"THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN BUYING CHEAP CLOTHES…" A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SHOPPING IN THE SZEKLERLAND REGION (TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA)

Laura Nistor[1]

ABSTRACT: *The spread of second-hand consumption practices can be linked both to austerity and reflexive, ethical consumption. The purpose of this descriptive-exploratory qualitative investigation was to study the sources of motivation for shopping for second-hand clothes and to identify how such a practice is structured among interviewees who described their clothes-shopping behaviour as being centred around second-hand shops (i.e., they usually buy their clothes second-hand). Interviewees were residing in the Covasna and Harghita Counties of Romania (also known as Szeklerland), in a relatively disadvantaged region of the country. The narratives showed that the interviewees prefer to shop in second-hand settings due to economic, hedonistic, and, to a lesser extent, ethical-environmental sources of motivation. Thus, second-hand consumption seems to be a matter of indulging contexts and affordable opportunities. The results confirm previous findings in the literature, according to which even in economically disadvantaged contexts second-hand consumption can be explained in more diverse ways than being austerity-driven. Other results showed that extrinsic cues (i.e., quality, price, shopping atmosphere) count a lot, while conspicuous cues such as brand are less important. Interviewees differed regarding whether they preferred to visit second-hand shops alone or in groups, but in both cases hedonist motivations are highly accentuated.*

KEYWORDS: *second-hand shops, thrift, austerity, hedonism, ethical consumption, Romania, qualitative study*

1 *Laura Nistor PhD* is an Associate Professor at the Department of Social Sciences of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, email address: nistorlaura@uni.sapientia.ro.

INTRODUCTION

Second-hand shops have proliferated since the 2000s, not only in the developing world but also among wealthy nations (Williams–Paddock 2003). This form of retail, which implies the circulation of previously owned products, has become more and more formalized, so that now second-hand settings include shops which in their localization and appearance replicate traditional retail outlets: they can be found in city centres and "are taken-for-granted facets of social and economic life" (Gregson–Crewe 2003: 41). The growing popularity of second-hand shops can be interpreted as a form of cultural change (e.g., Murphy 2017) and can be explained on the basis of two macro-societal changes: the 2008 economic crisis within which context second-hand shops offered consumers a form of value shopping (Marzella 2015; Ferraro et al. 2016), and the rise of an ethical consumption megatrend (Törőcsik 2016; Murphy 2017).

My personal observations indicate that, in Romania, second-hand shops started to appear right after the 1989 regime change. At first, second-hand objects entered the country through charity convoys from the West and were disposed of through semi-formal networks (e.g., church-related networks). Later on, during the early 1990s, small second-hand shops started to appear which merchandised imported used products (mostly clothes, electronic equipment, and furniture). At that time, such shops and goods offered contact with the West for the impoverished citizens of a post-socialist transition. Second-hand shops (mostly those that offer clothes) have continued to be omnipresent retail settings in Romania. The flourishing of second-hand retail can be linked, partly, to the still-limited income of Romanian citizens. According to data from the 2016 *European Quality of Life Survey* (Eurofound 2016), 42% of Romanian citizens cannot afford to buy new clothes instead of second-hand clothes. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to examine the case of Romanian second-hand shoppers through the lens of economic deprivation. However, cultural changes – e.g., rising concerns about sustainability, and consumer ethics – are also prevalent in Romanian public discourse, so it is meaningful to try to reveal whether second-hand clothing consumption can be explained in more diverse ways than economic austerity.

The purpose of the study was to investigate – through qualitative interviews – what the major motivations are for shopping for second-hand clothes, and how such a practice is structured among consumers who usually buy their clothes from second-hand shops. The subjects were recruited among ethnic Hungarians from the Covasna and Harghita Counties of Romania; i.e., from a region called Szeklerland. This region is a relatively deprived, mostly rural area of the country, inhabited mostly by ethnic Hungarians (Csata–Csata 2019).

There are no big cities in the region and shopping opportunities are quite limited (e.g., shopping malls have just started to appear in the region). Thus at first sight income deprivation and structural deprivation in terms of retail diversity may be assumed to be the major explanation for buying clothes from second-hand shops. However, I wanted to look beyond this cliché and to explore various other research questions connected to second-hand consumption.[2]

The study is a descriptive-exploratory endeavor insofar as second-hand consumption has not been studied before in Romania, particularly in the area of the present research. The option for a qualitative study design was thus motivated by the lack of previous Romanian data: I assume that revealing the narrative complexity of the studied phenomenon can be used as a starting point for further investigations (e.g., developing hypotheses, questionnaires, etc.).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early approaches to second-hand shopping accentuated the role of economic scarcity (Williams–Paddock 2003). Such shops are described as being more popular in economically less developed nations and among less better-off social strata – i.e., among excluded consumers (e.g., William–Windebank 2002; Williams–Paddock 2003). In Romania, the value of second-hand clothing imports was USD 34.8 million in 2011 (Cuc–Tripa 2013) and the size of the Romanian second-hand retail industry has been on the rise: the total revenue associated with second-hand store retail in 2018 was 324 million USD, compared to 205 million USD in 2008.[3] The growth of the sector can be linked to those socioeconomic transformations which have occurred in the country over the last decades that have resulted in large income inequalities and unequal access to consumption. There exist two major consumption trends: (1) subsistence consumption in the case of individuals in low income quartiles, and (2) in the case of higher income deciles, the manifestation of conspicuous consumerism, which is largely enabled by consumer credit that has been available since the 2000s (Stanciu 2010). Obviously, between these two extremes, and depending on variables such as employment status, cultural capital, age, locality, family

2 The scope of the study did not include looking at the sales sector, although for a comprehensive picture it is necessary that further studies map this sector as well, insofar as there are only sporadic data regarding the size and structure of the Romanian second-hand market.

3 https://www.statista.com/forecasts/337912/romania-second-hand-store-retail-revenue-forecast-sic-4779

status, etc., there are various other forms of consumption patterns (INSSE 2021). As already mentioned, the popularity of second-hand products can be linked to austerity, but consumerism or the search for unique clothes and looks like a form of distinction (Bourdieu 1996) can also be referred to here. Thus, all the consumption trends that exist in Romania can be regarded as possible explanations for the growth and transformation of the Romanian second-hand market. In this latter respect, it is illustrative that the second-hand market which during the 1990s and 2000s was dominated by small, individual, no-name shops started to change from the 2010s onwards: the market has gradually been occupied by bigger second-hand retailers such as Humana, LaMajole, Hada, and Tabita, which offer a wide range of branded clothes (Roșca 2021). Second-hand consumers have also changed: they are now more selective and exigent and mostly buy good quality products, so that the most successful second-hand shops are those in which consumers can find products with a good quality/price ratio which look 'wow' just like those sold in premium shops (*Business24* 2021). Previous data referring to Romanian youngsters showed that they prefer to shop in outlets and second-hand shops because in this way they can access conspicuous, branded clothes and manifest a form of conspicuous consumption (Nistor 2020). Similar data were identified by the Remix online second-hand clothes retailer as well: in 2018, the Romanian market generated 30% of the regional online seller's income (a total of EUR 42 million). The majority of the Romanian clients were middle-class women under 30 years of age from urban settlements, and they opted mostly for branded clothes offered at a good price point (Stroe 2019).

Second-hand shops are becoming popular in developed countries as well (Laitala–Klepp 2018). The recent *ThredUp Report* (ThredUp 2020) estimates that the value of the second-hand clothing market was USD 24 billion in 2019, and it is estimated that it will reach USD 51 billion in 2023. The reports revealed that there are more second-hand shoppers than ever before, and 70% of US women are open to buying clothes from such shops, while second-hand shopping is starting to become part of status consumption and can be linked to ethical consumption and to celebrity influencers advocating the cause of sustainability. These dynamic transformations indicate that economic, scarcity-based approaches to second-hand shopping can be challenged by the so-called cultural turn (Williams–Paddock 2003; Murphy 2017). It is assumed that the reflexive consumers that now exist not only wish to satisfy their material needs but also want to do so sustainably. In such a context, second-hand products allow consumers to participate in the circular economy (Tranberg Hansen–Le Zotte 2019). The popularity of second-hand shops can also be linked to the growing fashionability of vintage clothing items (Palmer–Clark 2005; Cassidy–Bennett

2012; Ferraro et al. 2016) – a fashion trend which implies the recycling of clothing items from past decades, involving integrating them into personalized outfits. Finally, the need to locate branded clothes at a good price and being able to manifest conspicuous consumption (Gregson–Crewe 2003) is also linked to the popularity of second-hand shops. Thus Bourdieu's theory of taste and distinction (Bourdieu 1996) can be used as a good lens for examining the case of second-hand consumption: while for the least privileged social strata, for whom consumption involves necessity, thrift shops represent a 'pragmatic' choice and enable such consumers to buy low-priced items, for those who are better off or for those consumers which are rich in cultural capital second-hand shops allow them to practice various forms of symbolic consumption, either in the form of conspicuous consumption (i.e. buying branded clothes at a good price point – cf. the creation of fashion labels as a form of symbolic consumption – Bourdieu (1996)) or in the form of cultural distinction (i.e. practicing various forms of conscious, critical consumption through which consumers can distance themselves from mass consumption and consumer society).

Similarly, Williams–Paddock (2003) group the various sources of motivation for second-hand shopping into two major categories: (1) an economistic reading – which assumes the role of economic scarcity, and (2) an agency-oriented reading – according to which shopping in such shops is related to individual lifestyle preferences. Likewise, Waight (2013) contrasts two types of second-hand shoppers: those "who are forced" vs. those "who choose" to shop in such settings. The latter consumers are motivated by ecological, ethical, and critical reasons (Bardhi–Arnould 2005; Franklin 2011; Waight 2014; Laitala–Klepp 2018). Williams and Paddock (2003) contend that the choice to buy from second-hand shops can be linked to spectacular consumption in the sense that through buying from such alternative settings consumers can be viewed as buying the "right" things, so that second-hand shopping can contribute to the articulation of distinction. Hedonic, experiential motivation refers to drivers such as having fun, seeking adventure, or hunting for 'treasure' in second-hand shops.

In the present research, only clothing-related second-hand consumption was investigated, which is an important component of the whole range of second-hand products (Franklin 2011; Laitala–Klepp 2018). At the same time, second-hand clothes are sense-affected objects: they enter into direct contact with the body and they can be rejected based on hygiene- and identity-related concerns (Roux–Korchia 2006; Roux 2010; Yan et al. 2015; Hur 2020). When consumers decide to purchase used clothes, they usually apply various cleaning methods and alterations/refitting through which their new owners take possession of and/or reinterpret such items of clothes (Roux 2010). Gregson and Crewe (2003) specify various types of adaptation rituals. Recovery rituals imply the

reconditioning of second-hand products. These practices aim to preserve the original patterns of the products and are focused only on disguising signs of previous use (e.g., antique furniture, or vintage clothing). Divestment rituals aim at deleting the signs of previous ownerships (e.g., washing clothes). These practices are the most common and "allow the new owner both to erase and to personalize, and through these to 'free up' the meaningful properties of possession" (ibid. 155).

Even if second-hand shops have become widespread places of consumption for those of any social strata, scholars have shown that we can still find attitudes of stigmatization towards second-hand clothes, stores, or consumers of such items. Consequently, self-esteem-related concerns can keep consumers back from buying second-hand clothes: some may think that buying from such shops makes them less valuable or less unique (Roux–Korchia 2006; Laitala–Klepp 2018). Williams and Paddock (2003) showed that better-off consumers seek to buy new clothes "at all costs." Obviously, the ethical turn largely nuances this approach, as picking up clothes from second-hand shops has lately become a sign of "moral" shopping (Franklin 2011) and conscious distinction, but the still existing disapproval of second-hand shopping practices can be identified in the form of the old bourgeois distinction and consumption habitus, as suggested by Bourdieu (1996) – with higher social classes considering that access to new goods represents access to restricted goods (i.e., to more costly new items), thus being a symbol of financial distinction.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research is based on qualitative methodology, which is quite typical in the investigation of second-hand consumption. Among others, Gregson–Crewe (2003), Williams–Paddock (2003), Guiot–Roux (2010), Roux (2010), and Waight (2013, 2014) employed qualitative methodologies for the investigation of second-hand consumption.

The context of my study was represented by two counties from Romania (Covasna and Harghita Counties), which are situated at the end of the Romanian scale of income classification:[4] in 2019, out of the 42 Romanian counties, including Bucharest, the average monthly wage was 2,591 RON (approx. 528 EUR) in Covasna County (25th position) and 2,434 RON (approx. 496 EUR) in Harghita County (40th position), which in both cases is below the Romanian

4 http://statisticiromania.ro/clasamente [Last access: 03 05 2021]

average monthly wage (2,735 RON). By comparison, the average monthly wage in Bucharest was 3,991 RON. In none of the towns of Covasna and Harghita Counties is there a shopping mall (a smaller one was opened in Miercurea-Ciuc, Harghita County in May 2020). Taking these two facts (low wages, a lack of malls) together, there is contextual austerity in terms of shopping for new clothes, which thus creates fruitful terrain for exploring the motivations and other aspects of second-hand clothes shopping.

The empirical research is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews; the research questions were the following:

- What are consumers' major sources of motivation when they decide to buy their clothes from second-hand shops?
- What types of clothing items do consumers choose to purchase, and what are the cues that drive this shopping (i.e., price, brand, quality of products)?
- Are there clothing items which are avoided? What are the reasons for such avoidance?
- What divestment rituals are there? What do consumers do with purchased items prior to wearing them?
- Are there any negative experiences connected with second-hand shops which consumers find it important to recall?
- Which are the specificities of the contexts of shopping? How frequently do consumers shop, and in what types of second-hand shops? Do they shop alone or in groups?

During the interviews, these questions were operationalized in a flexible manner. The semi-structured interview design allowed us to adapt the questions to respondents' specific opinions and narratives and to add further, clarifying and/or provocative questions when answers to certain questions needed it.[5]

The interviewees were recruited through the snowball technique and the sine qua non criteria for participation was that the subject declared that they shop frequently and deliberately in second-hand shops. Participants were informed about the aim of the study and were assured that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Prior to interviewing, we asked for participants' permission to

5 For instance, in the case of questions and narratives which investigated branded clothes, many interviewees talked about brands without mentioning a clear brand name. By asking those clarifying questions, it became obvious that many of them were referring to fast fashion. The buying of fast fashion clothes, even from second-hand shops, might contradict the principles of ethical consumption, although the answers to further clarifying questions showed that there are two strategies in this regard: (1) the most critical consumers decline to buy such products even if they are otherwise good quality, and (2) others consider that such brands are worth buying because they satisfy the criteria of being fashionable at an affordable price.

record the interviews. All the participants agreed with this, and were free to ask any questions about the aims and scope of the research. Twenty-six interviews were conducted in total between January 15 and March 4, 2020. The interviews were recorded at participants' home, in cafes, and at the author's university. The language of the interviews was Hungarian (later on, the excerpts presented in this article were translated into English by a native speaker). The interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 1.45 hours. The analysis of the interviews was undertaken using NVivo qualitative software.

Table 1 in the *Appendix* presents the list of the interviewees, with their coded initials, gender, age, county of residence, occupation, and self-declared spending/month in second-hand shops as well. Eighteen out of the twenty-six interviewees were female, the average spending/month in second-hand clothing shops was 148 RON (approx. 30 EUR), and the average frequency of visiting such shops was several times per month.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivation for shopping

In the case of each research question, the answers were coded with the help of NVivo software. The code family for the question regarding what motivates interviewees to shop in second-hand shops comprises six major child codes: finding cheap clothes (occurring 87 times), treasure hunting (34) and finding unique clothes (37 times), leisure (social interaction, 57 times), recycling (34 times), store atmosphere (they look like first-hand retail shops, 24 times). These forms of motivation resemble the economistic, the hedonistic, and the environmental sources of motivation found in the literature (e.g., Guiot–Roux 2010) and they are not mutually exclusive (Balsa-Budai–Kiss 2019). It is true that finding cheap clothes constitutes an important driving force for shopping, but almost none of the interviewees considered it to be the sole motivation for their second-hand shopping. In almost all interviews, the desire to buy cheap clothes went together with hedonistic motivations such as treasure hunting, finding unique pieces, etc. or – to a lesser extent – with ethical drivers such as recycling.

The economic or thriftiness motivation is revealed from those in-vivo codes associated with interviewees claiming that they visit second-hand shops in order to acquire their clothes at good prices, to find bargains, or to save money for other purchases (cf. pragmatic consumption – Bourdieu 1996):

The price of the product is essential for me. It's not because I couldn't afford to buy new stuff but because I've come to realize that buying in second-hand shops saves me more money so I can buy other things that are important for me. (A. D., female, 21 years old)

Thrift stores have considerably lower prices, offer a wide diversity of branded clothes, and their products are in good condition in most cases. So, I can get a good price-value ratio, which is important to me. (B. E., male, 22 years old)

The hedonistic, experiential motivation category (Bardhi–Arnould 2005; Mitchell–Montgomery 2010; Guiot–Roux 2010, etc.) is represented by four specific child codes that capture the narratives of interviewees who indicated that second-hand shops offered them: adventure in the form of treasure hunting (e.g. finding vintage clothes); possibilities to acquire unique clothes compared to those available in conventional shops (here interviewees were not necessarily referring to vintage clothes, but to anything different from the current mass market collections); possibilities for socializing (e.g. hanging around, looking around with friends) or – if visiting alone – a pleasant way of spending leisure time, or a form of meditation; or the feeling that they get when they visit a normal shop containing new items (when the location of the shop, its appearance and product display imitate those of regular shops – see Gregson–Crewe (2003); Mitchell–Montgomery (2010)).

Stuff that others find useless comes back to life with me. I tend to buy things that are old, vintage – these clothes have their own stories, which cannot be said of new acquisitions. Such products can be the real gems in my outfit. (F. B., female, 50 years old)

I think that thrift stores may be an option for people with a somewhat different perception in terms of clothes, fashion, and style. I'm of the view that shopping in a second-hand store is an adventure – because of the prices, the quality, and the uniqueness, since I've got more chance of buying something special for myself. (B. D., female, 19 years old)

I visit second-hand shops almost every week; I consider it a good pastime, and sometimes I lose all track of time for hours. (B. A., female, 29 years old)

At the crossroads of economic and hedonistic motivations, the interviewees also claimed that second-hand shopping could result in negative consequences such as overconsumption, the over-accumulation of clothes, and shopping addiction. This finding resonates with those of Bardhi–Arnould (2005), Gregson–Crewe (2003), and Williams–Paddock (2003), and confirms that second-hand shopping can result in behaviours which conflict with the frugal and ethical motivations associated with second-hand shopping:

> *One can easily get accustomed to thrifting, as all they can think of is how cheap a bargain they could snap up. But all this can be a trap sometimes as I also buy unnecessary things, and the products of regular thrifting get piled up at home… Nonetheless, if I can get an appealing article of clothing at a good price, I simply cannot ignore it. (A. E, female, 39 years old)*

> *Getting good quality stuff as cheap as possible is essential for me, and if this works out, it gives me a sense of accomplishment. But this can easily lead to addiction. (A. F., male, 29 years old)*

The ethical motivations for second-hand shopping (Bardhi–Arnould 2005; Guiot–Roux 2010, etc.) are represented by a desire to recycle. Interviewees maintained that second-hand shopping was important to them because it offered the possibility to extend the lifecycle of products to avoid unnecessary waste. This motivation appeared in many of the interviews, usually tied to other types of motivations, or was assessed as a by-product of second-hand shopping through which consumers can also manifest that they are doing the 'right thing' with their purchases (Williams–Paddock 2003). There were a few (four) interviewees in whose cases the ethical-environmental motivation represented by recycling was articulated as the most important driver of second-hand shopping. These interviewees also pointed out that they sought in general to minimize their consumption-related waste, so it can be argued that the ethical motivation of their second-hand clothing shopping is a specific manifestation of their ethical lifestyle in general. Apart from these four interviewees, the other participants considered recycling to be one of the many reasons for visiting such shops and, similarly to the findings of Gregson and Crewe (2003), did not formulate any radical opinions about second-hand shopping as a form of boycotting first-hand retail.

The narratives showed that hedonistic, lifestyle motivations taken together are the most diverse and most important drivers of second-hand shopping, the latter which are, however, enabled by the lower price of the products. Thus,

"second-hand shopping is much more than buying clothes at good prices," but the fact that the consumer can actually afford to buy the sought out products is very important for the occurrence of the good feelings which are associated with second-hand shopping. This finding corroborates the idea of Bardhi–Arnould (2005) that the lower price of products enables second-hand shops to make consumers' fantasies come true, and allows consumers to take part in consumer society.

Chosen products vs. avoided products

Tops (i.e., shirts, T-shirts, and sweatshirts), outerwear, leisurewear, sportswear, clothes for work and clothes for children are items typically bought in second-hand shops. Footwear is a more controversial form of purchase and has both its fans and opponents: some interviewees reject the buying of second-hand shoes based on hygienic considerations or specific orthopaedic necessities. On the other hand, there are also more general narratives regarding what is bought from such shops: some of the interviewees buy "anything if it makes a good haul," while others only hunt for unique items, regardless of the type of clothing. It follows that interviewees do not use only second-hand channels to buy their clothes: even if buying from such shops is a frequent, mostly taken-for-granted experience, they also rely on traditional retail as well, either for specific products or only as a form of amateur market research in order to see the trends or compare the prices in these two types of markets. For many interviewees, the decision to stick with second-hand shops was the result of two specific situations: (1) defecting from traditional retail (mostly due to an unfavourable quality/price ratio, homogenous trends, etc.); and/or (2) the lack of diverse offerings (e.g., a lack of malls or shopping opportunities).

The fair price of products and other utilitarian criteria, such as the short lifecycle of certain new products (e.g., T-shirts, clothes for children, work-related clothes) may mean that consumers rely on second-hand shops for clothing acquisition. Thrift and careful planning in terms of quality vs. price (Waight 2013, 2014; Bardhi–Arnould 2005) are important motivations for choosing a product, even in situations when the primordial reason for entering such shops is some sort of self-indulgence (e.g., to feel good, leisure, socializing, hanging around). Some of the interviewees opt for certain types of clothes if they fall into the category of vintage, unique pieces (Bourdieu 1996; Gregson–Crewe 2003).

The truth is that I'll buy anything if it gains my approval and pays off. As a matter of fact, I'll just go inside a shop only to have a look around without any purpose, and if I happen to like something, I'll buy it. I prefer to buy sportswear and children's wear from here [such shops] – the[y] must be replaced much more often, and I have fewer regrets about getting them torn [damaging them] in a short time if I pay less for them. (C. A., female, 57 years old)

I go for more unique, rare, perhaps older stuff. This way I can avoid coming across the same products on the street, be they T-shirts, coats, or anything. (D. C., female, 31 years old)

In the light of previous findings in the literature (e.g., Gregson–Crewe 2003; Roux–Korchia 2006), it was not a surprise that interviewees mentioned a set of products the purchase of which from second-hand shops was nearly unanimously rejected. This list is topped by underwear – i.e., items that may enter into direct contact with certain body fluids and are thus considered to be 'polluted' by previous owners to the extent that there is no possibility for their re-appropriation (Roux–Korchia 2006). Consequently, the major reason for rejecting the purchase of an item from a second-hand shop is the fear of contamination (Yan et al. 2015). Additionally, any clothing item which has evident signs of the previous owners' body form, has stains, or is damaged is usually rejected and does not enter any ritual of re-appropriation (Gregson–Crewe 2003; Roux–Korchia 2006). Products can also be rejected if perceived as overpriced.

In any other situation, the chosen products enter various rituals of re-appropriation. The most common case is the divestment ritual (Gregson–Crewe 2003), during which products are washed before their first wearing, either according to the laundry symbol or at high temperatures or on a long washing cycle. Some of the interviewees go even further and have products sterilized using specialized services. Recovery and transformative rituals (Gregson–Crewe 2003) were less frequently mentioned and usually applied in cases when the products were "such a good haul that it's worth working on [them] a bit and making it wearable" (A. E., female, 39 years old).

Criteria involved in product choice

There are four non-mutually exclusive criteria which crucially influence consumers' product choice: uniqueness (mentioned 76 times), price (66 times),

quality (59 times), and brand (31 times). Uniqueness is a product feature which can be very subjective: there are consumers who perceive vintage clothes as unique, while for others the criterion is not so strict and they regard fast-fashion clothes as unique. Logically, the uniqueness of clothes becomes an important product choice criterion for consumers who visit second-hand shops based on hedonic motivations – i.e., treasure hunting.

The price of products is an important selection criterion as well, but it is linked to other contextual features of second-hand shopping or to the socio-demographic backgrounds of the interviewees: it is particularly important for those consumers who visit second-hand shops more frequently, who have children, or are more constrained by their budgets (Murphy 2017). Finally, an acceptable price for a product allows for the fulfilment of a successful treasure hunt as well.

> *The price of the product is essential… especially considering that I've got children, and so I need to be extra careful where the money is going. (B. C., female, 55 years old)*

> *The price of the product isn't something to be overlooked: mainly because I'm a frequent visitor of thrift stores, mostly just to have a look around, but once there I do buy this and that, and it wouldn't do me any good if stuff came with a hefty price tag... (A. D., female, 21 years old)*

Price is usually judged as a function of quality. Even if there were a few interviewees who associated quality with the intrinsic features of products such as composition (e.g. "I feel much better wearing a cotton or wool top than a plastic one"), quality is related mostly to extrinsic features such as non-damaged clothes that show no or only a few signs of previous wear. If the product is damaged, its low price splits the consumers into two groups: some of them choose to buy the product and then fix it, while others decline. The case is similar with brands. Only three interviewees declared that if they found a branded product, they would buy it even if the clothes did not fit them or had minor damage. In all other cases the brand of the product counts only if it is tied to other criteria that support purchase intentions: a good price, a good fit, and good quality. In other words, some consumers enter second-hand shops in order to find good-quality products at fair prices regardless of the brand of the product, while other consumers visit such shops to find branded clothes at a fair price and of good quality, but branding alone usually does not influence shopping:

I won't buy it just because it's branded. If it's in good condition, if I like it, it fits me, and, of course, the price is also good, then yes. (B. E., male, 22 years old)

If it's branded and worn, I certainly won't buy it… I'd rather focus on its condition and only then I check out the price tag, and if it's a branded one, then I'm happy... But only if it's in good condition too. At the very most, I'll be sad if it's branded but has some flaws or it doesn't fit me. In such cases, I'll pass… If the product is damaged, it doesn't matter if it's branded or not. (C. E., female, 25 years old)

Interviewees who are driven by ethical, recycling motivations, are logically very critical of brands, especially fast fashion brands. In their cases, certain brands can deter them from buying:

If I find a piece of clothing that I like, but then I figure out it's some sort of fast-fashion brand, I might think twice before buying it. My personal rule here is that it must be very special and of high quality in order for me to make a purchase. Branding is crucial only if it's an extremely good-quality, hard-wearing brand or a really special high-end brand. But not even then will I buy it for the brand alone. I must like it; it must look good on me, must be of good quality, and must have, of course, a fair price. (F. A., female, 34 years old)

The contextual features of second-hand shopping

The contexts of visiting second-hand shops are identified as being in line with Tauber's (1972) work, and reveal two major categories of shoppers: those for whom shopping is a more personal act, and those for whom it is mostly a social activity. Additionally, there is also a mixed category – i.e., a child code that captures those narratives according to which it depends (mostly on products) whether the interviewees prefer to shop alone or in groups.

Interviewees who have a preference for shopping alone usually claim that it helps them to be more attentive to detail and select products more carefully. These consumers also point out also that shopping is a form of individual leisure activity – a way of 'chilling out' for them (i.e., an introspective process), and they do not want anyone else to distract them. Finally, there are also narratives according to which interviewees do not want others to know that they visit

second-hand shops – i.e., they are ashamed of this habit, and consider that buying second-hand items erodes their self-esteem and social image (cf. Roux–Korchia 2006; Waight 2014).

> *I tend to go by myself. Thrifting is a rather lengthy process; one needs to be absorbed by it; the point is to take a deep dive into the piles of clothes… (C. F., male, 38 years old)*

> *There are times when I enter a thrift store tired after a day's work, and then it helps me unwind as I don't need to think of work, but I can lose myself among the racks of clothes. This is some sort of therapy for me. (D. F., female, 24 years old)*

> *I tend to go on my own. Actually, I never go with anyone, and I wouldn't even want others to learn about this. Many look down on people buying from second-hand shops, and I wouldn't want to have to explain myself. (C. E., female, 25 years old)*

Interviewees who show a preference for shopping in groups had narratives that accord with the claims of the literature that shopping in groups may be a social experience per se:

> *I go shopping with my family or friends; in the meantime, we talk, tell each other what has been going on in our lives, and then we go for a coffee. Thrifting is often just an excuse to meet up. (A. E., female, 39 years old)*

Shopping with friends/family can involve utilitarian reasons as well: when interviewees want trustworthy feedback about how clothes fit them, they usually prefer to shop in groups. However, some interviewees claim that they are uneasy about others judging their appearance and how clothes fit them, so they prefer to shop alone. So, the context of shopping is very much dependent on the personality of the interviewees and/or on the chosen products.

Regarding the frequency of shopping and the money that is spent, there are huge differences between interviewees: some of them visit such shops on a daily basis, while others enter them only if they really need a specific clothing item. The former category is made up of participants who buy things very frequently, even if they are not in need, which makes it important for them to find a bargain. The latter are usually those interviewees who visit such shops on a seasonal

basis, buy fewer items on most occasions, and are more prone to splurging on them. The narratives are also split regarding interviewees' preferences for a specific type of second-hand shop. Those who are motivated by hedonistic preferences give priority to less organized settings where they need to dig through huge piles of clothes. On the other hand, there are those consumers who prefer neatly organized shops where the clothes are put on hangers and the atmosphere imitates that of first-hand retail. No matter what the preference in terms of display, there is a consensus that the spaces should be clean, there should be a pleasant smell, and the shop should look reassuring as a whole (Mitchell–Montgomery 2010).

Negative experiences

Negative experiences refer to extrinsic issues related to the goods on offer (i.e., low-quality clothes, clothes with clear signs of wear from previous owners, or overpriced products) or the (un)pleasantness of the in-shop atmosphere (lack of hygiene, lack of proper fitting rooms, crowded places – cf. Mitchell–Montgomery (2010)).

There are two child codes that capture narratives in which negative experiences related to such shops have an internal locus of control – i.e. they are the result of either the interviewees' personal incapacity to find 'treasure' or their second-hand shopping addiction, which results in clothing accumulation. The interviewees see the success of second-hand shopping in terms of patience, learning, and success. Those who possess such abilities are seen as the experts at second-hand shopping, and interviewees might appear to be less talented and less successful when compared to such consumers – a perception which then leads to a critical attitude towards the whole second-hand experience.

An over-accumulation of clothes is another negative experience that was frequently mentioned in relation to second-hand shopping (Gregson–Crewe 2003; Williams–Paddock 2003). Finally, one child code integrates those narratives according to which some of the interviewees consider that they are the subject of critique of their acquaintances because they shop for their clothes in such shops. Thus, they recalled certain concrete situations when they felt a negative attitude from their friends or colleagues, and thus were embarrassed.

CONCLUSIONS

Previous findings in the literature (e.g., Williams–Paddock 2003; Gregson–Crewe 2003; Bardhi–Arnould 2005; Guiot–Roux 2010, etc.) have shown that explaining second-hand consumption merely through the lens of austerity is quite a reductionist approach, and even in economically less advantaged contexts consumers' preference for second-hand retail can be more nuanced. The narratives confirmed this situation: our interviewees who reside in a relatively disadvantaged region and describe their clothes-buying behaviour as being centred around second-hand shops have more diverse motivations for second-hand shopping than economic scarcity. On the basis of the 26 interviews, I managed to reveal multifaceted sources of motivation for second-hand shopping (Bardhi–Arnould 2005; Guiot–Roux 2010; Waight 2013, etc.): the interviewees prefer to shop in second-hand settings due to economic, hedonistic, and, to a lesser extent, ethical-environmental motivations. Indeed, the low price of products is an important driver of second-hand consumption; however, it turned out that hedonistic motivations (e.g., leisure, socialization, treasure hunting, finding unique clothes) are even more important. The enjoyment of second-hand clothing purchases comes from the fact that it is adventurous; one can never know what one might find in a shop, but once one finds a treasure, one can afford to buy it because it is affordable. Thus, I would say that second-hand consumption is a matter of indulging contexts and affordable opportunities.

The narratives show that items that do not pass the quality test are usually rejected regardless of their low price, and branded products are no exception to this rule. Brand alone is not a sufficient incentive for picking a product: branded products should have only minor evidence of previous ownership and need to be sold at an affordable price. The interviewees are aware that there are plenty of second-hand shops in their settlements, and they usually do not make compromises: if they feel that products, the store atmosphere, the sellers, etc. do not meet their expectations they will leave the products and stores behind without a second thought and look for better alternatives. Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of interviewees have their favourite second-hand shops, which are the results of amateur market search based on many years of experience.

All in all, the narratives suggest that second-hand shopping involves much more than buying clothes at low prices; it is a pleasurable, hedonistic experience based equally on utilitarian and hedonistic drivers. It is part of the interviewees' everyday life-world, and many of them would stick to such shops even if their incomes rose. Although the interviewees come from a relatively disadvantaged region, their socio-demographic background was quite diverse, and thus we can claim that this research has provided preliminary evidence that shopping for

second-hand clothing items is not perceived as a form of social exclusion in the Szeklerland region (e.g. Williams–Paddock 2003), and has started to become a conscious choice motivated by economic-hedonistic and, to a lesser degree, ethical narratives.

Obviously, the qualitative methodology has its limits and does not allow for making more generalized statements about the researched phenomenon, but it surely allows for the formulation of some working hypotheses for further research (e.g., in focus groups and surveys). It is also a legitimate question whether with the spread of shopping malls which offer major opportunities for hedonistic consumption, second-hand shops can continue to attract shoppers. I suppose the answer is yes, and the reason is that the lower price of products in second-hand shops allows consumers to really buy and to really feel part of consumer society, so from this point of view second-hand shops can be considered inclusive places.

REFERENCES

Balsa-Budai, N. – V. Á. Kiss (2019) Conscious consumers on the market of second-hand products. *Közép-Európai Közlemények*, Vol. 12, No. 2., pp. 197–214, https://ojs.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php/vikekkek/article/view/32882/32416

Bardhi, F. – E. J. Arnould (2005) Thrift shopping: Combining utilitarian thrift and hedonic treat benefits. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 4, No. 4., pp. 223–233. DOI: 10.1002/cb.12

Bourdieu, P. (1996 [1984]) *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* London (UK), Routledge

Business 24 (2021) How the Romanian market of second-hand and outlet products has been transformed. https://business24.ro/lifestyle/stiri-lifestyle/cum-s-a-transformat-comer-ul-de-haine-second-hand-i-outlet-in-romania-1616580 [Last access: 09 29 2021]

Cassidy, T. D. – H. R. Bennett (2012) The rise of vintage fashion and the vintage consumer. *Fashion Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 2., pp. 239–262. DOI:10.2752/175693812X13403765252424

Csata, I. – Zs. Csata (2019) Cégaktivitás Romániában és Erdélyben. *Erdélystat*, http://statisztikak.erdelystat.ro/cikkek/cegaktivitas-romaniaban-es-erdelyben/42 [Last access: 03 21 2021]

Cuc, S. – S. Tripa (2013) Fast fashion and second-hand clothes between ecological concerns and global business. *Annals of the University of Oradea, Fascicle of Textiles, Leatherwork*, Vol. 15, No. 1., pp. 163–166.

Eurofound (2016) *European Quality of Life Survey. Data Visualisation*. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey [Last access: 03 21 2021]

Ferraro, C. – S. Sands – J. Brace-Govan (2016) The role of fashionability in second-hand shopping motivations. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services,* Vol, 32, pp. 262–268, DOI:10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.07.006

Franklin, A. (2011) The Ethics of Second-Hand Consumption. In: T. Lewis – E. Potter (eds.): *Ethical Consumption. A Critical Introduction*. New York (NY, US), Routledge, pp. 156–168.

Gregson, N. – L. Crewe (2003) *Second-hand Cultures*. Oxford (UK), Berg Publishers

Guiot, D. – D. Roux (2010) A second-hand shoppers' motivation scale: Antecedents, consequences, and implications for retailers. *Journal of Retailing,* Vol. 86, No. 4., pp. 383–299, DOI:10.1016/j.jretai.2010.08.002

Hur, E. (2020) Rebirth fashion. Second-hand clothing consumption values and perceived risks. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 273, No. 10., DOI:10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.122951

INSSE (2021) *Living Standard*. Press Release No. 140/7., https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/abf_2020r.pdf [Last access: 09 25 2021]

Laitala, K. – I. G. Klepp (2018) Motivations for and against second-hand clothing acquisition. *Clothing Cultures*, Vol. 5, No. 2., pp. 247–262, DOI:10.1386/cc.5.2.247_1

Marzella, F. (2015) The second-hand market: The practice of reusing goods in cultures dominated by the new. *Italian Sociological Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1., pp. 105–122, DOI:10.13136/isr.v5i1.97

Mitchell, M. – R. Montgomery (2010) An examination of thrift store shoppers. *The Marketing Management Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2., pp. 94–107, http://www.mmaglobal.org/publications/MMJ/MMJ-Issues/2010-Fall/MMJ-2010-Fall-Vol20-Issue2-Mitchell-Montgomery-pp94-107.pdf

Murphy, F. (2017) The Austerity Myth: Parenting and the New Thrift Culture in Contemporary Ireland. In: Heffernan, E. – J. McHale – N. Moore-Cherry (eds.): *Debating Austerity in Ireland*. Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, pp. 204–217.

Nistor, L. (2020) *Fashion. A Phenomenon of Consumption and Communication*. Cluj (RO), Presa Universitara Clujeană.

Palmer, A. – H. Clark (2005) *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion*. Oxford (UK), Berg Publishers

Roșca, C. (2021) Second-hand market on the rise in Romania. http://www.zfenglish.com/companies/retail-consumer/second-hand-fashion-market-on-the-rise-in-romania-20048739 [Last access: 09 29 2021)

Roux, D. (2010) Identity and self-territory in second-and clothing transfer. *Advances in Consumer Research,* Vol. 37, No. 1., pp. 65–68, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315759878_Identity_and_Self-Territory_in_Second_Hand_Clothing_Transfer

Roux, D. – M. Korchia (2006) Am I what I wear? An exploratory study of symbolic meanings associated with secondhand clothing. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 33, pp. 29–37, https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/v33/v33_47.pdf

Stanciu, M. (2010) The Romanian population's consumption model during the last two decades. *Calitatea Vieții*, Vol. 21, No. 3–4., pp. 251–273, https://www.revistacalitateavietii.ro/2010/CV-3-4-2010/03.pdf

Stroe, A. (2019) Compania care face milioane din haine la mâna a doua. [The company which makes millions out of second-hand clothes]. *Business Magazin*, June 4th 2019, https://www.businessmagazin.ro/actualitate/compania-care-face-milioane-din-haine-la-mana-a-doua-18150051 [Last access: 03 21 2021]

Tauber, E. M. (1972) Why do people shop? *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 36, No. 4., pp. 46–49, DOI:10.1177/002224297203600409

ThredUp (2020) *2020 Resale Report*. https://www.thredup.com/resale/2020/#-consumer-trends [Last access: 03 21 2021]

Törőcsik, M. (2016) A fogyasztói magatartás új tendenciái. *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4., pp. 19–25, http://unipub.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/2325/1/VT2016n4p19.pdf

Tranberg Hansen, K. – J. Le Zotte (2019) Introduction. Changing secondhand economies. *Business History,* Vol. 61, No. 1., pp. 1–16, DOI:10.1080/00076791.2018.1543041

Waight, E. (2013) Eco babies: Reducing a parent's ecological footprint with second-hand consumer goods. *International Journal of Green Economics,* Vol. 7, No. 2., pp. 197–211, DOI:10.1504/IJGE.2013.057444

Waight, E. (2014) Second-hand consumption among middle-class mothers in the UK: Thrift, distinction, and risk. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 1., pp. 159–162, DOI:10.1332/204674313X13805551473134

Williams, C. C. – C. Paddock (2003) The meanings of informal and second-hand retail channels: Some evidence from Leicester. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3., pp. 317–336, DOI:10.1080/0959396032000101372

Williams, C. C. – J. Windebank (2002) The 'excluded consumer:' A neglected aspect of social exclusion? *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 4., pp. 501–513, DOI:10.1332/030557302760590422

Yan, R.-N. – S. Y. Bae – H. Xu (2015) Second-hand clothing shopping among college students: The role of psychographic characteristics. *Young Consumers*, Vol. 16, No. 1., pp. 85–98, DOI: 10.1108/YC-02-2014-00429

APPENDIX

Table 1. *Research participants and some of their socio-demographic data*

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	County	Occupation	Amount spent/ month	Frequency of shopping*
1	A. B.	Male	29	CV	Driver	100 RON	2
2	A. C.	Female	45	CV	Teacher	300 RON	3
3	A. D.	Female	21	CV	Student	150 RON	4
4	B. A.	Female	29	CV	Medical assistant	150 RON	3
5	A. E.	Female	39	CV	Unemployed	100 RON	2
6	A. F.	Male	29	CV	Trainer	200 RON	1
7	A. G.	Male	51	CV	Seller	200 RON	2
8	B. C.	Female	55	CV	Physician	200 RON	2
9	B. D.	Female	19	CV	Student	100 RON	5
10	B. E.	Male	22	CV	Student	200 RON	3
11	B. F.	Female	39	CV	Waitress	200 RON	2
12	C. A.	Female	57	HR	Manager	200 RON	4
13	C. B.	Female	55	HR	Self-employed	350 RON	4
14	C. D.	Female	65	HR	Retired	100 RON	2
15	C. E.	Female	25	HR	Self-employed	200 RON	5
16	C. F.	Male	38	HR	Journalist	100 RON	2
17	C. G.	Male	41	HR	Sportsman	50 RON	3
18	D. A.	Male	42	HR	Photographer	100 RON	3
19	D. B.	Female	30	HR	Unemployed	50 RON	4
20	D. C.	Female	31	HR	Teacher	100 RON	4
21	D. E.	Female	19	HR	Student	50 RON	5
22	D. F.	Female	24	HR	Medical assistant	50 RON	4
23	E. A.	Female	38	HR	Hairdresser	250 RON	3
24	E. B.	Male	49	HR	Baker	100 RON	2
25	F. A.	Female	34	HR	Sewer	100 RON	2
26	F. B.	Female	50	HR	Self-employed	150 RON	3

** Interviewees had to choose between the answers: daily (coded as 5), weekly (4), several times a month (3), once a month (2), and less than once a month (1).*