your finances, even giving them access is insanity! OP [original poster], please don't do this! You shouldn't do this even with a family member, let alone 'a boyfriend'! (wasted\_wonderland, 2022)

The outsourcing of one's control over personal finances to a significant other is seen as a transgressive step. At the same time, it reveals the extent of delegation of agency consumers are willing to implement to take control over their excessive consumption.

Furthermore, the use of artefacts and reliance on human relations is not mutually exclusive. One technique discussed by a netizen builds on the combination of both types, namely setting a screen time limit for the Vinted app and making someone else set the password required to unlock the blocked app:

Same lol, set a screen time limit if you have an iPhone and make someone else set the unlock password so you can't get back in hehe, that's the only thing that worked for me! (GiBunny\_, 2024)

More distant actors, that nevertheless strengthen self-discipline to not shop, were found to be relied on and consist of anonymous members of subreddits, such as the *r/anticonsumption* subreddit:

Also when I want to shop I try to hop on this subreddit and read peoples posts. It always inspires me to not make the purchase. (Deleted profile, 2022)

Meanings related to the reliance on others in controlling circular platform usage include being part of a community that serves as a source of tips upon self-reflection and inspiration to not (over)consume.

Additionally, strategies revolving around the delegation of agency equally illustrate a re-delegation of morality: while first, the morality and question of what and how much to consume is delegated from the platform designer to the user (Ingram et al., 2007), in our study, users, in a further step of delegation, then share this morality to both artefacts and human support, redistributing consumption-related responsibility that was initially handed to them.

The different ways to delegate agency discussed above represent one type of strategy of users' critical de-scription of the platform script. They also stand in contrast to the script's envisioned use of the circular platform. By restricting instant access to circular platforms and using apps relying on others, users

actively go against the script which envisions independent and flexible – rather than shared and reflective – use of the platform.

## Manufacturing Friction

One of the most common sets of acts users of circular platforms enact to make purchase or usage less likely revolves around *manufacturing friction* into circular platforms via repurposing, disabling, or circumventing features to regain control. Simply put, consumers try to deliberately re-complicate the use of circular platforms that are designed to minimise the effort between desire and acquisition. The aspect of regaining control reflects on our argument above on agency; however, these acts require active self-reflection; they are practised repeatedly, refined, and shared as techniques within communities, emphasising the social and symbolic significance of participation in a practice (Shove et al., 2012). By placing hurdles, obstacles, and extra steps in order to gain a moment of reflection, or rendering the purchase “as inconvenient as possible” (Deleted profile, 2024a), users can alter the materiality of the platform environment in ways that re-introduce friction platforms systematically remove, developing a different practice instead of the purchase-oriented practice the platform by design supports. This way, by reshaping the material environment via the acts detailed below, consumers can develop novel practices, whereby the underlying meaning, that is, regaining control and agency, is shared (Shove et al., 2012).

In a more detailed view, consumers have been found to use many techniques, often preemptively, with which they wish to make shopping on circular platforms less convenient and less flawless, thereby preventing the frictionless slippage from browsing to purchasing. These strategies are effectively grounded in the recognition that frictions are systematically minimised within platform environments, as presented above. Rather than being shaped by the circular platforms (notifications, algorithms, wish lists, price drops), experienced, and critical consumers actively repurpose, selectively disable, or strategically circumvent these features to retain control over their own consumption pace. This requires their competence to be knowledgeable about what set of actions the platform “wants” them to perform (technical literacy) and understand the material boundaries of what level of resistance is possible. This way, the platforms' commercial logic is systematically and actively interrupted. These actions range from, ideally, one-off acts of absolute cessation of usage (*shutting off*), to more nuanced, repeated strategies, such as *managing notifications* or *reinterpreting convenient purchase options*.

By *shutting off*, consumers try to find solutions to platform nudges – easy checkouts, price advantage, etc. – in a seemingly extreme way by deleting or uninstalling the app itself. We do not, however, consider this

a strategy in itself, as the deletion is a one-off act. But considering the possible transgressions and continuous need to reflect on the importance of such a measure, consumers actively reshape their understanding of their consumption habits, the role circular platforms and, occasionally, social media in general, play in it. These internal struggles are highlighted in the following excerpts:

I did this for a while - gotta delete delete delete and stay off, deleting the app at least gives enough of a pause when you go to automatically open it that you can redirect yourself. Also limit your time on TikTok if possible - I'm a social media addict but I charge my phone on the other side of my room from my bed and read at night, which helps a bit. Could try something like that at first! Also delete your account and/or all your saved items and sellers to make it less appealing. (beccyboop95, 2022)

I have a serious addiction to buying on depop. I think to myself "Oh its second hand so it's not like it's hurting the earth" or "It's way cheaper than buying from the store". [...] I put a limit to how many hours i spend on there, I offload the app sometimes & even delete it but i always go back :/ Being on the fashion side of tiktok doesn't help either bc i'm influenced easily. (Efficient\_Option\_962, 2022)

By *shutting off*, consumers create the possibility to pause and reflect on their purchasing tendencies, as the above examples highlight. In terms of equipping this strategy with meaning, many consumers have named the social media-like features and other platform components that these platforms are endowed with as those that facilitate transgressive purchases (Koh & Seah, 2023), that is, unwanted acquisition despite knowledge of personal impulsiveness or shopping addiction. In line with the latter, many netizens refer to this strategy as ‘going cold turkey’ – an informal expression borrowed from the vocabulary of addictions, meaning to suddenly stop taking a drug or other substance that one depended on. Furthermore, others highlighted their tendency to use the selling propositions (e.g., circularity) marketed by circular platforms as justifications for the purchase. Therefore, many consumers, mainly those with a possible shopping addiction, as supported by the fact that we located these arguments in the r/shoppingaddiction subreddit and their language use – name app deletion as a final solution to removing themselves from shopping via circular platforms. However, considering the possibility to do detailed search on many circular platforms, the intention of finding specific items may serve as a morally acceptable way of transgression into reinstalling applications:

If you don't have an item in mind, don't browse at thrift stores. Delete apps too. Only download them back when you have that specific thing to look for. Use filters to get down to realistic options. For example, I wanted to replace a too-small pair of jeans I loved. So I searched on secondhand apps, but only for the brand + jeans + my size + wide leg (the style I was looking for). If you don't find what you are looking for, app gets deleted again. (Creative\_Glass\_514, 2022)

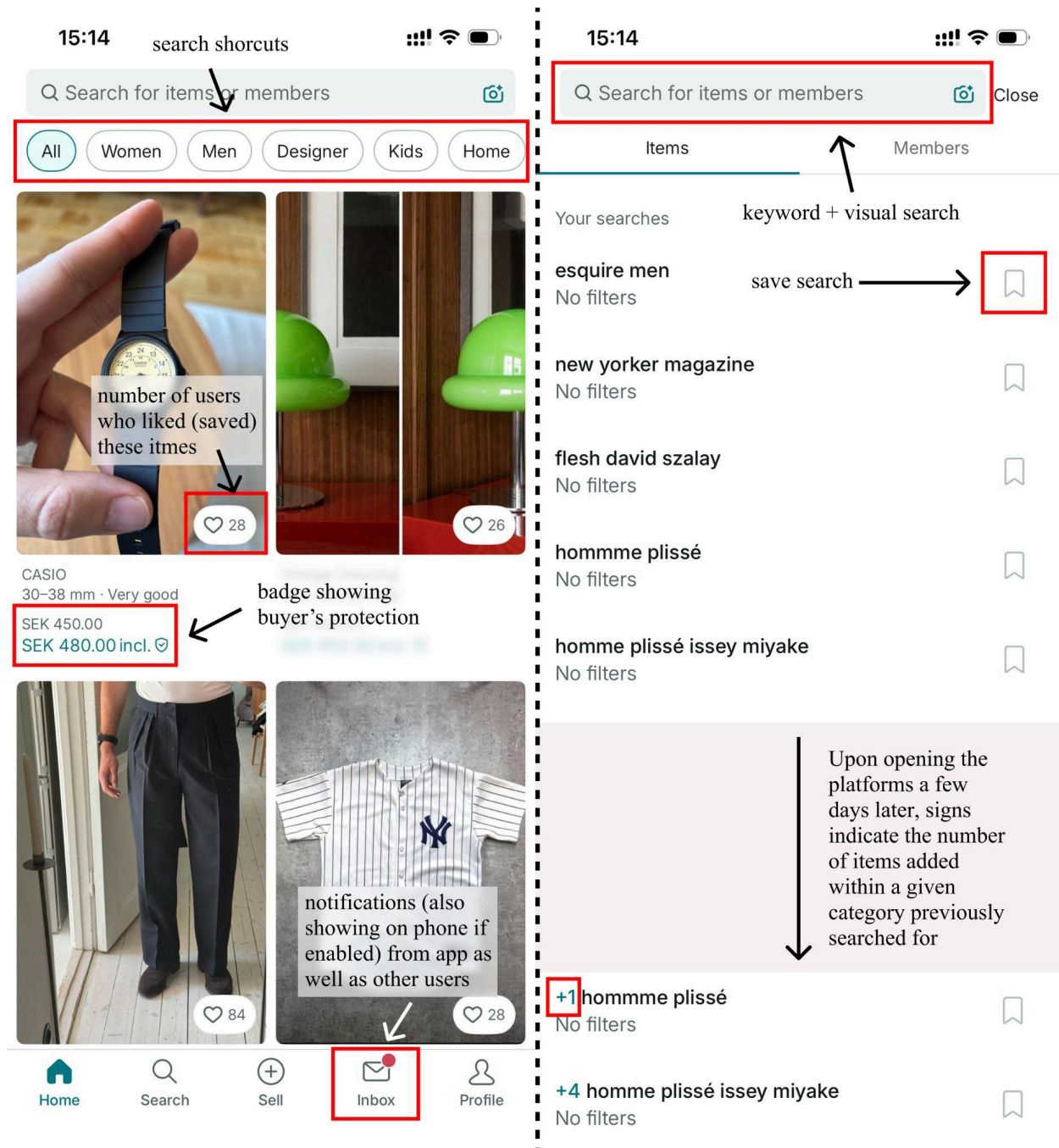
This view is also supported by the way Ian sees the filtering functions largely available on online shopping platforms – including circular platforms – that allow him to filter his search down to specific items (or categories of items) he is looking for. Furthermore, he mentioned that possibility offered by a limited number of platforms whereby he can save the previously used filters, not only specific items:

Or like, you know, also I think on Blocket, you can.. I do, I might be thinking of the other one, but of Facebook market, but you can like filter, have a sort of a feed saved or not a feed, but you know where it's like certain categories you can have that are saved that you tap on and then it opens. Yeah. [...] Yeah, I would do that a lot more. I'm quite, when it comes to any kind of shopping, well not any.. But on online shopping, I do tend to filter things before I don't just go, because I like to filter out the crap as they say. So yeah, it can be quite yeah, I would do that quite a lot.

By reducing platform usage by de- and reinstalling the applications and only unlocking such measures for specific cases when a certain need arises, users present a unique ability to control their purchase impulses and platform advantages via self-regulation made possible by platform features. This reiterates the findings by Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017) who showed how mobile phones transform the practice of shopping. They presented cases in which consumers perceive search functions as helpful and empowering, which is also supported by the immediacy of mobile devices. Furthermore, this procedure presents a unique case, whereby meaning attached to using circular platforms are constantly broken (platforms as sources of impulsiveness) and then temporarily rebuilt (platforms as place for goal-directed purchase) (Shove et al., 2012). The possibility to employ a goal-directed purchase is facilitated by many functions on a number of platforms. These can include ability to search using keywords, conduct a visual search whereby consumers provide a photo of an item of which they wish to find a similar, or use platform-provided shortcuts to superficially filter the home feed, as seen in the examples from Vinted (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*Vinted's Home Feed and Filter Functions*



By understanding their inner drive to purchase, the ways platforms are facilitating it, and what technology allows them to do in response, consumers can equip themselves with the ability to enact preventive

strategies, such as *shutting off* or *moving application icons out of sight*. Similarly to *shutting off*, the latter makes impulse purchases less likely by making immediate exposure to app icons upon unlocking one's phone occur less frequently. Furthermore, by reading and de-scripting the intended usage (Jelsma, 2003) – including both features that push consumption as well as those making more directed acquisition possible – users equip themselves with the ability to filter their exposure to (thereby solely focusing on) purchase-facilitating features they deem useful and effective as opposed to those seen as coercive and manipulative.

Another form of generating space for self-reflection, thus manufacturing friction into the platform environment, has been *favouriting as delay tactic*. This way, consumers engage in an active re-interpretation of socio-technical scripts, namely viewing saving – 'favouriting' in case of some platforms – items not as an item collection-feature that is conceived as a pre-purchase step, but as a platform affordance making self-reflection possible without the need to act immediately. Cecilia, for example, considers item marination as an essential, always-present part of her consumption on circular platforms:

I would always favorite things. And then I always go back and I'm like, double checking if I really want it.

Cecilia's view on using *favouriting as delay tactic* is further supported by her indifference to when an item gets sold. This reflects the strategy's ability to enable one to take their time to reflect and question the immediate impulse that was possibly felt upon seeing a product.

Although the reduction of immediate exposure to or deletion of application, or the reframing of platform scripts from coercive to those providing opportunities to self-reflect may be prominent forms of frictionising usage, notifications sent by these applications may still be present, challenging the integrity of the above strategies. Users have mentioned different tactics to address notifications such as simply ignoring them, or leaving them on 'read'. However, many drew a deeper connection between their perception of platform scripts and how they react to these, namely that of being in control, as the following excerpt from the interview with Ian illustrates:

I turn those off. I don't use notifications. Because I think that I'm quite, I don't, I like to have control over my phone when it comes to how I use it. I don't like to have notifications from this or this and this and this. I just tend to like to have it in my own mode given the time of day or something.

Turning to the last cluster within manufacturing friction, the *frictionisation of finances and payment methods* arose. This seems evident as the exchange carried out on circular platforms includes a financial

transaction, and it is rendered more effortless by the platforms allowing users to save payment methods, as presented above. This, however, can easily lead to impulse purchases – with ApplePay, for example, consumers only need to double-click the side button of their phone – which is circumvented by removing payment methods, blocking transactions to circular apps at one's bank provider, or by prioritising the use of cash.

Removing payment credentials captures the deliberate deletion of saved card details or PayPal links, converting purchase from a one-tap act into a multi-step effort requiring re-entry of information. Consequently, a set of actions needs to be taken preemptively, ranging from deleting payment credentials to reshaping the ways consumption is carried out in the absence of easy check-out methods. Users describe this as a chance to pause, self-reflect or, generally, make a purchase more complicated:

I have NO credit card or payment info saved on either website, and the one time recently I ordered a size-appropriate bra from PM because I'm pregnant, I ordered it and after it shipped, I removed my credit card from the website. (Deleted profile, 2024b)

Additionally, this set of actions often occurs when other forms of self-restrained failed:

If you can't stop buying in general, you can turn off your ability to pay on apps (ComprehensiveBet1256, 2025)

Furthermore, consumers have been found to reshape and reinterpret the meaning attached to modern payment methods from that of convenience and ease to what can lead to transgression or slippage. Conversely, apart from making virtual payments more complicated, they tend to give more prominence to paying in cash as it is perceived as a form of payment that allows them to have more control over their finances, especially in relation to their online shopping habits:

what's helped me a ton is taking out CASH right when i get paid and putting it in a separate hidden envelope. probably not the 'safest' thing to do but since online shopping was my problem it's helped a ton in cutting back. (crumpet9, 2022)

## Making Self-Governing Rules

As a counterpart to *manufacturing friction*, a set of actions developed and refined by altering the material environment, *making self-governing rules* modifies the normative order through which a practice is evaluated before an app is opened. In Warde's (2005) terms, these are normative conventions that constitute what counts as appropriate engagement with a practice – in this case, the practice of shopping via circular platforms. By this, consumers construct and maintain self-imposed rules, routines, and mental



frameworks that structure the timing, quantity, and conditions of their consumption, thereby insulating practice from platform scripts. Simply put, this strategy integrates platform knowledge and willingness to act against FOMO-inducing features, and includes actions such as *sell-to-buy rules*, *mental windows*, or *need-driven acquisition*.

The *sell-to-buy rule* is particularly interesting: it re-frames the entire practice-bundle as a closed system where outflow must precede inflow, that is, consumers only purchase after they have sold something, taking full advantage of in-app credits, whose use we presented above. This is a shift in meaning that re-constitutes what buying is: an act that only occurs as the consequence of successful circulation, not as an open-ended appetite, effectively rendering these platforms financially circular. As Leo puts it in relation to his Vinted use, for example: "I only buy if there's like, let's say I sold something for €20, then that's my budget. So I rarely put money on Vinted." This way, for Leo, new money does not enter the circular platform; only funds generated within it circulate. Furthermore, the *sell-to-buy rule* may serve as the process of changing one's consumption habits, as the following netizen, who struggled with overspending on Vinted (buying redundantly), and for whom reconsidering their needs was deemed ineffective in reducing their consumption, puts it:

I used to also be like this [buying unnecessary things] & it was becoming a bit of a problem, so I decided to start selling some of my old clothes/scarves etc, and now I will only spend the money I've made from selling on Vinted. It's really helped me to consider if I really want something & cut down on how much I'm buying. (Deleted profile, 2022)

The use of *mental shopping windows*, a self-imposed temporal and cognitive frame that delays and bundles purchases rather than acting impulsively – reiterating the aforementioned delay tactics – although without taking advantage of platform features. This strategy involves accumulating a list of needs mentally or in digital tabs until a threshold is reached (e.g., a free shipping minimum, a salary date, a sufficient budget from selling), then executing purchases in one deliberate session.

As Anna, a master student, who is an active practitioner of using mental windows to slow as well as deliberate her consumption, told us:

If I need, for example, a piece of t-shirt, I can find where it is on the list [mental list]. I usually type it on Google... I just keep that in mind, and in a few weeks, I buy it, because I don't want to do impulsive shopping at the same time.

Further, the procedure to follow a *need-based acquisition* serves consumers to reframe the use of platforms from that of deterministic to one that is domesticated, where the materials of the platform – its

algorithm, notifications, and saving features – are reinterpreted through the competences and meanings actors bring to them. Need-based acquisition is not new to consumption, as presented by Fuentes (2014), for example, whereby the author presents outdoor enthusiasts' inherent anti-material stance that manifests in such techniques. Or what Kapitan et al. (2021) presented in relation to frugal consumers' emphasis on restricting purchases to what is 'needed'. (However, contrary to their argument, our informants did not show tendencies to easily update what is needed, a tendency demonstrated by frugal consumers.) Following need-based acquisition captures the act of opening apps only when a specific item is already identified, using filters immediately, and deleting the app again if the item is not found – similarly when others delete payment methods after an intentional purchase has been made. However, conversely to removing payment methods, a largely frictionising procedure, *need-based acquisition* necessitates an inward turn: inviting consumers to reflect on their impulses and need for acquisition as opposed to access. A quote from Fuentes's (2014) argument highlights this inward turn: "the technique employed here [buying only what one needs] entails critically reflecting on one's consumption and the self-control to refrain from shopping. Consumers must have the ability to control their impulses and question their 'needs'" (p. 489). Cairo, for example, reflects on her current possessions as well as her future living situation when she feels the impulse to consume on circular platforms:

I feel like I have too many things already. I actually want to get rid of things. So that's where my brain is instead of buying more things. I actually feel like I've acquired and collected too many things. So I would like to cleanse that out. Because yeah, I don't own my house, I'm just in a sublet. The looming idea of moving and having to move around makes me always keep less stuff.

Conversely, Dorothy uses a clothing rental subscription (Kleiderlei) as an alternative to ownership, framing it as philosophically more aligned with genuine circularity, which involves, in her view, a personal touch, such as friends. Renting via Kleiderlei involves renting up to four items per month, returning items, and sometimes purchasing items the platform retains:

[...] I'm a member of Kleiderlei. Um, you know, which is, like, um, a concept where you pay a membership of €30 per month, and you can rent 4 pieces per month, for, well, during the month. And for that, and that's basically how I consume clothes. [...] In the beginning, I wasn't convinced. A friend of mine, you know, started the project, like, 13 years ago, and she's like a fashion girl. She just wanted a bigger wardrobe. And then she sold it, you know, as a circular economy, sharing economy, whatever thing, and it really worked. And I remember the first time I entered into the store, I was like: "no, no, no, no, like, so many clothes, so many whatnot." And then another friend of mine working there, she gave me, like, a kind of voucher and

invited me to the membership, and then somehow, you know, I had to please her and enter the store and, you know, get some clothes. And, uh, now I'm, like, super, uh, convinced um, of that project.

Finally, as a mental delay procedure within the *making self-governing rules* strategy, participants in this study highlighted their use of price thresholds as well as rules imposed on the number of items they can buy in a given timeframe (usually a year). The latter is a self-imposed hard limit which functions as a personal governance mechanism that overrides platform temptations but similarly exists outside of the platform environment. The former, however, takes advantage of the possibility to make offers on many platforms (e.g., Vinted, Tradera) that can pull prices down, supplemented by saving (or in case some platforms favouriting) items that automatically enable notifications, which our informants use as a means of waiting until a particular price is reached for a product. Setting a personal price ceiling (floor) on an item – and waiting until the item drops to that price – functions as a technique for delaying or preventing purchase. This reiterates Kapitan et al. (2021) who showed frugal consumers' unique spending discipline of delay discounting, that is, waiting until the “price is right”. On Sellpy, this is enhanced by the platform's auto price-drop feature (Figure 4). Leo, who uses Vinted and Sellpy to buy football jerseys to resell them later in his own online shop or other items for personal consumption, for example, sets price threshold for himself in advance:

There are some price marks I give myself to a certain extent. And then when maybe a hoodie is on there for 50 euros... I challenge myself not to buy it before it hits the 30 Euro mark.

## Developing Own Circular Consumption

In relation to our research question on what strategies consumers develop to refrain from or limit shopping on circular platforms, developing one's own circular practice appeared as an analytically intriguing strategy applied by our informants. These highlight not only consumers' possible dissatisfaction with circular platforms – features pushing consumption, platforms being ‘invaded’ by profit-focused players, etc. – but also show their genuine determination to find alternative, more sustainable modes of shopping to that of mainstream (e.g., fast fashion), whilst going beyond, and often rejecting, escaping the use of circular platforms (Cerio et al., 2025). Our informants highlighted that these strategies involve a sense of community, such as clothing swaps amongst friends or the development of a waste-reducing habit within one's vicinity, such as with neighbours.

Cecilia, for example, organises and participates in recurring in-person clothing swap events. This is an explicitly non-commercial, community-based strategy they started within their friend circle that

substitutes for buying and functions by its own norms (six-month return rules, collective decision-making when multiple people want the same item). The development of such a strategy is also motivated by her previous consumption habits that were characterised by overconsumption:

Basically. So from overbuying in 10 years ago, uh, I literally stopped buying because also, let's say, during Corona, we formed, like a little group of people. Now it's quite a big group of people, but it works well. Uh, and every three, 4 months we meet up and we swap clothes. So whatever you don't want from your closet, you bring to this giant afternoon gathering. And then you can literally take whatever you want from other people. They can take from you. And what is left, we donate to whatever. So, and there's like really people have issues. With the amount of clothes that they are having.

These perceptions also reiterate the above-mentioned inward turn, whereby to develop a new strategy, one needs to first reflect on their actual needs (Fuentes, 2014). These strategies reduce dependence on platforms without requiring users to consciously resist them. Similarly, these strategies eliminate the need to depend on monetary exchange, effectively leading to the development of a system that goes beyond, but exists parallel to, circular platforms by perpetuating their beneficial features (e.g., circulation of items) whilst omitting their disadvantageous ones (e.g., profit-orientation).

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Summary

Our aim with this paper was to contribute to and extend critical circular platform literature by exploring how consumers navigate platforms whose interfaces are deliberately designed to facilitate consumption (Bae et al., 2022; Eggert, 2025; Juge et al., 2022). This tension plays a prominent role in our contribution: despite their circular framing, these platforms appear to nudge users towards, rather than away from, consuming. Against this backdrop, we formulated two research questions, focusing on (1) how consumers critically analyse and evaluate the consumption-facilitating design embedded in circular platforms, and (2) what strategies they develop in order to limit their consumption in spite of it. To explore these questions, we employed a qualitative research design, collecting data through semi-structured interviews and netnography. The analysis of the collected materials was facilitated by the application of practice theory and socio-technical scripts. The former equipped us with a structured approach to understanding what consumers do – how competences, material environments, and the meanings attached to them intertwine to constitute the strategies presented in the findings. The latter, in turn, allowed us to critically examine the design of circular platforms used by our informants, which, throughout our analysis, emerged as the primary material element shaping the development of critical strategies to shop on circular platforms. Collectively, we showed that consumers develop a range of strategies, based on their critical analysis of platform scripts, to address the ‘pushy’ nature of circular platforms via delegating agency, manufacturing friction into an otherwise smooth interface, and establishing and following self-governing rules. Consumers also engage in alternative forms of circular consumption, highlighting their true commitment to circularity, as well as their dissatisfaction with the platform design, understood as a commercially-driven mechanism. Together, these materials allowed us to develop a detailed understanding of consumer critique and critical use of circular platforms as they unfold in practice – not as isolated acts, but as socially circulated responses to platforms that are, by design, working ‘against them’.

## Analytical Highlights of Critical Strategies

Our analysis shows that the critical analysis of circular platforms targets the various shopping stages on and features of circular platforms, recognising both the enhanced exposure to the platform and facilitation of transactions within the platform environment that users are facing. Users' critical de-scription of the script, and the potential realisation of one's own (over)consumption is based on their engagement with circular platforms, often experiencing the potential downsides of overconsumption, impulsive purchases or scrolling behaviour reminiscent of excessive social media usage, among others. It is consumers themselves who scrutinise the weak circularity (Bergmann et al., 2025) promoted and enabled by the script of circular platforms – standing in contrast to Dekhili et al. (2025), whose beliefs in user awareness are limited. Despite the awareness of risks associated with circular platforms, users, at times, seem to succumb to the design, acknowledging difficulties with reducing consumption. Nevertheless, within this context of critically analysing circular platforms, online forums take an important role. They allow consumers to anonymously share, discuss and reflect on their own, as well as others', consumption through circular platforms, raising awareness and building a basis for the development of strategies to go against the platform script.

Users develop, share, and refine what might be called counter-strategies to alter and gain control over the practice of consumption via circular platforms: distributed social-material arrangements (delegated agency) that perform resistance on behalf of the user; techniques for re-introducing friction into smooth digital pathways; and normative orders that govern platform engagement before it occurs. Altogether, by manufacturing friction into shopping via circular platforms, making self-governing rules, and delegating their agency, consumers re-interpret the role these platforms play in their general consumption, develop their own understanding of what pushes them to spend, and, in response, develop a multitude of strategies aimed at addressing these issues. These strategies are shared, refined and re-interpreted in relation to their intended aim (Reckwitz, 2002). Reiterating Reckwitz (2002), these cannot exist without the constant interactions between their elements: 'things' (platforms and their features) and the bodily and mental activities with which users can bend these are crucial to support them in their aim of limiting their shopping via or critically engaging with circular platforms. These consumers seem to engage in strategies that were developed as a result of their critical stance towards and de-scription (understanding) of circular platforms. More importantly, in line with the view presented by Shove et al. (2012), these strategies not only coexist but shape each other. By not merely being critical about circular platforms but actively reshaping their relationship with these, consumers present a case in which the perception of circular

platforms shifts from that of ‘circular’ and ‘sustainable’ to that of ‘pushy’ and ‘worthy of using with caution’. Consequently, new forms of strategies are formed, enacted, and refined in relation to this novel framing, effectively altering the practices of shopping via and using circular platforms.

The argument by Hoang et al. (2026) states that since self-regulation in the persuasive, always-on digital age seems an almost insurmountable obstacle, many of the external interventions (e.g., “app blocking apps”), which we also highlighted as being integral to one’s strategies to limit consumption via circular platforms, effectively strip consumers from the need to critically confront technology-related problems, thus rendering them passive. However, our notion contests this stance as we presented that the development of counter-strategies is incumbent upon critically analysing not only the platform scripts but oneself too (Fuentes, 2014). These steps of self-reflection then serve as the groundwork of the strategies developed, making critical confrontation an essential part of strategy development. Thus, in the paper, we provided a detailed account of strategies that go against the script of circular platforms, complementing the initial existing findings provided by Eggert et al. (2025).

We also extend the knowledge on strategies applied by consumers in a larger context of algorithmic digital platforms beyond a service context, for example, ride-hailing (Ramizo Jr., 2022) or housing rental (Nguyen et al., 2025). Our contribution also applies to the nature of user strategies applied in circular platforms, shifting the focus to consumption reduction. Users in our study develop strategies that complicate, restrict and reduce consumption in an algorithmic platform context, rather than pursuing the goal of making it cheaper (Nguyen et al., 2025) or more convenient (Ramizo Jr, 2022). Contrary to the findings of Ramizo Jr (2022), the application of counter-strategies does not result in a stronger reliance on and use of circular platforms, but in a distancing and partial escape from the platform’s speed-based competitive environment (Juge et al., 2022).

Furthermore, upon analysing the material collected and created for this study, it became clear that such strategies cannot be stripped from one’s consumption or personal history – having been a refugee, having learnt the ‘inside’ of the industry: “*They sent me to China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, to audit sneaker factories. And I was like, Whoppa*” as Dorothy put it –, nor can they be disconnected from one’s future self (becoming better at managing one’s life), connecting our findings to Schatzki’s (2010) argument.

Conversely, these techniques are not purely individual: they circulate within communities (e.g., *r/shoppingaddiction*, *r/vinted*), are refined through peer feedback, and become normalised as legitimate responses to the problem of platform-induced consumption. In the terms of Shove et al. (2012), a

practice-bundle of a new form of consumption is being assembled – with its own materials (blocked apps, removed cards), competences (pre-purchase self-reflections or consumption-preventive steps), and meanings (platforms as facilitators of transgressive purchases, deliberation as virtue, "one-of-a-kind" as trap), effectively altering the practice of consumption via circular platforms. This practice-bundle is recruited through participation in communities that treat it as normal, expected, and teachable.

Consumers were also shown to develop their own form of circular strategies, largely rejecting the use of circular platforms while keeping their belief in true circularity intact by organising and participating in, for example, in-person swaps or neighbourhood-organised food-sharing. This shows that the evasion of the digital platform environment, and its market-dominant logic (Cerio et al., 2025), does not need to dissolve a consumption practice but instead alter it by turning towards alternative, localized ways of circular consumption (Korsunova et al., 2025), keeping the meaning of the practice intact, while changing the material and competence aspects (Shove et al., 2012).

## Implications

Our findings suggest that understanding the strategies developed by consumers to limit shopping via circular platforms is of practical importance (Flyvbjerg & Sampson, 2001). The “actors” – who we approached as platform users who have been at least partially stripped from their agency by the platform design (script) and which they may regain (at least, partially) by a more conscious and critical usage of circular platforms – via the aforementioned strategies do indeed regain agency, that is, their ability to do something (Warde, 2015). Instead of blindly following the platforms' scripts, by carefully analysing their design, thus understanding what the platforms ‘want’ them to perform, complemented by self-reflection, consumers can successfully limit their shopping via these commercial sites. Moreover, we also believe that our findings contribute to understanding these strategies in a larger social context of (over)consumption. While it seems that overconsumption is spilling over from linear to circular contexts (e.g., Dekhili et al., 2025), implying that we are facing consumption accumulation (Bączyk et al., 2024) – circular consumption effectively growing the consumption ‘pie’ overall, instead of taking up a larger ‘slice’ – these strategies, we believe, can effectively be applied to other acquisition-oriented digital platforms such as fast fashion, due to our findings’ transferability (Drisko, 2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Crucially, these strategies, although on the individual level and often unbeknownst to the consumers, are effective in limiting the effects (including that of rebound) we introduced in the literature review section



(Juge et al., 2022; Parguel et al., 2017), paving the path for future inquiries that can expand the aforementioned strategies to other transaction-oriented digital platforms.

## Future Research

Challenging the ideas put forth by Jiang et al. (2024), who concluded that platform features aimed at reducing consumption, like reminders on time spent on a platform, spending limits and wardrobe digitalisation, are welcomed by users in order to reduce unnecessary consumption, we propose to emphasise the role of consumers instead. Given the contradicting interests of platform providers and users (Ramizo Jr, 2022), that is, profit vs supporting sustainable consumption, the adoption of such consumption-reducing and -slowing features is unlikely. Therefore, we propose that future research, instead of proposing a change in the commercial nature of platforms, expands the applications of the identified strategies in other contexts and develops an understanding of their various effects, such as ecological, psychological or financial.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

**Study Purpose** To better understand how people critically use, decide not to use, or choose not to shop via circular platforms.

**Interview Structure** The session is divided into thematic sections. The interviewee will not be told when sections change. The session will be recorded. Confirm the participant has read and understood the consent form before beginning.

*Ask for consent and start recording.*

### Part I – Introduction

- Could you please introduce yourself? (*name, background, where you live*)

### Part II – General Consumption Habits

- Do you like shopping? Do you shop mainly online or in-store?
- How much do you think people consume – in Sweden, or where you currently live? Where would you place yourself relative to others?
  - *If low:* Do you think you consume less than others? Why?
  - *If high:* Do you think you consume more than others? Why?
- When you shop, do you usually consider alternatives – visiting multiple stores, websites, or apps? Why is that?

### Part III – Awareness and Use of Circular Platforms

- Are you aware of any circular platforms – for example peer-to-peer (P2P) or sharing platforms?
  - *If unsure:* Have you heard of or used platforms like Vinted, Sellpy, Too Good To Go, or Ryde? Or others that allow sharing or renting?
- Which ones have you tried? Why did you start using them, and what did you use them for? (*browsing, comparing, intentional search*)
- How often do you use these – would you say they are part of your regular shopping habits, or more occasional?

### Part IV – Platform Features and Use

### ***Features and Navigation***

- How do you usually go about using these platforms?
- What features are you aware of? Which do you find particularly useful, and which not? (*prompts if needed: distance/radius filter; wish list, bundle offer; saved search, following sellers, price offers/negotiations*)
- Do you use the offer or negotiation functionality? How does that affect your purchasing decisions?

### ***Notifications and Recommendations***

- Do you use these platforms with notifications enabled? How do you react to them – do you ignore them, or open the app?
- Do you think notifications lead you to use the app more often, or to purchase more often?
  - *If notifications were previously enabled: What made you turn them off?*
- How do you perceive the recommendation algorithm on these platforms?

### ***Favourites and Social Features***

- Do you like, save, or favourite items? How do you feel about the number of likes shown on items?
- What do you typically do with saved items – do you forget about them, purchase them later, or use them as a kind of mood board?
- Have you ever removed items from a favourites list?
- If the platform allows it, do you follow any sellers or creators?

### ***Optional – Walkthrough***

- Could you walk us through a typical session on a platform of your choice – what do you do after opening it?

## **Part V – Critical Reflection and Platform Dynamics**

### ***Feeling Pushed to Buy***

- Can you recall a time when you felt a circular platform was pushing you to buy something? How did it do that, and how did you respond?
- Have you ever stopped using one of these platforms altogether?

### ***Social Media and Inspiration***

- Do you use social media? Do you feel trends or content there inspire you to make purchases?
  - If yes – what do you do with that inspiration? Do you think through the purchase before acting on it?

***Food Platforms*** (if applicable – e.g. *Too Good To Go*)

- Do you browse spontaneously or plan your "surprise bag" purchases?
- Have you regretted any purchases? Have you ever decided against getting a bag?
- Does the risk of bags selling out affect your behaviour?
- Have you ever travelled specifically to pick up a bag? Have any purchases resulted in food waste, or do you tend to freeze leftovers?

**Part VI – Meanings, Competences, and Materials**

*(Theory-oriented questions)*

***Meanings***

- How do you feel when you end up not shopping, or not using the platform?
- Do you connect refraining from purchasing to sustainability or conscious consumption?
- Has your understanding of what these platforms are *for* changed over time – for instance, from seeing them as sustainability tools to something else?

***Competences***

- Have you developed any personal rules or routines that help you pause before buying? Where did those come from?
- Do you feel you understand these platforms well enough to use them on your own terms, or do you sometimes feel the platform is better at keeping you engaged than you are at resisting it?

***Materials and Devices***

- What devices do you use to access these platforms – mainly mobile, desktop, or both?
  - *If desktop*: Do you check less often on desktop? Is that a deliberate choice or a practical one?
- Do you use any strategies to manage your consumption – screen time limits, monthly budgets, no-buy challenges, or personal rules like limiting yourself to a set number of items per year?

**Part VII – Closing**

- Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered?
- Do you have any questions for us?

## Appendix 2 – Consent Form

### **Informed consent form to participate in a Master thesis study at the faculty of Social Sciences, at Lund University**

We sincerely thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your contribution is greatly valued and will meaningfully support our research.

#### **Purpose of the study**

This study aims to better understand the ways people decide not to shop via or use circular platforms like Vinted, Too Good To Go, etc. The findings will be used to contribute to existing critical literature on circular consumption as well as inform individual consumers how they may reject the use of these platforms. The research is conducted as part of our Master's thesis in the Service Management program at Lund University.

#### **Duration**

The interview is expected to take no longer than 60 minutes. You are of course welcome to take breaks as needed.

#### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any question, and you may end the interview at any time and without providing a reason. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will have no negative consequences for you whatsoever.

#### **Confidentiality and data protection**

All information you share will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your personal details will be redacted – any identifying information (such as your name, employer, or role) will be made unrecognisable in all research materials and publications. Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team and, if necessary, the project supervisor. Raw data will be retained for the duration of this research project in accordance with *applicable data protection regulation* and then, upon grading of this project - approximately in June 2026- securely deleted.

#### **Recording**

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription. Recordings will be used solely for research purpose, i.e. analysis, and deleted once transcribed.

☐ I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

☐ I do not consent to audio recording. (The interviewer will take written notes instead.)

#### **During the Interview**

The interview will consist of 3 parts, each dedicated to a specific topic we would like to explore further. Both of us will be present – one conducting the interview and the other taking notes.

#### **Right to access and withdrawal of data**

You have the right to request access to your data, to request corrections, or to withdraw your data from the study at any point up to. After this point, data may no longer be attributable to you and therefore cannot be removed.

## Contact

If you have any questions before or after the interview, please contact:

Máté Bikkés, [ma3642bi-s@student.lu.se](mailto:ma3642bi-s@student.lu.se) or Normen Meffert, [no1732me-s@student.lu.se](mailto:no1732me-s@student.lu.se).

## Declaration of consent

By signing below, I confirm that: (please tick the boxes below)

☐ I have read and understood the information above.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

☐ I agree to participate in this interview voluntarily.

Name: .....

Email address: .....

Date & Signature: .....

Researcher confirmation:

I confirm that I have explained the study to the participant and answered any questions to their satisfaction.

Date & researcher signature: .....



## Appendix 3 – Prompts used for Artificial Intelligence

### *Claude prompts for qualitative data analysis*

You are an expert qualitative research analyst with deep expertise in Practice Theory, particularly the work of Theodore Schatzki and Shove, Pantzar & Watson. You are assisting a researcher who studies **consumers' ways of critically using circular platforms** (e.g. resale, rental, repair, swapping platforms).

The researcher has collected data through **netnography** (online community observation) and **semi-structured interviews**, and has analysed this material using Practice Theory as a theoretical framework.

**Your task is to suggest theory-driven thematic labels** for the codes the researcher presents to you.

When labelling, prioritise the following Practice Theory concepts:

- **Elements of practice** – how the codes relate to *materials* (objects, infrastructures, bodies), *competences* (skills, know-how, embodied routines), and *meanings* (symbolic understandings, cultural expectations, interpretive frames)
- **Teleoaffective structures** – how the codes point to ends, goals, emotional orientations, or normative stances that organise what practitioners do (and *don't* do)

Ground your labels in these concepts. Where a code sits clearly within one element, name it accordingly. Where a code spans multiple elements or reveals a teleoaffective tension, name that complexity explicitly.

**The research focus is abstention**, not adoption. Keep this foregrounded in your reasoning:

- Treat non-use, avoidance, disengagement, and restraint as active, structured social practices – not simply absences of behaviour
- Consider how materials, competences, and meanings *sustain* abstention as a practice
- Consider what teleoaffective structures (e.g. values around ownership, trust, sustainability, convenience) organise refraining

How to respond when given codes:

1. **Restate each code** in a single line
2. **Identify which Practice Theory element(s) it most strongly relates to** – materials, competences, meanings, or teleoaffective structure – and briefly explain why
3. **Propose a theory-driven thematic label** (4–8 words) that could work as a theme name in the final analysis
4. **Flag any codes** that appear contradictory, overlapping, or that reveal a theoretical tension worth exploring

After working through all codes, provide a **synthesis overview**: suggest how the individual labels might cluster into 2–4 higher-order themes, using Practice Theory logic to justify the groupings.

**Begin when the researcher pastes their codes.** Ask clarifying questions only if a code is genuinely ambiguous and the distinction materially affects the label you would assign.

### *Ask Reddit Prompts*

**Date:** January 29, 2026

How do people resist consumption? What are the strategies applied by people to not spend money?

**Date:** April 13, 18:13

Prompt: how not to use vinted?

**Date:** April 13, 14:12

Prompt: how do vinted users reacted to the expansion of countries one can buy from and sell to ?

**Date:** April 12, 12:15

Prompt: is there overconsumption caused by sustainable or circular food platforms/apps?

**Date:** April 11, 14:34

Prompt: what makes consumers stop using apps like vinted, ebay, toogoodto?

**Date:** April 7, 2026, Time: 18:04

Prompt: “how to stop shopping from secondhand or circular platforms and apps?”