

Consumers' Perception Towards Pre-loved Activewear and Factors Influencing It

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the consumer perception of young consumers living in Sweden, towards second-hand activewear and to identify characteristics that may have an influencing effect on the perception. The study was based on the following two research questions: *(1) How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand? (2) How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and do it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?*

The study was based on qualitative research and the empirical material was collected through eight semi-structured interviews conducted via face-to-face interviews and via online Zoom meetings. The participants were selected based on their age and due to their great interest in second-hand consumption in general. All of the study's participants live in Sweden. The study's findings showed that there has been an increased acceptance of the idea of second-hand activewear consumption in recent years. In terms of the purpose and research questions, it was concluded that the price, hygiene aspects, sorting and organizing products, and quality plays an important role in influencing consumer perception.

Keywords: Second-hand, perception, activewear, purchasing behavior, purchasing decisions, millennials, Sweden

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Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 PROBLEM DISCUSSION	4
1.2 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
1.3 DELIMITATIONS	6
1.4 OUTLINE	7
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 SECOND-HAND CONSUMPTION	8
2.2 PREFERENCES OF MILLENIALS	8
2.3 BARRIERS/CHARACTERISTICS OF PRE-USED ACTIVEWEAR	9
2.4 INFLUENCE OF ACTIVEWEAR BARRIERS/CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMER CHOICE AND PERCEPTION	10
2.5 CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS SECOND-HAND	11
2.6 RESEARCH GAP	11
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	13
3.1 CONSUMER PERCEPTION	13
3.2 ERRORS IN CONSUMER PERCEPTION	14
3.3 COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY	15
3.3.1 How Cognitive dissonance theory is applied in this study	15
3.4 SELF-PERCEPTION THEORY	16
3.4.1 How Self-perception theory is applied in this study	16
3.5 CONSUMER THEORY AND CONCEPT OF HUMAN AGENCY	17
3.5.1 How Consumer theory is applied in this study	17
4. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY	18
4.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHOD	18
4.2 DATA COLLECTION	19
4.3 THE SELECTED PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY	19
4.4 STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEW GUIDE AND PILOT TEST	21
4.4.1 Steps in Conducting the Pilot Study	21
4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	22
4.6 DATA ANALYSIS	23
4.7 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA OF QUALITY MEASUREMENTS	24
4.7.1 Credibility	24
4.7.2 Transferability	25
4.7.3 Dependability	25
4.7.4 Confirmability	25
5. PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL	26
5.1 THEMES RELATED TO RQ1	26
5.1.1 Theme 1 : Acceptance has increased	27
5.1.3 Theme 3: Price aspect	29
5.2 THEMES RELATED TO RQ2	30
5.2.1 The hygiene aspect is dominant	30
5.2.2 Physical store rather than online	31
5.2.3 Quality aspect is dominant	32

6. DISCUSSION	33
6.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 1	34
6.1.1 “Acceptance has increased”, “Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting” and “price aspect”	34
6.2 OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 2	36
6.2.1 “The hygiene aspect is dominant”, “Physical store rather than online” and “Quality aspect is dominant”	36
6.3 CONCEPT OF CONSUMER AGENCY	38
6.4 IMPLICATIONS	38
7. CONCLUSION	39
7.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS	41
APPENDIX	43
Appendix 1 Interview guide and questions	43
LIST OF REFERENCES	44

1. INTRODUCTION

“The most important thing is that the garment continues to maintain a certain quality. I buy an activewear item for it to fulfill a certain function, so that is why it is important. Otherwise, I find it sometimes difficult to buy second-hand clothes that are close to your body and due to that, it is very important that the clothes feel fresh and washed and do not smell bad or anything.” - excerpt from interview with respondent (2022).

The fashion industry has gone through several major changes which have been made possible due to new innovations and technological development (Jin & Shin 2021; Brydges 2021). According to Duarte, Sanches and Dedini (2018), the industry has been permeated by four significant revolutions which have moved the industry from traditional handcraft production towards mainly industrial, automated manufacturing. The earlier revolutions, where the first one started in the mid-eighteenth century, revolved around the introduction of new sources of energy and mechanical inventions while the latter ones, during mid-twentieth century, revolved around the transformation from analogue to digital technology (Duarte, Sanches & Dedini 2018). All parts have played a key role in the development of the industry and have laid the foundation of the mass production model and productivity in general (Anguelov 2016; Bertola & Teunissen 2018; Jin & Shin 2021). In the mid-twentieth century, the emergence and use of computer-aided design and manufacturing systems, as part of the digital transformation, enhanced the flexibility and pace of production (Bertola & Teunissen 2018; Jin & Shin 2021). In line with increased globalization, new markets emerged and the industry became further worldwide which has transformed the fashion industry immensely (Bertola & Teunissen 2018; Fraser & van der Ven 2022). The digital transformation has opened up for new business models and has enabled a faster paced fashion cycle unlike the traditional ones (Bertola & Teunissen 2018). The shorter fashion cycle facilitates fashion brands to be flexible to meet customers’ changing needs (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin 2020). For instance, the recent years’ increasing popularity of athleisure wear, defined as comfortable, leisurely activewear worn in non-athletic settings, can be seen as a key trend in the fashion industry offered in several different brand segments (Black & Freeman 2021; Chi et al. 2021). In today's fashion industry, consumer demand is accelerating and the time to react to emerging trends is shrinking, which in turn affects apparel fashion cycles as well as forecasts and plans for major fashion retailers (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin 2020).

The fashion industry has been scrutinized increasingly on a global scale for its supply chain practices that harm the environment (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Despite the widely reported negative effects, the industry is expanding, in part because of the emergence of fast fashion, which is based on low-cost production, promoting frequent consumption and short-lived garment use (Niinimäki et al. 2020; Fraser & van der Ven 2022). The fast fashion-phenomenon is based on a business model that is driven by encouraging constant change and creating an illusion of newness in terms of frequently new upcoming trends

(Farahani, Asgari & Van Wassenhove 2022; Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin 2020). According to Koszewska (2018), the textile and clothing sector has relied on a linear production and consumption paradigm for a long time. A linear business model is built on the transformation of raw resources into completed goods that are then discarded by consumers after only a few uses (Mishra, Jain & Malhotra 2021).

As a sector generating major turnover and employment, the consequences of this current business model and way of consumption are unsustainable (D'Adamo, Lupi, Morone & Settembre Blundo 2022). Consumers in wealthier nations buy more clothing than they actually need as global apparel consumption rises (Sajjad et al. 2021; Zhou et al. 2021). The fashion industry has been criticized in recent years for being the second-most polluting business in the world, therefore the circular economy has gotten more attention lately (Murray, Skene & Haynes 2017; de Aguiar Hugo, de Nadae & da Silva Lima 2021). A circular economy is not based on the "take-make-dispose" model of manufacturing as the structure of a linear economy, but rather a closed-loop economy that recycles waste and reduces resource use to reduce pollution (de Aguiar Hugo, de Nadae & da Silva Lima 2021). The entire process from production to consumption of a garment is followed by severe impacts on the environment, such as energy consumption, soil, water, and atmospheric systems (Kim, Jung & Lee 2021). In order to tackle the problems of pollution and climate change, a circular economy model has gained attention as a way to lessen industrial environmental harm while also generating revenue through repair and reuse (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). Unlike the linear economy, the circular economy emphasizes the necessity of utilizing products' end-of-life rather than allowing them to wind up in landfills (Brydges 2021). Established business structures and consumer preferences adjust because of greater attention to the urgent need for more sustainable development.

As an effect of growing consumer awareness, there has been a consumption pattern shift in recent years, toward a greater interest in second-hand consumption (Evans, Grimmer & Grimmer 2022). In addition to growing awareness, several other aspects have influenced the shift, including social media platforms which have increased reachability and simplified the second-hand sales process (Slaton & Pookulangara 2022). Furthermore, the increased discussion around the benefits of purchasing second-hand items, such as the financial, environmental and hedonic aspects, have been discussed as contributors to the consumer shifts as well (Machado, Almeida, Bollick & Bragagnolo 2019). It is argued that particularly the consumer group of Millennials (consumers born between 1981 and 1997), are valuing green and ethical products and are said to be the most sustainable generation to date (Gerard 2019; Kim, Jung & Lee 2021). Research has shown that different generations leave different types of ecological footprints. The Millennials (born between 1981 and 1997) express an environmental awareness that sets them apart from previous generations. Due to an occurring skepticism towards overproduction and overconsumption in today's society, consumers seek satisfaction by reducing unnecessary consumption (Lee, Jung & Lee 2021). In contrast to fast fashion, which is still anticipated to rise by 20% over the next ten years, second-hand fashion is anticipated to increase by 185% (Park & Martinez 2020). Consumers are increasingly choosing used retail locations and online marketplaces offering pre-owned items (Evans,

Grimmer & Grimmer 2022). According to Park & Martinez (2020), the growing interest in second-hand consumption is a powerful force that is reshaping the fashion industry. The increasing second-hand market is a great enabler for changing consumption patterns toward more sustainable development (D'Adamo, Lupi, Morone & SettembreBlundo 2022).

The pre-owned fashion market is being embraced by retailers and consumers where the pre-owned clothes sector sales have increased 21 times faster than the overall retail garment market in just the last three years (Pham et al. 2021). The online second-hand market is expected to increase from \$7 billion in 2019 to \$36 billion in 2024 on a global scale (Evans, Grimmer & Grimmer 2022). As the stigma and obstacles to buying second-hand lessen, there are an increasing number of independently owned, fashion-forward second-hand retailers (Evans, Grimmer & Grimmer 2022). Additionally, the knowledge and importance of buying second-hand clothes in order to decrease environmental and social harm are increasing among consumers nowadays, especially among young consumers. (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). Considering the greater awareness regarding second-hand clothes as the far most environmentally friendly consumption, a lot of people have begun to shop at second-hand stores more frequently (Papadopoulou, Papasolomou & Thrassou 2022). Additionally, scholarly research on second-hand purchasing, consumer motivations and consumer perceptions has increased recently and mainly after the Covid-19 pandemic (Tao et al. 2022). Consumers have grown accustomed to ongoing fashion changes and to the availability of new products, which is largely made possible by "fast fashion" (Stanescu 2021). A way to address the issues caused by the fashion cycle, in general, is to buy used clothing (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). By avoiding traditional fashion outlets, consumers can cut back on part of the waste that the fashion industry produces (Stanescu 2021).

Sustainability is highly valued in Sweden, where recycling and second-hand store buying are almost standard habits (Pham et al. 2021). Besides clothing, according to Svensk Handel (2021), the most popular categories for the Swedish second-hand consumer are furniture and home electronics. Unlike clothes, second-hand furniture and home electronics are considered to have a relatively high resale value. According to Svensk Handel (2021), a relatively high portion of second-hand clothing consumers are motivated by sustainability concerns, when compared to other categories of second-hand goods such as furniture, electronics and more. In addition to the benefits of lower costs and getting vintage items at a discount, second-hand shopping enables to cut down on waste, carbon emissions, and resource consumption (Pham et al. 2021). Online shops, social media platforms, and consumer-to-consumer marketplaces like Tradera and Blocket are just a few of the alternatives available to consumers to purchase and sell pre-owned clothing in Sweden (Pham et al. 2021). According to Divante (2022), these new online second-hand channels are probably going to continue to expand at the expense of conventional offline second-hand marketplaces. The take-back of one's own merchandise is also a new trend (Stål & Corvellec 2019). Players in the fashion sector and industry are starting to gather and resell their own previously sold goods where this movement opens up new opportunities for extended business models (Stål & Corvellec 2019).

Younger customers who are between 18-22 and are mainly workers or university students are mostly responsible for the second-hand clothing market's expansion (Smith 2022). As previously mentioned, Millennials are said to be the most sustainable generation to date where second-hand is an increasingly popular trend (Gerard 2019). It is regarded as a less expensive and more environmentally friendly alternative, both of which are issues that are particularly important to younger customers (Statista 2022; Sorensen and Johnson J. 2019). The relatively affordable pricing of used clothing made clothing that would otherwise be out of reach, at hand and the market for used personal luxury goods has increased as a result of this (Smith 2022).

1.1 PROBLEM DISCUSSION

Despite increased awareness about the negative consequences of the fashion industry and the benefits of second-hand clothing, according to Naturvårdsverket (n.d), in 2019 each Swedish person still consumed 13.7 kilos of new clothes and home textiles.

Consumption of new clothes continues, and sportswear is one of the garment industry's fastest-growing subsectors, according to 440 Industries (2022). Before, athletes were the main sportswear consumers, but a recent analysis found that market revenue has increased over time by more than doubling (440 Industries 2022). The sudden rise is the result of activewear becoming more widely worn as casual clothing by the general population and no longer being restricted to workout-related situations solely (Statista Research Department 2022; 440 Industries 2022). As a result, the activewear industry has shifted and has turned into a fashionable item, being both comfortable and fashionable, which has made the sector explode in the last years (440 Industries 2022; Yip 2020). Activewear and athleisure wear (henceforth, the term activewear will be used for this study) have subtle distinctions while being used interchangeably (Kim & Oh 2022). Anything you would put on when you want to work out is considered activewear (Kim & Oh 2022). According to Yip (2020), activewear in fashion is defined as clothing, including footwear, worn for sport or other physical activity.

According to Research and Markets (2022), the worldwide activewear industry will reach \$380 billion in 2022 because of consumers' increased desire for athleisure garments. Due to younger people's growing health consciousness and interest in exercise and wellness activities, the market for activewear is expanding quickly (Research & Markets 2022). More consumers are demanding activewear clothing that varies in color, texture, and style to fit their needs and interests as the market becomes more diversified (Yip 2020). Activewear has become a part of everyday life which has made the market boom, but also has a diversity of items available (440 Industries 2022). Activewear has rather become a lifestyle which made it the favorite wear for people living in Sweden (Statista Research Department 2022).

As previously mentioned, the textile industry is said to be one of the most polluting sectors nowadays (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). During the production of activewear, multiple mixed materials are being generated which in turn is difficult to be recycled, affecting the environment negatively. The below figure is showing a forecast of the activewear segment:

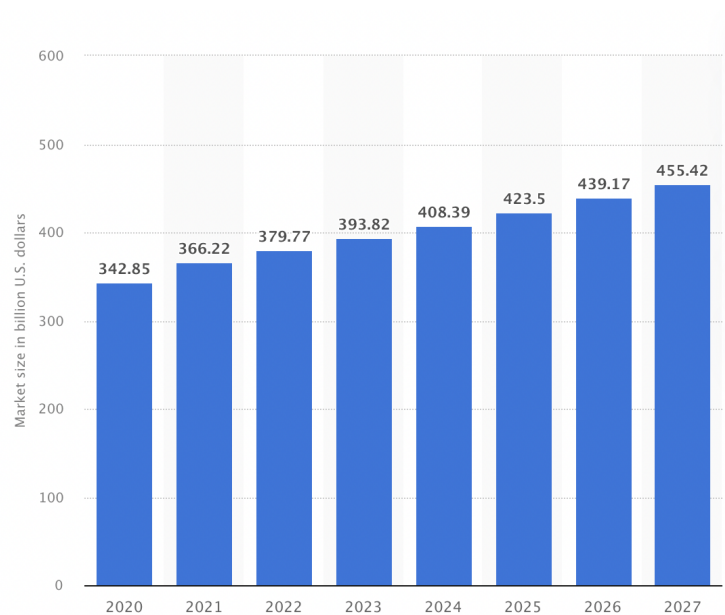


Figure.1 Size of the activewear market worldwide from 2020 to 2027 (Statista 2022)

Drawing attention to the issues related to the production of new activewear in combination with the increased interest of this product segment, the opportunity to offer activewear second-hand has gained greater attention to increase the lifespan of the product (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). However, it is shown that some barriers are related to the consumption of second-hand activewear specifically, where the quality aspect, health problems and taboo are prominent (Sajjad et al. 2021). Consumers who regularly purchase used items are more aware of getting higher quality and durability and become enthusiastic when discovering something unique (Geegamage, Ranaweera & U Halwatura 2021).

The consumer in Sweden focuses on inclusivity and sustainability, ongoing technology innovation, and new business models which are driving a significant transition in the fashion sector nowadays (Syrén et al. 2021). Due to Sweden's exceptional circumstances in terms of sustainable innovation, entrepreneurship, and creative height, Swedish fashion has a great chance to become a global leader (Syrén et al. 2021). Second-hand garments are becoming increasingly fashionable, especially among Swedish young consumers (CBI market 2021). Research on second-hand purchasing has revealed a variety of characteristics, including fashion interest and environmental concerns (CBI market 2021). Given this, it has not been investigated as a motivating factor for purchasing second-hand clothing (CBI market 2021). The recovery and sale of worn items that were used by consumers but are still in decent shape to be utilized by others is known as secondhand or pre-owned clothes (Kim, Jung & Lee 2021). It is a method that encourages consumers to be more responsible and conscious of the environmental effects that the textile business has on the environment, and it is one of the basic tenets of this recycling concept (Kim, Jung & Lee 2021). Second-hand clothing has

become the solution to the numerous effects that are derived from the textile industry, this is because of the economic crisis that has been raised in recent years in addition to the effort applied by the media and environmental organizations that rail against hyper-consumption and waste (Kim, Jung & Lee 2021).

By drawing attention to this, it is debatable if Swedish consumers' habits reflect a dissonance between their environmentally conscious mindset and the consumption behavior of second-hand activewear. On the one hand, the awareness of the benefits of second-hand consumption increases, but at the same time, activewear as a product group gains popularity, whose demand has increased significantly in recent years. This situation lays the foundation for the selected topics for the current study. Previous studies have been conducted regarding consumer perception towards second-hand clothes in general, however, limitation has been identified regarding studies investigating consumer perception towards pre-owned activewear specifically. Therefore, with this study, the aim is to shed more light on consumer perception towards second-hand activewear.

1.2 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study's purpose is to understand and investigate the perception of young consumers, living in Sweden, towards second-hand activewear and to indicate characteristics that may have an influencing effect on the perception. Consumer perception is defined as the way people view and experience products and services where previous experiences and expectations are vital parts of the evaluation process (Kim, Jung & Lee 2021; Baek & Kim 2022). In this sense, consumer perception towards second-hand activewear will be studied whereby the following two research questions will work as guidance during the research process:

RQ1: How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?

RQ2: How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and do it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?

1.3 DELIMITATIONS

For studying the consumer perception towards pre-used activewear, a qualitative research method through interviews was selected. The respondents were selected based on their age (fit into the range of Millennials) and on their interest in second-hand in general. A qualitative approach was considered beneficial in order to understand the characteristics that influence the perception of consumers towards purchasing second-hand clothes. The study will be centered on the resources available in the Gothenburg and Stockholm areas. This will account for the participants who have been chosen. The focus has been solely on second-hand clothing and, more specifically, used activewear because it has garnered less attention in the literature.

1.4 OUTLINE

The outline of the study will be structured as the following; As a first step, a literature review will be presented including previous studies and end up with an explanation of the identified research gap. This will be followed by the theoretical framework presenting theories concerning concepts that are central to this research and which shall support the research in the analysis of the empirical data. As the next step, the chapter on methodology will be described in detail including an explanation of the research strategy and data collection method. This in turn will be followed by a presentation, analysis and discussion of the results gathered by in-depth interviews. In the discussion chapter, the findings will be discussed together with the study's theoretical framework. As a final step, the study is concluded with the most important findings together with a discussion of future research proposals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter will present an overview of previous research in accordance with the purpose and research questions of this study. The aim of this chapter is to identify and present the research gap which will lay the foundation for this current study.

2.1 SECOND-HAND CONSUMPTION

Previous literature has addressed the topic of second-hand clothing from different perspectives where one perspective has been regarding the shift in consumer consumption (Loos 2022). Second-hand products have traditionally been perceived as inferior in quality and condition, and mainly people with less disposable income have targeted second-hand consumption (Loos 2022). However, over the last few years, the perception of second-hand items has slowly changed (Borusiak et al. 2020). Consuming second-hand items nowadays has frequently been thought of as a strategy to leave a positive ecological imprint (Gilquin 2021). It has been demonstrated that second-hand consumption is gaining extraordinary pace and the market has been rising gradually over the past few years (Gilquin 2021). Previous literature studies have shown that consumers nowadays are becoming more aware of their role and taking greater responsibility for their lifestyles (Daiane 2022). In many cases, lifestyle is known as a pattern of consumption that reflects a person's decisions about how they spend their time and money, but it also refers to the attitudes and beliefs associated with these behavioral patterns (Daiane 2022).

In addition to the consumer perspective of second-hand consumption, previous literature has also addressed the topic from a business perspective, investigating second-hand and rental services as part of new business models (Loos 2022). It has become a field of interest as a result of the criticism towards the fashion industry and the field of sustainable business models has gained attention due to its potential for competitive advantage (Gyde & McNeill 2021). The field of sustainability practices and second-hand consumption has received a lot of focus within research and is increasingly more embedded into the broader context of business practices within the fashion industry (Gyde & McNeill 2021). Several previous studies have discussed the concept of circular economy as a movement from the linear model (Machado et al. 2019)

2.2 PREFERENCES OF MILLENNIALS

Previous research has drawn attention to the consumer group of Millennials, concerning consumers born between 1981 and 1997 (Gerard 2019). Previous studies have emphasized the unique characteristics and preferences of this generation in order to understand what distinguishes this group of consumers (Gerard 2019). According to a survey made by Pew Research Center (2021), Millennials have a high level of engagement concerning climate change. It is argued that Millennials are growing more aware of the items they purchase and the social and environmental consequences of their decisions (Sorensen & Jorgensen 2019).

The industry considers millennials to be one of the most powerful consumer groups due to their high degree of purchasing power (Fu & Liang 2019). This shows that their social and ecological consciousness had a favorable influence on their decision to buy eco-friendly clothing and their willingness to pay more for it (Bhargavi, Megha and Kiran 2021). The consumer group of Millennials also values eco-friendly products in an effort to protect the environment and a sustainable lifestyle is often desirable (Fu & Liang 2019).

2.3 BARRIERS/CHARACTERISTICS OF PRE-USED ACTIVEWEAR

The activewear industry is undergoing a big transformation as a result of the popularity of activewear as everyday clothes (Bertola & Teunissen 2018). According to recent studies, activewear is one of the few clothing sectors in the fashion business that is increasing rather than decreasing in sales (Yip 2020). Rather than being on different extremities of the fashion spectrum, active and activewear apparel have become more closely tied to high-end products in recent years (Yip & Lando 2020). Not only are manufacturers catching on and creating trendier activewear styles in general, but they are also cooperating with high-end labels to underscore the importance of high-end fashion and activewear coming together (Bertola & Teunissen 2018). For example, popular activewear brands such as Puma and Adidas are focusing on activewear and clothes primarily meant for customers searching for workout wear, but at the same time have expanded their production to include more trendy clothing that can be worn daily (Yip 2020). Although buying used activewear has been increasingly common recently, many people still don't accept the idea of buying pre-used activewear that has already been worn (Gil 2022). Adidas has worked a lot with second-hand materials as part of their garments meaning that consumers can buy products that are new but made from recycled materials such as polyester (Herzogenaaurach 2020). In terms of sustainability, Adidas has reached a crucial turning point year 2020, more than half of the polyester used in Adidas goods is made from recycled plastic waste (Herzogenaaurach 2020).

Along with those who believe second-hand shopping of activewear is useful, many others reject it for a variety of reasons (Lang & Zhang 2019). There are several barriers to second-hand buying where some people believe that used activewear is of poor quality, that it might cause health problems, and that it is a taboo in society (Sajjad et al. 2021). Some customers are dissatisfied with their shopping experience because there is no standard size for everything and shopping at a second-hand store is inconvenient (Lang & Zhang 2019). Some consumers prefer new activewear rather than second-hand since they have never shopped and experienced second-hand before (Bauck 2021). Some consumers believe that pre-used activewear clothes may have been tainted during their previous use and hence have low expectations for them (Bauck 2021).

The barriers that consumers might face while purchasing second-hand are increasing (Hur 2020). The ones associated with pre-used activewear will be the topic of this study work. To begin with, more individuals are prepared to buy used activewear, but the difficulty is that they don't always find what they're looking for in second-hand retailers (Hur 2020). For

example, they might not be able to find the right size, the desired product, or a specific feature like color or shape. Thus, it could be said that the variety of activewear products in second-hand stores is limited, which makes consumers resort to buying new ones (Hur 2020). In addition, when thinking about the quality of new products and their lifespan compared to used activewear, several consumers will prefer buying new ones in order to have better quality and longer lifespan activewear products (Koay, Cheah & Lom 2022). Furthermore, it was mentioned that in addition to poor quality, the hygiene aspect plays an important role in customers' decisions when buying second-hand garments (Koay, Cheah & Lom 2022). Surprisingly, it was mentioned also that consumers have no problem spending money and paying more if provided with sports clothing of good quality (Gil 2022). Thus, it is a positive indicator because their perception may be changed towards second-hand clothes if they were provided with high-quality pre-used garments (Premalatha, Venkatarvi, & Sangeetha 2018).

On the other hand, consumer awareness of the importance of buying used clothes to reduce environmental, social, and economic effects is growing (Seo & Kim 2019). Many people are also attempting to buy garments from second-hand stores rather than new ones and many consumers are donating their unwanted clothes to second-hand stores and charities rather than ending up in landfills (A sustainable closet 2021). It was mentioned that consumers tend to buy used activewear considering that it is made from mixed materials which are difficult to be recycled and if it ends up in landfills it will negatively affect the environment (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). According to Seo & Kim (2019), consumers of second-hand clothes are "very economically-oriented bargain seekers," making this a crucial factor in the decision to buy second-hand clothes. In addition to that, the brand image is significant since it can offer the buyer the assurance, they need to make a wise purchase choice (Silva et al. 2021). The second-hand market may offer the chance to purchase clothing from well-known brands at a discount or even rare items that appreciate in value over time (Silva et al. 2021).

2.4 INFLUENCE OF ACTIVEWEAR BARRIERS/CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMER CHOICE AND PERCEPTION

Customers are becoming more environmentally sensitive, and they fundamentally dictate the production trend (440 Industries 2022). Some websites allow visitors to search for products based on their environmental credentials (A sustainable closet 2021). Non-toxic colors, recycled polyester, and other materials such as organic cotton are used by some activewear manufacturers, Reebok, for example, promotes its environmentally friendly products (ISPO Munich 2022).

In the past, the idea of consumer perception and value was used to examine consumer decision-making at various stages (Premalatha, Venkatarvi & Sangeetha 2018). Consumers will value the product based on a variety of internal and external considerations, as well as what they are willing to have (Baier, Rausch & Wagner 2020). Some previous studies showed that consumers' perceptions towards pre-used activewear are influenced by the barriers and by prior second-hand purchase experience (Silva et al. 2021). In addition to that, consumer perception is being influenced and customers are being strongly motivated by environmental

concerns (Silva et al. 2021). Additionally, it was shown that the experience is a moderating influence in consumers' perception regarding purchasing pre-used activewear (Baier, Rausch & Wagner 2020). Customers who are less experienced seem to view the purchase of second-hand apparel significantly more negatively (Borusiak et al. 2020). A substantial body of research has also revealed that when customers gain experience with second-hand purchases, their acceptability of it rises (Baier, Rausch & Wagner 2020). Social factors have an impact on consumer perception (Styvén & Mariani 2020). The discomfort and stigma of being connected with people of lesser socioeconomic power are frequently voiced consumer worries (Styvén & Mariani 2020). As a result, many report concerns about the impression they give to their peers and anxiety about being judged when obtaining second-hand garments (Borusiak et al. 2020).

2.5 CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS SECOND-HAND

In recent years, second-hand shopping has become more popular as a sustainable purchasing strategy (Ögel 2022). Consumers believe that by purchasing second-hand items, they may promote sustainability cost-effectively rather than spending a fortune on eco-friendly, green products (Ögel 2022). Thus, second-hand purchasing is now increasing for a variety of reasons, including ethical consumerism, a desire to live in a green and sustainable environment, and financial insecurity (Sajjad et al. 2021).

Financial motivations, recreational motivations, fashion motivations, critical motivations, such as avoiding traditional channels, ethical consumerism, and being environmentally friendly by preferring the concept of recycling in addition to ideological motivations are all examples of second-hand shopping motivations (Sajjad et al. 2021). Some people find enjoyment by recreating new outfits and garments with second-hand items, while others seek happiness through recreation by developing a personal and unique style that is distinct from the popular (Baier, Rausch & Wagner 2020). Other people enjoy second-hand shopping since it is like a treasure hunt for them, as they must choose the best item for themselves from a plethora of options (Silva et al. 2021). Fashion is an essential motivator in second-hand buying since individuals, particularly young people, are more inclined to it, making it trendy and thereby no longer stigmatized (Ögel 2022). Second-hand buying is becoming increasingly popular as more people become aware of environmental issues (Styvén & Mariani 2020). The use of digital platforms like apps and websites is encouraging more consumer participation in second-hand trades (Pedro, David & Begoña 2022). Using online apps or websites to buy or rent products has significantly increased during the past few years (Pedro, David & Begoña 2022). As a result of much research, it is mentioned that the key characteristics of second-hand purchasing are the environment and non-wastefulness, cost, uniqueness and style, fashion and trendiness (Baier, Rausch & Wagner 2020).

2.6 RESEARCH GAP

Second-hand consumption is a current trend that has been rising in popularity in Western society in recent decades, and it is also considered a sustainable fashion practice (Gazzola et al. 2020). Consumers do not translate environmental awareness motives into their general behavior or their second-hand clothing consumption, according to previous studies (Paço et al. 2020). At the same time, Western society's consumers have been labeled as environmentally sensitive (Valor, Ronda & Abril 2022). Their purchases of green product categories, on the other hand, are mostly motivated by their own health and needs (Silva et al. 2021). In terms of second-hand clothes consumption, it has not been determined whether environmental consciousness is the main factor that affects consumers' perception of second-hand clothing (Paço et al. 2020).

There is still a scarcity of studies on the garment sector in the literature (Sajjad et al. 2021). Most of the studies and research done previously have focused on customer behavior toward second-hand clothes and what are the factors that influence this purchasing behavior (Sajjad et al. 2021). These studies and the literature lack a thorough grasp of the characteristics that influence buyers' opinions and perceptions towards second-hand clothing purchasing (Brice & Thorpe 2021). More precisely, there hasn't been much scholarly discussion of the effects of second-hand activewear characteristics and barriers on consumer perception (Brice and Thorpe 2021). Thus, future studies should pursue the investigation of studying the perception of customers purchasing pre-used activewear since the consumption of it is rapidly increasing.

Several previous research also studied the visual qualities of repurposed and recycled fashion items, as well as the overarching notions of sustainable fashion. As a result, the new research and studies should enhance the academic and practical understanding by analyzing consumers' perceptions of circular fashion in greater depth. Thus, the goal of this study will be to investigate consumers' perceptions of circular fashion and mainly second-hand activewear clothes and indicate the characteristics that influence consumers to consume pre-used clothes, mainly activewear.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following chapter, the framework for analyzing and interpreting data is presented. The chapter will describe and discuss consumer perception which is the core of the study. Furthermore, the Cognitive dissonance theory, Self-perception theory, Consumer theory, and Concept of the human agency will be presented and discussed.

3.1 CONSUMER PERCEPTION

Consumer perception can be explained as an opinion obtained by consumers based on direct and indirect engagement with the product (Samea & Rashed 2021). According to Baek and Kim (2022), consumer perception is critical for increasing customer loyalty and retention, as well as brand recognition and reputation. Thus, consumer perception is explained as “*the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensations into a meaningful whole*” (Hanna et. al 2013, cited in Emilien, Weitkunat & Lüdicke 2017, p. 577). It is also said that perception is highly subjective depending on an individual's frame of reference (Baek & Kim 2022). As part of an individual's frame of reference is previous experiences and expectations, which will lay the foundation for the evaluation process of a product (Baek & Kim 2022). It is not only possible that different individuals perceive the same stimuli differently, but an individual can also perceive a given object or surrounding differently at different times or in different situations (Samea & Rashed 2021). The concepts of *exposure*, *attention*, and *sensation* are the three concepts that are closely related to perception and are a part of the whole perception process (Chen et al. 2022).



(Figure.2 Consumer perception process (author's own development)

In the process of perception, *exposure* is the first step where an individual is exposed to a particular object or environment and consequently experiences some kind of reaction (Chen et al. 2022). The contact with a certain surrounding can either happen by accident or deliberately (Kevin, Rowland & Peter 2020). However, not all or even most of the stimuli to which consumers are exposed are noticed when they come into touch with external incentives (Chen et al. 2022). Followed by the state of exposure comes *attention*, meaning the allocation of mental capacity to a stimulus or task (Emilien, Weitkunat & Lüdicke 2017). Consumers may pay attention to a specific aspect of the stimulus that is within their range of exposure after deciding whether or not to expose themselves to a message (Neumann, Martinez & Martinez 2021). People use their attention which is the allocation of a person's mental capacity to a stimulus from a particular activity (Emilien, Weitkunat & Lüdicke 2017). According to the Theory of planned behavior (TPB), an individual's behavioral intentions are shaped by three fundamental factors: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral

control (Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt 2020). In terms of the relationship between consumer perception and behavior, it is said that consumer buying behavior can be significantly affected by the perceptions consumers have of a product (Al-Mamary & Alraja 2022). With the model below, the decision-making of consumers can be analyzed.

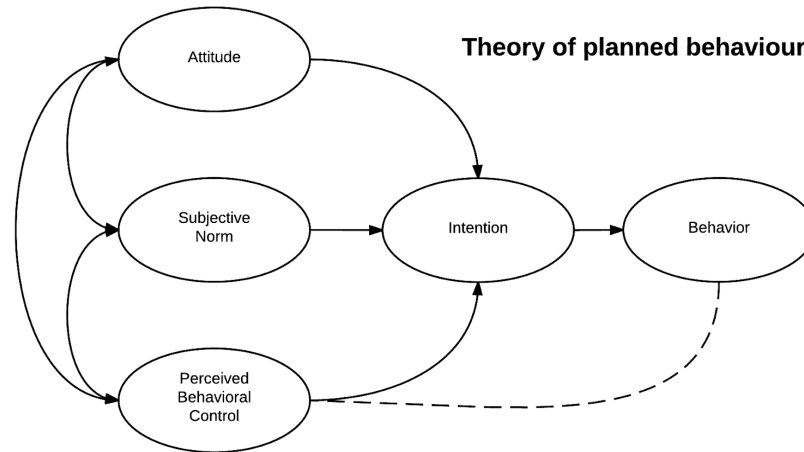


Figure.3 Theory of planned behavior (Al-Mamary & Alraja 2022)

Sensation, as the final step in the process of perception, is when an individual's sensory receptors are sending signals to the brain (Emilien, Weitkunat & Lüdicke 2017). The responses of consumers' sensory receptors (eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and touch) to external stimuli, as well as the transmission of that information to the brain via the neurological system, are referred to as sensations (Chen et al. 2022). This step in the information processing process represents the acquisition of raw sensory information obtained through the sense organs (Kevin, Rowland & Peter 2020).

3.2 ERRORS IN CONSUMER PERCEPTION

A crucial part that affects and influences consumer perceptions is their experience with a service or a product (Perrotta 2019). This covers everything from the quality of a product to the value that they feel that they get from the product or service (Perrotta 2019). Perception error is the inability to judge a product fairly and in an accurate way because of several reasons such as a previous bad experience or negative feedback from a known person (Aakko & Niinimäki 2022). Consumers start perceiving a product and they start having impressions which sometimes leads to perceptual errors (Pretner, et al. 2021). It was mentioned previously that perception is the process of examining and comprehending a stimulus in its natural state (Chen et al. 2022). The ability to detect the stimuli as they are, however, might not always be possible (Pretner et al. 2021). Consumers might misinterpret the stimuli and perceive it incorrectly whether they are aware of it or not (Aakko & Niinimäki 2022). Errors in perception can frequently be attributed to preconceptions inside the consumer, the time of perception, an unfavorable background, a lack of stimulus clarity, confusion, and other causes (Aakko & Niinimäki 2022).

3.3 COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

Consumer expectations, attitudes toward products, and internal reasoning when making a purchasing decision all fall under the category of cognitive dissonance theory (Vaidis & Bran 2019). According to cognitive dissonance theory, when a person's action conflicts with his or her opinions and beliefs, an underlying psychological tension results (Vaidis & Bran 2019). An individual is thus motivated to adjust their perception in order to achieve consistency between their beliefs and behaviors as a result of this underlying tension (Harmon-Jones & Mills 2019).

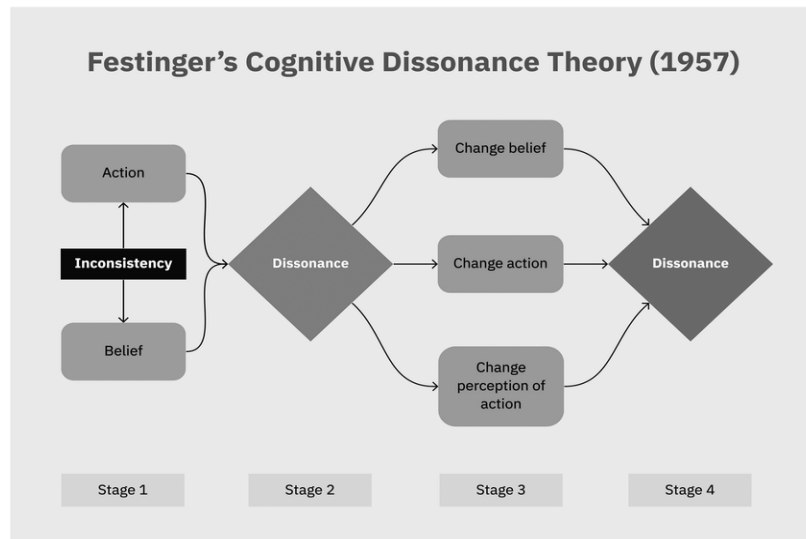


Fig.4 Cognitive dissonance model (Cairns, Elaine & Bereziat 2021)

3.3.1 How Cognitive dissonance theory is applied in this study

The cognitive dissonance model is used to explain through the data collected via semi-structured interviews the decision-making of consumers and the factors influencing their perception towards used activewear. The cognitive dissonance theory was used in our research paper in order to analyze consumer perception and consumers acting based on it. Below is a quote from one of the study's participants Mehmed:

“On the economic side you can really save money, so it is a good combination. For clothing you can find good brands such as Adidas at a cheap price and sometimes people just let it and you can buy it then for a really good price.”

This can indicate that the price aspect could be a factor that influences consumer perception to buy used activewear and affect consumers purchasing decisions. Thus, it can be said that cognitive dissonance theory can be a predictor of consumer purchasing behavior through indicating factors influencing their perceptions to buy used activewear such as price.

3.4 SELF-PERCEPTION THEORY

Self-perception theory states that people decide their preferences and attitudes by evaluating their own actions, and it is how a person considers himself as a consumer (Mohebi & Bailey 2020). This is vital for a business to consider in the world of marketing since it enables them to see how their image, product, and service may change customer perception (Mohebi & Bailey 2020). According to the self-perception theory, consumers develop their attitudes and opinions towards a product by analyzing their own behavior and generating conclusions (Olsson et al. 2020).

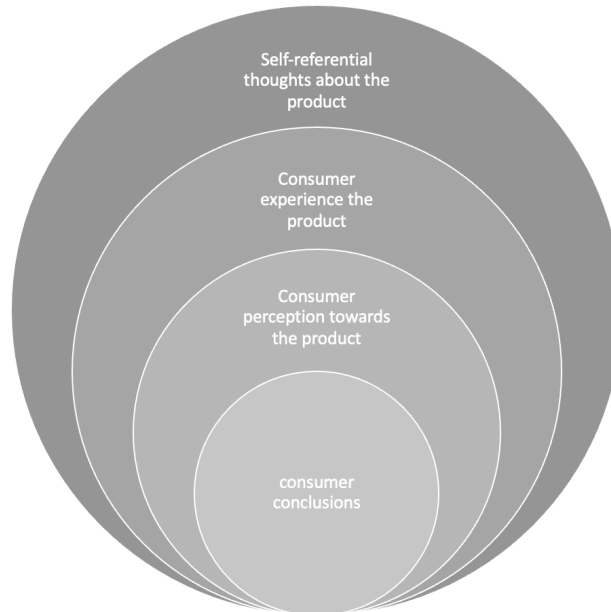


Fig.5 Self-perception model (the authors' own development)

3.4.1 How Self-perception theory is applied in this study

Consumer perception determines how a consumer experiences a product, whether they continue to purchase it and whether they possibly recommend the product to others (Yu & Lee 2019). In other words, how consumers perceive a product according to previous purchasing experience (Olsson et al. 2020).

By conducting the study's interviews, with the aim of understanding how consumers perceive second-hand activewear, and how opinions are created towards it will be studied. Below is an example from the interview with one of the participants Caroline:

“As my knowledge about how the fashion industry pollutes the world in many ways, both socially and environmentally, I consider second-hand shopping as an alternative when I shop.” This shows how a second-hand consumer perceives used activewear and what is the reason behind purchasing second-hand items.

3.5 CONSUMER THEORY AND CONCEPT OF HUMAN AGENCY

Consumer theory examines how people make financial decisions based on their own needs and available budgets (Tanrikulu 2021). In order to better comprehend consumer perception and decision-making processes, it is essential to understand people's preferences and means of sustenance (Liberto 2022). Consumer theory makes three different types of assumptions: transitivity, non-satiation, and completeness (Williams & Lombardo 2022).

First, *Completeness* presupposes that consumers are equipped with all the knowledge necessary to decide on a product and their own preferences intelligently (Bielawska & Grebosz-Krawczyk 2021). Second, *Transitivity* assumes that if purchasing action A occurs, purchasing action B will follow (Williams & Lombardo 2022). Third, non-satiation explains that even when the consumer has a certain amount of something, he may still demand more product options (Liberto 2022).

In terms of the human agency concept, it reflects a perspective that places the self above all others (Cannon & Rucker 2022). Consumer agency is based on the idea that individuals possess the ability to make their own decisions and are responsible for their actions (Code 2020). Thus, the power of consumers to manage and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior through the effect of already-existing products, services, etc. is described as the agency idea in terms of consumer perception (Code 2020). In this way, it can be said that agency is interconnected with perception; consumer actions can be considered a consequence of acquiring information through seeing and assessing items for sale. In particular, the concept of agency helps make the subject of the power of decision-making in a purchasing situation.

3.5.1 How Consumer theory is applied in this study

Consumer theory looks at customers' spending restrictions and personal preferences to try and anticipate how they will spend their money. This theory will be applied in this research paper to comprehend and identify the factors that influence people's perceptions and decisions to buy second-hand activewear. For example, participant three Sarah mentioned:

“My overall opinion of second-hand stores is good. Sometimes one can find what is needed easily, in good quality, and at a good price. On the other hand, sometimes you find what you want but not the size or color you are searching for.”

This can highlight that the price and quality are factors that affect consumer perception and gradually the purchasing behavior of second-hand activewear.

4. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter presents the study's procedure in a comprehensive manner, including the research strategy and method, data collecting technique and participants, interview guide and pilot test, ethical considerations, data analysis, and assessment criteria.

4.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHOD

A qualitative research strategy with inductive reasoning was utilized for the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research area and to answer the research questions. As additional data was gathered, conclusions shifted and evolved, and because it proceeds from detailed interviews about individual occurrences to bigger generalizations, for this research inductive reasoning was employed. A deductive process aims to use and test an existing theory, meanwhile, the goal of an inductive process is to establish a new theory as an outcome of the study (Ruane 2016, p. 35). A researcher following a qualitative method aims to study beliefs, values, or views expressed by individuals, tied to a specific context, as opposed to quantitative methods which aim to generalize their findings to a greater population (Hall 2020, p. 56). Qualitative research aims to provide an understanding of the real-world contexts in which people act (Hall 2020, p. 59). The context embedded in this research is young consumers, who are experienced in second-hand consumption in general and view it as a natural part of their everyday life.

In regard to the purpose of this thesis, a qualitative methodology is better suited to find in-depth answers to the research questions. In contrast to quantitative techniques, participants in qualitative research have the chance to express their views more elaborately and, in more detail, due to the degree of flexibility inherent in qualitative research (Haven & Grootel 2019). The qualitative structure is therefore suitable due to its flexible approach, as it allows participants to not be constrained to closed-ended questions, as the study strives for an open reflection on the research area (Haven & Grootel 2019). The inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, in which the preceding is inferred from the conclusion, is one of the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research, according to Bryman (2012), who also claims that qualitative research is more concerned with words than with data. Inductive reasoning was applied as a strategy to accomplish the study's objective by examining consumer perception with assistance from pre-existing hypotheses.

Exploratory research usually concerns research questions that haven't been thoroughly investigated before (George 2022). It often occurs within qualitative research due to its open-ended and flexible nature, and it's also known as interpretive research or a grounded theory method (Haven & Grootel 2019). Since limitations were found in previous studies, an exploratory research process was carried out for the current study. An exploratory research method can assist in connecting ideas in order to comprehend the foundations of the study without introducing any prior thoughts or preconceptions (Bryman 2012). Research designs,

such as cross-sectional study and longitudinal study enables the collection of a larger amount of data from a wide range of people and tend to be more suited for quantitative research (Hall 2020, p. 65). In a cross-sectional study, a type of observational research, the researcher simultaneously assesses the study participants' exposures and outcomes (Su et al. 2019). Researchers gather information on a variety of factors in longitudinal studies, which track the same subjects across time (Su et al. 2019). Using a case study approach, researchers can gain a comprehensive grasp of a complex problem from many angles (Bryman 2012). Based on a comparison of the above methods, the most suitable research method for the current study was to conduct in-depth interviews due to the structure of the research questions.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), primary data is data collected by the researcher himself, meanwhile, secondary data is data collected from already existing data collected by other researchers. For this study, primary data has been used exclusively and collected through interviews. According to Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020), in qualitative research, interviews are one of the most frequent methodologies, with unstructured and semi-structured interviews being the two most common varieties. In an unstructured interview, the form is even more flexible than in a semi-structured one, where the direction of the content largely is placed on the person being interviewed, unlike in a semi-structured interview, where the questions and content are somewhat more controlled by the person interviewing (Bryman 2012). However, for the semi-structured interview, flexibility is still an important factor, but the semi-structured interview is suitable when there is somewhat a more specific topic that is determined to be reflected upon during the interview (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger 2020). A total of eight semi-structured interviews were carried out where some of them were conducted face-to-face with the participants and some were conducted digitally through Zoom. The interviews were conducted with both of us present. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews mostly consist of open-ended questions consisting of themes that the researcher intends to cover during the interview (Bryman 2012). Although the interview focuses on essential subjects, there is also the opportunity to go through some specific areas of interest in further depth (Aspers & Corte 2019). Additionally, the method of the semi-structured interview was chosen as it allows for a degree of comparability among the questioned individuals and because both researchers conducted the interviews, it ensures that the interviewing style is comparable (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger 2020).

4.3 THE SELECTED PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

Selecting participants based on their characteristics in relation to the research question(s) is called purposive sampling (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019). The study's eight participants were selected via personal networks by the researchers in combination with certain predetermined criteria. All participants were chosen due to their great interest in second-hand consumption in general. To achieve variety, both men and women were selected for different occupations. As previously mentioned by Gerard (2019) and Kim et al. (2021), particularly the consumer group of Millennials (consumers born between 1981 and 1997), are valuing green and ethical

products and are said to be the most sustainable generation to date. Due to this, the Millennials were motivated as an interesting group to study and the participants were born within this age range. In addition, the study's participants included young consumers living in Sweden and were therefore limited to consumers in Sweden only. As stated previously by Pham, et al. (2021), sustainability is highly valued in Sweden, and this was also motivating for studying consumers living in Sweden. In addition to the participants being young consumers living in Sweden, the participants also live in bigger cities, such as Göteborg and Stockholm, meaning urban areas. Since the results are limited to younger consumers living in urban areas, it could be possible that the results do not correspond to other areas in Sweden. For instance, young consumers living in Swedish rural areas, might not be exposed to the same extent of fashion, stores and product range. Furthermore, it could also be possible that the results do not correspond to other cultures/countries, where sustainability might not be a current topic by young consumers and might not be as debated to the same degree as in Sweden. Some of the study's participants are Lebanese but born and raised in Sweden, so they are used to the idea of sustainability. In Lebanon, sustainability is not highly valued by all people and mainly young consumers prefer buying new items rather than used ones.

Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) claim that it is difficult to say when enough sample size is reached but it is often restricted to time and cost. As previously mentioned, eight interviews were conducted in total for this study. After four-six interviews, some patterns and similarities were visible among the interviewees, but in order to get further data collected, some additional interviews were conducted. The below table (table 2) presents an overview of all eight respondents being a part of the study:

Name	Occupation	w Sex and Age	Country
Jenny	Accounts Payable	Female/30 years old	Sweden
Lisa	Interior architect	Female/30 years old	Sweden
Sebastian	Master student in Fashion Marketing	Male/29 years old	Sweden
Caroline	Master student in Fashion Marketing	Female/36 years old	Sweden
Mehmed	Master data specialist	Male/28 years old	Lebanese living in Sweden
Sarah	Accountant	Female/21 years old	Lebanese living in Sweden
Yasmina	Sales Manager	Female/28 years old	Sweden
Fanny	Interior architect	Female/28 years old	Sweden

Table.1 The Participants of the study

4.4 STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEW GUIDE AND PILOT TEST

To provide a foundation and structure for conducting the interviews, an interview guide was created (see interview guide in Appendix). The structure of the interview guide was based on the theoretical framework with a focus on consumer perception and second-hand consumption. According to Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour (2014), a pilot study is a way to pretest the instrument used for a study to adjust potential errors before the actual use. Due to that, a pilot study was conducted to try out the suitability and the flow of the stated interview questions. In preparation for an extensive study, a pilot study is defined as a small study to test research methods, data collection tools, sample recruitment strategies, and other research methodologies (Anesthesiol 2017). It is a crucial stage in any research process since it allows researchers to detect potential issue areas.

4.4.1 Steps in Conducting the Pilot Study

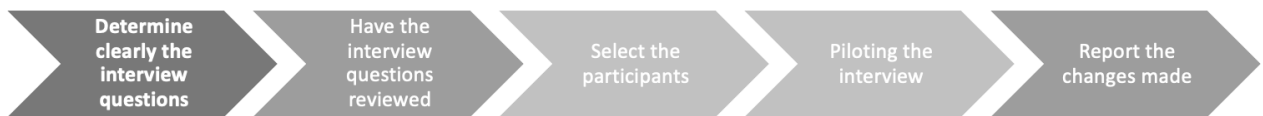


Figure.6 Steps in conducting the pilot study (the authors' own model)

- Open-ended questions about consumer perception, second-hand clothes, and mainly pre-used activewear consumption were asked. Initially, the interview structure was based on Bryman's work (2012). Essentially, the researcher was concerned with ensuring that the interview questions were designed to address and answer the research questions. This method can improve the effectiveness of interview questions and ensure that they are relevant to the study's goal.
- Following that, researchers assessed the interview questions for language, wording, and relevance. After the initial reviews, the questions were tested in the pilot work, and the researcher utilized probing inquiries to investigate the participants' points of view that needed to be clarified.
- Regarding the participants' selection, they were chosen based on their willingness to participate and purposive sampling. Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour (2014) proposes that in pilot interviews, the participants should have as many characteristics in common as possible with the set of participants for the main study. Accordingly, participants who had experience and interest in second-hand consumption were chosen.
- The pilot study's purpose was to see if the interview questions were appropriate for the research paper and a way to gain feedback on the research's potential. In addition,

it gave the researcher practice in conducting semi-structured interviews and establishing rapport with the informants. The researcher also gained a better understanding of interviewing procedures and conversation flow because of the pilot study. Building a good connection with the participants, according to Bryman (2012), may encourage improved responses. Therefore, before the interview, the interviewer engaged in social discussion with participants, and then in the interview, participants were asked the same questions, and researchers made sure they were comfortable while answering them.

- After the pilot study was completed, some adjustments were made. Some of the questions were edited, and some new ones were added. For example, questions were divided into two groups, introduction questions that indicate the age, education and describe the lifestyle of participants. The other group is follow-up questions that will indicate and describe the overall opinion of participants regarding second-hand clothes, mainly activewear, their purchasing experience, and other questions that highlight factors influencing their perception. As a result, ten open-ended questions were included in the major study in order to comprehend the participants' lived experiences.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When conducting an interview in qualitative research, it is crucial to take potential ethical concerns into account because the interpretation of the data and the results are more individualized (UK Statistics Authority 2022). Human participants must be protected in all research investigations by following appropriate ethical guidelines which are said to have a specific resonance in qualitative research due to the in-depth nature of the study method (Arifin 2018). According to Bryman (2012), anonymity is an area of ethical concern to consider due to the risk of emotional or professional harm. People participating in the interviews should feel comfortable sharing personal information with researchers and, most importantly, researchers must uphold their privacy (Hasan et al. 2021). For this study, before starting the interviews, it was assured that the interviewees were willing to participate. The interviewer obtained the interviewee's full assent and stressed that the research was undertaken solely for academic objectives, guaranteeing that all participants' privacy was protected. Participants were okay with showing their first names in table 2 and being mentioned when an example is given from the material gathered. All information and data gathered are treated with caution and are solely used for this project's academic purposes. It is carefully avoided providing false information or presenting primary data findings in a biased manner (Saunders & Rajon 2012). We considered the confidentiality and privacy risks associated with the data used, both with regard to the participant data gathered and the methods used to de-identify or anonymize it, as well as potential effects on the participants when results are disseminated. This research paper is based on the English language and because of this, the researcher asked the participant before starting the interview if it is possible to do it in English and the university ID was shown to them to make sure that the researchers are university students.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Following the conclusion of the interviews, a data analysis of the written transcripts was carried out. The interviews were also taped and later converted into text in order to guarantee a positive presence during the interview. It was also advantageous to record the interviews so that one could review them at a later time. For the analysis of qualitative data, coding is one of many approaches that can be utilized (Azungah 2018). In order to combine meaning and explanation, material can be sorted, grouped, and relinked using coding (Williams & Moser 2019). To facilitate the coding process, we chose to highlight the transcribed material with different colors that would symbolize the different themes we could identify. Thematic analysis was also used which is a technique for assessing qualitative data that involves looking through it to adjust themes (Bryman 2012). The coding and thematic analysis resulted in themes that we could distinguish from the material, and they were stated as the following:

Themes related to RQ1: Acceptance has increased, Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting, and Price aspect.

Themes related to RQ2: The hygiene aspect is dominant, Physical store rather than online, and Quality aspect is dominant.

A following step once the coding process was conducted, was to work with the theoretical framework and to investigate how it supports our empirical material. The data were analyzed and discussed through the lens of the theories presented in the theoretical framework.

In this research paper, we focus on identifying, defining, and describing the coding and thematic analysis techniques that were used, the function of each step, the iterative review process connected within the coding cycle, and the change from codes to themes in order to extract meaning from the data. The following steps were conducted:

1. We first selected an inductive coding method.
- 2 - After that, we started to examine the information gathered from the interviews to get a sense of how it appeared.
3. Line by line, we went over the collected data and coded as much as possible.
- 4- Finally, we sort the codes into categories and determine how they fit within the coding framework.

Thus, it is said that coding is "how a researcher defines the data examined and what the data examined is about" in qualitative research (Williams & Moser 2019). Coding is the process of locating a passage in a written document or other data items (such as a photograph or image), searching for, and recognizing concepts and themes, and then determining how those concepts and themes relate to one another (Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019).

4.7 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA OF QUALITY MEASUREMENTS

Qualitative research is sometimes criticized for being influenced by subjectivity and thus the assessment standards are presented in the following chapter. To ensure the study's quality, the data gathered must be evaluated from a critical standpoint (Yadav 2021). Measurement of the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are common criteria used to assess the quality of qualitative research findings (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). Below is a presentation of the concepts that will be discussed in a more detailed way:

Elements of Trustworthiness	Another elements of Trustworthiness in Quantitative Research	Characteristics
Credibility	Internal Validity	The degree to which a research report is credible and accepted, with a focus on participant and researcher agreement.
Transferability	External Validity or (Generalizability)	Generalizability and External validity are two alternative synonyms for transferability. The ability of a research study's findings to be applied to numerous locations, circumstances, times, and populations is established by showing readers that the findings can be applied to various locations, circumstances, times, and populations.
Dependability	Reliability	Participants' assessments of the study's findings, interpretations, and suggestions, all of which are backed up by the data received from participants.
Confirmability	Objectivity	The degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed and established by other researchers.

Table.2 Assessment Criteria (the authors' own model)

4.7.1 Credibility

Credibility relates to the data's confidence in the information provided in the research report, with a focus on participants and research agreement (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). Internal validity refers to how well a study paper establishes a consistent cause-and-effect relationship between a treatment and a result (Bryman 2012). Internal validity also refers to a study's ability to rule out alternative reasons for a given outcome (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). Techniques for ensuring credibility in qualitative research is either by triangulation or by respondent validation (Yadav 2021). When selecting the technique of triangulation, more than one data-collecting method is used to create a more in-depth understanding of a research problem (Yadav 2021). Considering the time limitation for this thesis period, the choice has been based on one selected data collection method, i.e., semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the level of credibility is not established by triangulation. However, to demonstrate the veracity of the research study's conclusions, the level of credibility is established by explicitly tying the interview findings to reality. Instead

of the technique of triangulation, the technique of member-checking has been applied which is the second significant strategy used in qualitative research to ensure credibility. This is an approach in which the data, analyses, and conclusions are made available to the participants. It allows participants to clarify their intentions, correct errors, and provide additional information as needed.

4.7.2 Transferability

According to Bryman (2012), transferability which can be referred to also as external validity or generalizability can be aided by working with 'thick description,' which provides the reader with a wealth of information about the phenomena being studied. Other researchers can then assess whether the findings can be used in different circumstances, times, locations etc. For this research, the seek for a 'thick description,' has tried to be provided to strengthen the level of transferability. This was done through the following steps: first, an interpretation of the interview results was done. Second, during the interview, researchers were trying to capture participants' thoughts and emotions by carefully asking follow-up questions. Third, before beginning the interviews with the participants, researchers assigned motivations and intentions and informed them of the research goal. Finally, researchers attempted to be as transparent as possible with participants to eliminate flaws and complaints, as well as researcher bias.

However, the data has been based on a small size of sample which will lower the level of generalizability for this study's findings. To strengthen the generalizability, a quantitative study might have been valuable but considering the purpose of the study, a quantitative study was decided not to be suitable.

4.7.3 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research can be defined as the consistency of data throughout time and across conditions (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). Dependability and reliability can be contrasted in quantitative investigations (Yadav 2021). It refers to research methods and how effectively they are documented so that they may be examined, audited, and critiqued by someone outside the study (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). For this research and the criteria of dependability, the time limitation has also been an obstacle. Although an external audit was not possible, the reliability of the research process was ensured through a well-documented research methodology. Furthermore, because people who actively acquire second-hand activewear participated in the data collection procedure, the level of reliability may be assured because identical results are likely to be produced when the same participants are interviewed.

4.7.4 Confirmability

The confirmability of the trustworthiness criterion may be the simplest to establish, as it mainly requires describing the study's conclusions (Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett 2020). This certainty may help readers better understand how the ideas came to be based on the data, which is valuable information. According to Bryman (2012, p. 435), total objectivity is impossible in social research, however, a strive for objectivity must be developed and a way is to guarantee that *“the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith”*. In this research, in order to ensure confirmability, the researcher has documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study.

5. PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The following chapter will present the empirical material collected from the conducted interviews. The material will be presented in the form of key themes which have emerged from the process of coding. The themes will be presented and supported with quotes from the interviews in order to present the material in an optimal way.

In order for the reader to be clear about the relevance of the collected empirical material, a reminder of the study's purpose and research questions will be presented first.

The empirical material has been collected to serve the purpose of the study: to investigate the perception of young consumers, living in Sweden, towards second-hand activewear and to identify characteristics that may have an influencing effect on the perception. The empirical material has been collected in order to answer the study's two research questions: (1) *How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?* (2) *How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and does it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?*

5.1. THEMES RELATED TO RQ1

In order to present the material in a structured way, the research questions will be addressed one at a time and presented with the themes identified in response to the question. The result of the first research question is as the following:

<i>RQ1: How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?</i>	Theme 1	Acceptance has increased
	Theme 2	Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting
	Theme 3	Price aspect

Table.3 Result presented as identified themes for research question 1 (author's own development)

5.1.1 Theme 1: Acceptance has increased

It was expressed that there has been, and still is to some degree, a resistance to consuming activewear second-hand garments in relation to what it is to consume other types of second-hand garments. As many of the participants expressed, second-hand activewear garments are often associated with garments worn close to the body and worn during workout sessions. According to the participants, this association is more present with second-hand activewear than with other second-hand garments that you do not wear that close to the body. However, several of the participants mentioned that the acceptance of second-hand activewear has increased, which several of the participants expressed is due to increased knowledge about the need to lessen the consumption of newly produced clothes. Many of the participants expressed that their perception and, as a consequence, purchasing decisions had changed after they had gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of the textile industry and the harm it can cause. Several of the participants said they had gained this knowledge during their university studies, studying fields related to the textile industry, logistics and engineering. However, several of the participants mentioned that, even before they started studying, they understood the consequences of the consumption of new clothes, but that this became even more apparent after the studies.

Among the participants, there was a common view that there is a need for more sustainable consumption, and when purchasing garments, they take into consideration the environmental effects and base their purchasing on it. The knowledge and awareness were mainly gained through education or through work. Below follows examples of expressions regarding that the acceptance has increased:

“My first interaction with second-hand shopping began in 2010, when I was volunteering for the Red Cross. Before that, I believe second-hands is more like “not my thing”, second-hand clothes are disgusting but after that I saw the potential in it and also as my knowledge about how the fashion industry polluting the world in many ways, both socially and environmentally, I consider second-hand shopping as an alternative when I shop.” - Caroline

“My interest in second-hand purchasing first began when I was studying my master’s degree in logistics at university of Gothenburg, I knew how the clothing industry is negatively affecting the environment.” - Mehmed

“I was a person that loved fashion and clothes. I didn’t like to wear the same garments for a long time, so I used to buy new ones and give the old ones to either people I know or donate them for charities such as second-hand stores. Once I started to study at the University of Borås Textile Technology and Engineering, I started to realize the importance of sustainability.” - Yasmina

“After finishing university and gaining the knowledge about the effect of materials that sportswear is made of I changed my purchasing behavior.” - Sebastian

In addition to that, the acceptance of the idea of buying pre-used activewear was also based on purchasing experiences of participants. It was mentioned that a great experience improves consumer perceptions of second-hand activewear, and that customer experience shapes positive consumer perceptions. Below, three examples are given from the empirical material:

So maybe if more people experience second-hand purchasing and recommend it to others, this will also help to build a positive perception of second-hand clothes and other stuff. - Sarah

“I didn’t imagine myself wearing or buying something that was used before by someone else. But now after having the experience, it’s okay with me.” Yasmina

“Whenever one gains a good experience with second-hand purchasing, he will stick to it.” - Mehmed

The above quotes are showing that second-hand consumption is sensitive and strongly influenced by the overall experience. As the experience of second-hand consumption has become more positive, it has in turn led to an increased acceptance and willingness to shop more second-hand.

5.1.2 Theme 2: Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting

Several of the participants mentioned that the unorganized sorting of used garments affected their perception of second-hand activewear negatively. Among the participants, there was a common view that some of the physical second-hand stores are failing in sorting products which consequently affects the perception of the items. When asked about what could be changed regarding the experience of purchasing activewear in physical second-hand stores, several participants responded that a more structured sorting and organization would affect the perception positively. In online stores, it is perceived as more organized regarding size and type of garment. For example, if size S is sold out for a certain product, it will be clear in the online stores compared with the physical where the sizes are more widely spread. As expressed by several of the participants:

“I think they need to be more organized. For example, if they have a huge variation in clothes, they should not put them all together with other types of clothes. When it comes to type, size ... for example when I’m looking for a pair of sportive pants it should be the old ones together separated from better quality ones, and arranged by sizes in incremental order, colors act. It makes it easy for the shopper to have a better experience with second-hand stores because whenever one gains a good experience, he will stick to it” - Mehmed

“I think they should put more commitment into better sorting in order to better create a more attractive range.” - Fanny

“Physical second-hand stores need to be more organized and cleaner. They can separate the garments according to the type, for example, sportswear together, jeans together, shirts together.” “This will make it easier for the customer to find what he wants easily.” - Sarah

This explains and shows that better-sorted and organized items will attract customers and build a positive perception of second-hand activewear. In addition, this will also build a positive experience which will encourage more people to purchase second-hand activewear by being recommended by others who previously experienced it.

5.1.3 Theme 3: Price aspect

Among the respondents, there was a clear agreement regarding the benefits of price reduction that comes with buying activewear second-hand when asked the question why they buy activewear second-hand. It was clear that many of the participants saw the price as an important factor and that their purchasing behavior was affected by that. One of the common factors that influence their perception and affect their purchasing decisions that was mentioned, is the price of pre-used activewear. Consumers can find high-quality activewear products from famous brands such as Adidas and Nike at lower prices compared to new ones. For example, a new Nike sports shoe costs 600 SEK and if that type of shoe could be found in a second-hand store, in great condition, the consumer would be able to find it for half of the price. To highlight this point, several examples from respondents' answers were expressed as the following:

“And the surprise was that I found the same shoes I bought a few months ago from Adidas, not used so much like a new one, at a very good price compared to the new one.” - Yasmina

“The price matters for me, if compared to new products, second-hand stuff is much better in price.” - Caroline

I would say that the price aspect does a lot since new activewear garments are very expensive compared to used activewear garments. - Jenny

Participants generally agreed that purchasing used activewear is more affordable than purchasing new ones, although this also depends on the condition of the garment and its hygienic qualities. Pre-used activewear items that were owned by previous consumers and were used only once or twice can cost a lot, but they will still be less in price compared to a brand-new item. For example, a new Adidas sports shoe costs 500 SEK, consumers can find it in second-hand stores in a good condition for 300-350 SEK.

5.2 THEMES RELATED TO RQ2

As stated previously, in order to present the material in a structured way, the research questions will be addressed one at a time and presented with the themes identified in response to the question. The result of the second research question is as the following:

RQ2: How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and do it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?	Theme 1	The hygiene aspect is dominant
	Theme 2	Physical store rather than online
	Theme 3	Quality aspect is dominant

Table.4 Result presented as identified themes for research question 2 (author's own development)

5.2.1 The hygiene aspect is dominant

The majority of the respondents were mentioning the hygiene aspect as a dominant part when it comes to second-hand activewear. When asked how they perceive second-hand activewear compared to other types of second-hand garments, several participants expressed that hygiene aspects are particularly present for this type of product group compared to other second-hand garments. This was expressed as the following by one of the respondents:

“This is very interesting because I actually think the area of activewear is similar to underwear. I have one thing that I do not buy second-hand, which is underwear. I do buy activewear second-hand but compared to other types of clothes I buy second-hand, I am pickier when I select and buy activewear. When I buy second-hand activewear, it is very important for me to really see that it is not “used”, I mean less used at least. This is very different from when I buy a knitted sweater, for example. If the knitted sweater is made of cotton, since I’m picky with what type of materials I buy, but if the sweater is fifty years old it does not matter if it is still in a good condition. When it comes to activewear, it is more sensitive that someone else has used the garment before and might have been sweating.” - Fanny

Consequently, some of the participants expressed that knowing that someone has worn the garment close to the body and has potentially been sweating while using it, has an impact on the perception of second-hand activewear. Several participants associate those types of clothes with the hygiene aspect which, for example, was expressed as the following:

“I have a more positive outlook of second-hand now than I had before but I'm not a hundred percent sure I like the idea that someone has been sweating in the clothes. Sometimes when you walk in second-hand stores, maybe it's a little smelly so my opinion has become more positive but I still have some issues with how they handle the clothes. If they find a way to take care of the clothes, maybe wash them, maybe the industry will grow more.” Caroline

It was also mentioned by several participants that some activewear products are easier to buy than others. For example, not all types of activewear are easy to buy used before such as sports tops and items that are worn close to the body. This is related to the hygiene aspect, knowing that someone has worn the garment close to the body and has potentially been sweating while using it, has an impact on the perception of second-hand activewear and the purchasing behavior of the consumers. The following examples are given from the interviews done:

“I have bought some types of activewear over the years. However, since the product group of activewear is broad, I tend to think that some products are easier to buy second-hand than others. I wouldn't buy second-hand sports tops, since you sweat a lot. That kind of thing I wouldn't buy, I think. Maybe some shorts would also be fine, maybe a sweater but not activewear that is close to the body”. - Caroline

“I buy an activewear item for it to fulfill a certain function, so that is why it is important. Otherwise, I found it sometimes difficult to buy second-hand clothes that are close to your body and due to that it is very important that the clothes feel fresh and washed and do not smell bad or anything”. - Sebastian

“It is inevitable that the hygiene aspect has a great impact when it comes to activewear, and I think about it more actively in comparison to when I buy other types of clothing.” “When I look for activewear specifically, hygiene factors are crucial.” - Jenny

The respondents expressed that barriers that might affect their perception for second-hand activewear in connection with the hygiene aspect were mainly focused on the smell, touch, and level of appearance, meaning the condition of an activewear garment.

5.2.2 Physical store rather than online

When the respondents were asked if they prefer to buy second-hand activewear from online stores or physical stores, all agreed that they prefer to visit physical stores for several reasons. There was a common view that this product group, specifically, many times needs to be experienced in reality as more parameters are taken into account than other types of clothing possibly do. Some of the respondents' answers are given as examples below:

“I tend to go to more physical stores when buying second-hand activewear because I want to feel and touch the clothes and see the condition of the garment before I buy it.” - Sebastian

“I actually prefer to visit second-hand stores physically because it is a challenge to buy new clothes from online stores and it's even more challenging to buy used ones.” - Mehmed

“I tend to go to more physical stores when buying second-hand activewear. I never shop second-hand activewear online.” - Caroline

Respondents mentioned that they prefer to see, touch, and experience the product before buying it in order to make sure it has a great condition and has good quality. It was mentioned that it is more difficult to decide an item's quality and condition through online websites such as Tradera, Blocket, and Facebook and especially when it comes to used activewear. A common point the respondents agreed on was that the above-mentioned websites are more suitable for purchasing other items such as furniture and electronics rather than clothes and, specifically, activewear.

“But I prefer to visit second-hand stores physically to see and touch the garments and this is better to see the condition of it because online you can't really recognize the exact condition of an item, mainly clothes.” - Sarah

“I believe that it's better to see and touch the garment before buying it to make sure if it's in a good condition and in a good quality because online websites can show you something and physically it's not the same as pictures.” - Yasmina

5.2.3 Quality aspect is dominant

Another influencing factor affecting the perception towards second-hand activewear that was brought up by the majority of the respondents was the idea of deteriorating quality. There was a recurring theme that activewear specifically is bought mainly for the functional demand of the garment and since the garment is pre-used, there is a consistent perception that the quality of the garment may have been negatively affected. This is exemplified by the following examples from the respondents below:

“If I for example buy jeans second-hand, I am not that dependent on the quality at the same level, I do not judge the garment by a functional aspect, unlike what I do when I evaluate activewear” - Caroline

“It depends on the quality and condition of the garments. If it's in good condition and good quality, I'll buy it, wash it, and then use it.” - Yasmina

“For activewear I think of functional clothes and for this type of product group I want good quality and I believe that there could be a bigger risk, when buying activewear second-hand, for worse quality. I have some beliefs that the activewear garment could be less good in quality since it has already been used. If I buy some activewear pants, they might have been used several times laying on the ground in the forest, which might have deteriorated the quality and this is something that I can think about, specifically when I buy second-hand activewear.” - Sebastian

The interviews also revealed that consumers can buy good quality activewear items and used products (like new) from second-hand stores, thus the quality can be a factor that influences consumers' perception positively and encourage them to buy used activewear. Also, the data gathered have shown an agreement that this perception is more common for the product

group activewear than others. In addition to that, and with connection to theme 1 the hygiene aspect, the respondents expressed that barriers that might affect their perception of second-hand activewear were mainly focused on the smell, touch, and level of appearance, meaning the condition and quality of the garment. There was an agreement among the respondents that specifically the smell and condition (quality level) of the item play an important role in affecting the perception and purchasing decision of buying second-hand activewear.

6. DISCUSSION

In the following chapter, the results of the study will be analyzed and interpreted in relation to the current study's theoretical framework in order to address the research questions. In the theoretical framework, the theory of planned behavior, cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory, and consumer theory were discussed.

This chapter will be based on the theories discussed in chapter 3 (Theoretical framework) in order to analyze the themes generated from the empirical material and to answer the following research questions (1) *How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?* (2) *How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumer's purchasing decisions, and does it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?*

The four theories that make up the theoretical framework are *theory of planned behavior, cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory, and consumer theory*. In order to address the study questions, the data obtained will be analyzed in light of these theories.

6.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 1

<i>RQ1: How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?</i>	Theme 1	Acceptance has increased
	Theme 2	Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting
	Theme 3	Price aspect

6.1.1 “Acceptance has increased”, “Negatively affected by the unorganized sorting” and “price aspect”

As presented in chapter 5, several of the respondents said that their increased acceptance, towards second-hand activewear consumption, was due to the increased knowledge gained from education or other external media channels, informing about the environmental harm caused by garment production. According to Mohebi & Bailey (2020) and the self-perception theory, people decide their preferences and attitudes by evaluating their own actions and thereby, how a person sees themselves as a consumer. Following the self-perception theory, the increased acceptance of second-hand activewear consumption, could be seen as a result of

respondents having more actively evaluated their consumption habits and their image of themselves, as a consequence of knowledge gained from education and media. As many of the respondents expressed, the overall perception towards second-hand consumption has lately been more positive and consequently, the activewear category has also received more attention. The fact that several of the participants believe that the interest in buying activewear second-hand has increased, might be connected to the importance of expressing an image of being a conscious consumer who cares about environmental issues and that you are a consumer acting against it. Additionally, the reason why the acceptance of the idea of purchasing second-hand activewear has increased, can be due to the positive purchasing experiences of consumers in general. A more positive purchasing experience, environmental awareness, and increased knowledge have been shown to be crucial reasons for purchasing second-hand activewear as mentioned and explained previously. As mentioned by several of the respondents, when becoming a more environmentally aware consumer, the perception and acceptance of purchasing activewear from second-hand stores have increased. As stated by the self-perception theory, consumer perception determines how a consumer experiences a product, whether they continue to purchase it and whether they possibly recommend the product to others (Yu & Lee 2019). In other words, how consumers perceive a product according to previous purchasing experience (Olsson, et al. 20220). This explains that when a consumer gains a positive purchasing experience of second-hand activewear, the acceptance will increase, and the perception will be influenced positively.

Several respondents said that their perception of second-hand activewear has been negatively affected by the unorganized sorting in physical second-hand stores. At the same time, the majority of the respondents preferred to visit physical second-hand stores, especially when consuming second-hand activewear. Aakko & Niinimäki (2022) states that perception error is the inability to judge a product fairly and in an accurate way because of several reasons such as a previous bad experience. A possible connection between the negative experience, due to unorganized sorting in physical stores, and the so-called errors in consumer perception can be drawn. As stated previously, consumer perception is explained as “*the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensations into a meaningful whole*” (Hanna et. al 2013, cited in Emilien, Weitkunat & Lüdicke 2017, p. 577). Drawing on this, the unorganized sorting in physical second-hand stores could be seen as a perception error, obstructing the action of creating a meaningful whole. As stated by Baek and Kim (2022), perception is highly subjective depending on an individual's frame of reference, where in turn, the individual's frame of reference is based on previous experiences and expectations. If the obstacle, hereby referred to as perception error, can be eliminated, the overall experience should be able to improve and result in a more positive perception.

As was shown in chapter 5, the “Price aspect” was mentioned by most of the respondents which means that there was a clear agreement regarding the benefits of price reduction that comes with buying activewear second-hand when asked the question why they buy activewear second-hand. According to the *Cognitive dissonance theory*, consumer expectations, attitudes toward products, and internal reasoning when making a purchasing decision all fall under the category of cognitive dissonance theory (Vaidis & Bran 2019). This

can indicate that through the price aspect, the consumer is thus motivated to adjust his/her perception in order to make a purchasing decision for a pre-used activewear item. Buying a pre-used item of good quality and in a good condition at a lower price compared to a new one will motivate the consumer to buy more from second-hand stores and affect their perception towards pre-used activewear positively. According to consumer theory, the purchasing decisions done by consumers are based on financial aspects such as price reduction and savings and based on their personal preferences and financial limitations. Thus, it can be said that the price of second-hand activewear plays an important role in affecting consumer perception and buying decisions.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 2

RQ2: How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers’ purchasing decisions and do it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?	Theme 1	The hygiene aspect is dominant
	Theme 2	Physical store rather than online
	Theme 3	Quality aspect is dominant

6.2.1 “The hygiene aspect is dominant”, “Physical store rather than online” and “Quality aspect is dominant”

Another influencing factor affecting the perception towards second-hand activewear that was brought up by the majority of the respondents was the degree of quality. It was clear that quality plays an important role in purchasing decisions and affects consumer perception either negatively or positively. Consumers can find activewear products of good quality and in a good condition similar to new ones in second-hand stores which will affect their perception and buying decisions positively. At the same time, consumers might not find what they want or what they need in good quality and condition in second-hand stores which will make them rather buy a new one. Also, the data gathered have shown an agreement that this perception is more common for the product group activewear than others such as jeans, dresses or kids wear. In addition to that, and with connection to the hygiene aspect, it is said that barriers that might affect consumer perception of second-hand activewear are mainly focused on the smell, touch, and level of appearance which means quality and condition. There was an agreement among the respondents that specifically the smell and condition (quality level) of the item play an important role in affecting the perception and purchasing

decision of buying second-hand activewear. For example, as expressed by the respondents, not all types of activewear are easy to buy second-hand, such as sports tops and items that are worn close to the body. This is related to the hygiene aspect, knowing that someone has worn the garment close to the body and has potentially been sweating while using it, has an impact on the perception of second-hand activewear and, consequently, the purchasing behavior. This indicates that, even though knowing that the item has been washed, the association is still present, and could for some still affect the perception and the idea of buying pre-used activewear. At the same time, some are content with the knowledge that sweat or fungus which could potentially be health risks associated with used items are typically eliminated by adequate washing and that any bacteria disappear by a proper washing temperature and a proper cleaning. In relation to the TPB (theory of planned behavior), the consumer perception process passes through three steps which are exposure, attention and sensation as mentioned in chapter 3 and that are applied in terms of product quality, condition, and hygiene aspect. In terms of the relationship between consumer perception and behavior, it can be said that consumer purchasing behavior can be significantly affected by perception. Thus, when a pre-used activewear item is perceived as having a high level of quality and great condition in combination with that the hygiene aspect is not becoming an obstacle, it will influence the perception positively and thereby potentially the purchasing behavior.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when participants were asked if they prefer to visit physical or online second-hand stores when buying second-hand activewear, all agreed that physical stores are more beneficial. The main reason was the possibility of “touch” the product and to be able to decide the condition and quality physically before potentially buying it. According to the majority of the participants, this was especially important for the category of second-hand activewear due to the reasons discussed above - hygiene, quality and condition. This indicates that this specific category of second-hand items is potentially more “sensitive” compared to other second-hand items and the perception of this category includes more parameters than it might do for other types of garments. The perception implies more complexity and is more strongly associated with "ownership", meaning that it might be more difficult accepting that other people have owned it previously and foremost, have worn this item close to its body.

Furthermore, there was a common agreement that physical second-hand stores should put more effort into sorting and how the clothes are exposed in the stores. It could be understood that if this is improved and the purchasing barriers of pre-used activewear can be decreased, this could encourage more people to buy second-hand activewear. As understood by the respondents, it is important to see the products before purchasing and the perception of buying activewear second-hand online is often associated with a greater risk. With online shopping, there is a bigger risk that the items are different from what is visible in the pictures online. In relation to the consumer perception process presented in the theoretical framework, this shows that exposure, extension, and sensation are important steps that are affecting the perception of second-hand activewear which are applicable in physical stores rather than online stores.

According to the self-perception theory, consumer perception is influenced by how a consumer experiences a product while purchasing it or after using it. Physical stores allow the consumer to experience the product as a whole and to build their own perception of it. This shows why it is preferable to visit physical stores rather than online ones for this specific product group. It is also said that the returned items from online second-hand stores are more than the returned items from physical ones. It was mentioned by Clark (2020) that 5-10% of physical second-hand purchases are returned by customers, compared to 15-40% of online second-hand purchases. Additionally, because shipping and transportation expenses are not included in physical stores' experiences, consumers who exchange or return items they purchased online pay, maybe both in terms of money but also in the form of risk-taking (since you cannot evaluate the product physically) more than those who do so in physical locations (Clark 2020).

6.3 CONCEPT OF CONSUMER AGENCY

According to Code (2020), the consumer agency is predicated on the notion that people are capable of making their own decisions and are accountable for their actions. Consumers have the ability to direct and regulate their thoughts, motivations, and actions (code 2020). One could argue that agency and perception are related. It is clear from the results that people have the capacity to decide for themselves and are accountable for their actions. However, it is difficult to deny that, as a consumer, you are also impacted by outside forces that, in turn, influence how you see particular goods. As an example, second-hand consumption, in general, has become more of a trend lately and, besides taking "your own decisions", the general acceptance towards second-hand consumption in society, can unconsciously create and steer consumer perception in a certain direction. It is often difficult to determine whether you as an individual yourself, influence and make your own decisions and how much you as an individual are influenced by the world around you.

Previously, second-hand consumption was associated with a certain consumer group, while today, it is considered more of a trend, especially among young people and it is an up-to-date topic discussed, as expressed by many of the participants. The fact that the view on second-hand consumption has changed in general, has possibly affected the perception of multiple consumers.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS

By posing and answering the research questions regarding consumer perception, it has opened a new perspective on how the motivations might be connected. It has also been discovered an interesting aspect that was not present in the theories previously by establishing that perceptions are rooted in personal ideals, knowledge and previous experiences and demonstrating that they remain more or less consistent throughout time. The most important conclusion, however, is that the research allowed us to take the results to a new level by logically connecting the driving characteristics that affect consumer perception and purchasing decisions of second-hand activewear.

The study's findings are relevant for retail, for instance, in order to more effectively promote the sale of used activewear. For retailers offering second-hand products, it could be valuable to gain an understanding of what characteristics influence the purchase decision, especially for second-hand activewear and what could be the barriers. Once an understanding of the barriers is made, the ability to counteract these should be seen as an advantage for creating a better experience for consumers. Since the findings have shown that the perception of second-hand activewear slightly differs from other types of second-hand clothes, in combination with the increased demand for activewear, the findings should be valuable in order to affect consumers' purchasing power.

7. CONCLUSION

The main characteristics that affect how consumers view used activewear have been highlighted in this study, as have the barriers that influence their purchasing choices. In terms of the study's purpose, it was to learn more about how young customers in Sweden perceive pre-used activewear. The selected segment has been the consumer group of millennials living in Sweden who are interested in second-hand consumption in general. Overall, this study has sought to contribute to a broader understanding of the view of second-hand activewear and to study whether that product group differentiates itself from other product groups within second-hand.

To summarize the experiences, expressed by the study's participants, it has been made clear that, speaking from a methodological qualitative viewpoint, there has been a shift in the view of second-hand consumption in recent years. Today, the interest in second-hand is more widespread and instead of almost being seen as taboo for some consumers, second-hand consumption today is seen as a way to be trendy and fashion-conscious. In terms of agency, the concept that emphasizes the individual's free will and ability to make his own decisions, it can be debated whether the appeal towards an increased interest in second-hand is related to that, or how much it is influenced by one's surroundings. Considering that several of the study's participants described that they have been influenced and had "opened their eyes" to second-hand, through education or media, it shows that external factors certainly have an influence, however, it is difficult to say whether and to what extent it controls an individual's actions. As many of the participants expressed, second-hand consumption comes with the feeling of "doing good" which shows that today, consumption is much more than just a purchase, as a consumer, you are making a statement by buying certain types of products. In today's society, a lot of power lies with the consumer, and, for example, shopping second-hand is a way of expressing one's identity. If more consumers could receive a similar upgrade/advanced kind of knowledge, a systemic shift in consumer behavior could be facilitated.

Setting out to understand consumer perception of pre-used activewear, it can be said that people are becoming more and more drawn to buying pre-used activewear and other second-hand products over time. Not only buying but also some people today choose to earn more money for their pre-used activewear products by selling them through various "buy-back" channels, both online and offline. Consumers who are worried about the environment might be more likely to buy used goods as long as it has been meticulously cleaned, washed, and sorted in an organized way. Others can consider buying second-hand a trend or a lifestyle that might be prevalent in society. Thus, the perception of pre-used activewear differs between consumers depending on the gained knowledge, previous purchasing experiences, price, quality, and hygiene aspects.

RQ1: How do Swedish consumers perceive buying activewear second-hand?

First and foremost, the study has been of a qualitative nature and therefore the findings do not refer to all Swedish consumers. As previously mentioned, the segment of Millennials living in Sweden has been the focus of the study and are representatives of the study's findings. In this sense, second-hand activewear has been central and the findings have shown that the perception towards second-hand activewear is mostly positive. A conclusion is that the acceptance has increased, meaning that, if buying an activewear garment was not an option before, it is now, to a greater extent, considered an option. The conclusion drawn is that this correlates with the increased interest in second-hand overall. Furthermore, a great advantage coming with second-hand activewear consumption is the price aspect. Buying new activewear is often associated with high costs. Another conclusion is that many times, the perception differs somewhat depending on how second-hand activewear is perceived. The perception of a sports bra compared to the perception of a sports jacket is often different and might influence decision-making in different ways.

Thus, it can be concluded that a consumer will take into consideration the price of products and compare it to new items' prices then make the purchasing decision. In addition to that, the way the pre-used items are sorted and organized in physical stores plays a role in making a purchasing decision and influences consumer perception.

RQ2: How second-hand barriers/characteristics play a role in consumers' purchasing decisions and do it affect their perception towards pre-used activewear?

The study shows that second-hand activewear has a certain resistance around it, which could be seen as stronger and more present than other product groups available second-hand. Second-hand activewear somewhat has a certain resistance as the question of the hygiene factor is dominant and in turn, increases the level of sensitivity. As previously mentioned, perception has shown to be different depending on which second-hand activewear is evaluated/perceived, and thereby the barriers are also experienced differently. For second-hand activewear garments that are worn close to the body, intimacy plays a big role in terms of barriers affecting perception. As this type of product group is sensitive, the overall experience is often decisive and plays a big role in decision-making.

A conclusion drawn is that, when there is already a certain resistance, it is of great importance that the overall experience, in the form of sorting, organization and interior is of great importance to minimize what is already an obstacle. Additionally, it was clear that the hygiene aspects play an important role in purchasing decisions where the term "hygienic" refers to clothing that has been well washed and is odor- and germ-free which is taken into consideration by consumers when purchasing second-hand items.

In order to highlight the purpose of the study, we can consider it to be fulfilled. By conducting interviews with consumers having a great interest in second-hand, we have been given the opportunity to gain insight into real case experiences. Taking part in people's experiences and getting to share their views, has led us to be able to answer the research questions and to be able to confirm that the results have met our expectations. As we have

sought for an understanding of perception from consumers' point of view, we consider the goal to be achieved since the findings have concerned feelings, opinions, and experiences, all as part of a person's perception. Our study has mainly further supported claims made in previous research but has also added a new interesting view in this field. As claimed in previous research, environmental consciousness, price aspect and the seeking of a unique style are all known motivators for second-hand consumption, most of which have also been claimed in our study. However, an interesting finding is that the seek for uniqueness, which is common in the hunt for second-hand clothes, does not seem to be as prevalent when consuming second-hand activewear. Thus, this type of product, second-hand activewear, is somewhat different, where hygiene, quality and price are of great importance. The result shows that this product group does not seem to be, to the same degree as other types of garments, linked to the search for a unique expression, but the choice to invest in a second-hand activewear garment, might rather fulfill other criteria that are of higher priority for this type.

7.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

A limitation could be seen in the number of interviews made. Additional participants and thus a larger amount of data could have resulted in a more nuanced study. Additionally, considering that the product range of activewear is very broad, the findings might have been on a more general level since the perception obviously also differs between different types of activewear products. The last limitation identified is that, since the majority of the interviewees do not have English as their native language, that could lower the ability to express oneself compared to when speaking one's mother tongue.

As stated previously, the study's findings can not refer to all young consumers living in Sweden. Considering this, suggestions for future research could be to look at other types of segments, for instance, it could have been interesting to study young consumers within other types of educational fields, who have no prior educational knowledge related to the textile field. Also, it could have been interesting to study young consumers who have no university education and see if it could result in any other conclusions. As it has been discovered that Millennials as consumers are environmentally aware and conscious consumers in general, it could have been interesting to study another generation, even younger or older, and see if that might have ended up in some other interesting perspectives. Furthermore, it could also be interesting to make other geographical demarcations, for instance, study younger people living in suburbs rather than urban areas. As a final recommendation, long-term research on how knowledge can improve attitude and how this might influence consumers' perception of second-hand activewear can be advised. This could contribute to making a shift in clothing purchasing and disposal. It is suggested that a larger number of samples be investigated in order to understand what aspects can motivate consumers to buy used activewear and favorably affect their opinion. A quantitative method can be used for long-term studies to test and gather data on a larger scale.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1 Interview guide and questions

INTRODUCING QUESTIONS	Please can you introduce yourself (age, education/profession, leisure time activities, where do you live, origin- big city or small city life).
	How would you describe your lifestyle?
	Please tell us about when your interest in second-hand consumption first began and what made you interested in it? please mention some reasons
FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS	How would you describe your overall opinion of second-hand clothes?
	How do you perceive second-hand activewear compared to other types of second-hand garments?
	If you could change one thing regarding the experience of purchasing activewear second-hand, what would that be?
	What other features would you have liked to experience when purchasing activewear second-hand, what would that be? Is it price, uniqueness in products, environmental values or other?
	What considerations do you have when deciding on buying second-hand activewear?
	Is there any specific second-hand store that you buy from activewear? Why? Do you prefer to buy second-hand activewear from online websites or do you prefer to visit second-hand stores?
	How do you think people who prefer to buy new activewear can be encouraged to buy used ones? What might change their perception toward buying pre-used activewear?

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