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CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS VARIETY OF CHOICE IN FASHION E-TAILING

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ABSTRACT

Online fashion retailing is a burgeoning industry and new theories suggest online retailers could profit from catering to a longer tail of tastes. On the other hand, research shows that too much variety of products can be overwhelming to consumers. Based on this, it is essential for retailers to ask themselves if they should go for "the more, the merrier" or "less is more" when thinking of retail assortment. In order to properly understand the online fashion consumer, other theories such as the social aspect of consumption and the concept of flow were used in sketching the theoretical framework of this thesis. The current study focuses on consumers' perception of variety of choice on e-tailing fashion shops. Although there is sufficient existing research on the advantages and disadvantages of variety in retailing, there is no study on the how variety of choice on fashion online shops is perceived by consumers. Implications for the retailing industry are made at the end of the study.

"... the sale is lost if the customer is given more than three or four choices"

Charles Silberman, "The Revolutionists of Retailing", Fortune, 1962

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1.1. INTRODUCTION

E-commerce is becoming more and more important in the retail landscape. In 2013, statistics show that almost 60% of EU internet users from 16 to 74 years old shop online (Eurostat 2013). The purchasing behaviour varies in different parts of Europe due to both external and internal factors such as maturity of the market, level of trust, availability of offers, penetration of reliable payment options, reliable and affordable delivery, Internet-usage etc. (Ecommerce Europe 2013). The importance of digital commerce is undeniable and according to eMarketer.com, expected to grow further (2014). In an article on Business of Fashion, Deng (2014) states that only 10 per cent of clothing is purchased online and the reason for that is fit. Retailers are coming up with solutions to this hindrance and launching services that make apparel look as realistic as possible, simulating fit in natural conditions – like EBay plans to innovate along with PhiSix Fashion Labs. Kim and Johnson (2009) interviewed major retailers on the future of fashion retail and they predict that "customers would have a body image on file so they could custom order clothing to fit, and apparel websites would have e-fitting rooms and consumers will be able to try on garments electronically" (p. 273).

Along with matters such as convenience and comfort (Chiang and Dholakia, 2003), undeniable in the case of online shopping, Internet has brought about democratization. According to Oxford Dictionaries, one meaning of the word "to democratize" is "to make something accessible to everyone". The online is said to have "shaken up industry sales patterns and, perhaps more important, upended the traditional hierarchy of outlets that can promote music" said one author in The New York Times (Leeds, 2005). In the fashion system nowadays, bloggers are an important part of the press – the same way as established, heavy names at international fashion magazines are (Raye 2012). The power dynamic has changed and there is a huge debate on who holds the legitimacy in the fashion press (Menkes, 2013). On the consumer side, even since the 1970s Baudrillard sensed that individuals are being told "be different, be yourself" (1970), this slogan being deeply ingrained in their minds and influencing their purchasing habits. Addressing mass markets has become not just impossible but in some cases obsolete, especially for Millennials, as companies are finding that pushing consistent, pre-packaged messages through traditional media is not as effective and cost efficient as it once was (Boston Consulting Group, 2014).

As response, retailers consider that greater assortments benefit consumers since each and everyone can find products suited to their preference (Chernev, 2003, p. 170). According to Reibstein et al. (1975) "decision freedom" increases as the number of equally valued alternatives from which to choose increases (p. 434) and retailers want to recreate that environment based on this assumption. The biggest and most successful online retailers cluster a wide range of brands. Nelly, the Borås-based e-tailer gathers as much as 1000 brands and is planning on expanding (Bloomberg, 2014). Anderson (2009) argues that "hits now compete with an infinite number of niche markets, of any size. And consumers are increasingly favouring the one with the most choice". He also states that "after decades of executives refining their skill in creating, picking, and promoting hits, those hits are suddenly not enough" (p. 5). Hits are the products that marketeers would address the mass market with. To Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), mass market is one large group of customers with broadly similar needs and problems, whilst niches represent specific, specialized customers that have requirements to be addressed to with tailored products or services (p. 21). Anderson (2009) says that the audience is shifting to "a muddy and indistinct proliferation of ... Well, we don't have a good term for such non-hits. They're certainly not misses, because most weren't aimed at world domination in the first place. They're "everything else"" (p. 5). The mass market is turning into a mass of niches, one could say.

Undoubtedly, Anderson's concept is designed to point at the variety of choice that consumers are provided with. Consumers are empowered by the possibility they have at hand (Wright et al 2007). "It's not even that they [the consumers] are smarter; they just have everything at their fingertips" said the co-founder of an independent music label in Florida (New York Times 2005). Kucuk and Krishnamurthy (2007) further enforce that the industrial revolution was to manufacturers what the digital revolution is to consumers (p. 47), in a way that consumers have access to greater information, comparative search engines, and their voice is being enhanced in online community discussions. Individuals rely on what is called collaborative filtering, which is the evaluation of information within online communities and discussion boards (idem p. 54). With regard to the long tail, the consumer empowerment is visible even on the distribution level. The consumer holds higher bargaining power because he is able to access more options in the market, both online and offline. Additionally, the Web has made it

difficult for companies to hold consumer attention in digital spaces, but has, on the other hand, increased consumer knowledge of products and services (idem p. 52). This is a source of economic and social power for consumers.

1.2 PROBLEMATIZATION

In 1970 Alvin Toffler, the famous futurologist predicted that: "Ironically, the people of the future may suffer not from an absence of choice, but from a paralyzing surfeit of it. They may turn out to be victims of that peculiarly super-industrial dilemma: overchoice". Yet the very same author identifies the long tail too: "From a single homogenous unit, the mass market has exploded into a series of segmented, fragmented markets, each with its own needs, tastes and way of life" (Toffler, 1970). Fasolo et al. (2007) suggest that

> *"[T]he problem of too much choice is as current as ever in today's shopping environments, especially on the Internet. While real shops have at least a physical limit on the maximum number of products they can display to consumers, online shopping sites have virtually no limit and can easily present thousands of different items"* (p. 14).

One can easily assume that the online shopping environment is different from the offline retail space. The online space allows companies to showcase great assortments since there is no price for shelf space. Niche products have always existed but they were difficult to find (Anderson, 2009, p. 6). Long tail e-tailers nowadays tap into niche markets with their offerings and individuals can find them with the use of search engines and recommendation systems. Still, how the perception of assortment variety influence one's decision of opting for a particular (online) store is not yet defined. The concept of variety of choice is relevant since it can enhance or decrease the value of online consumers' shopping experience.

The assumption that long tail can be profitable is based on the fact that consumers are not only decisive in terms of what they plan to buy but they also orient themselves independently from their peers' influence. But fashion consumption is often a social, collective (even unawarely), the non-hits (or the products that are found deeper in the tail) would probably become rather hits than non-hits as they become popular.

Big, popular fashion online retailers provide thousands, if not millions of product alternatives today. Zara's online shop had an offering of 3583 pieces, only womenswear, as of 15th of May 2015, of which 526 represent only t-shirt and one should not forget that multi-brand retailers offer way more than that. On the same date, H&M went even stronger with an assortment consisted of 4094 pieces on their online shop. The question is, do consumers actually need this?

1.3 Hypotheses

The hypotheses aim at a better understanding of how variety is perceived to consumers.

H1: Consumers are attracted by variety of products on fashion e-stores.
H2: Variety of choice on fashion e-stores is overwhelming.
H3: There is a social influence in the process of product selection on fashion e-stores.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question make it possible for the author to generate a conclusion. Because it is too general, it was split in three sub-questions that have a more focused scope.

*Is great variety of choice benefitting the online fashion consumer
or is it warding him off?*

As previously mentioned, the main question is divided into several more specific research questions that respond to the hypotheses above.

1. *To what extent are consumers attracted by e-stores with
   great variety of products?*

2. *How can great variety of products on e-stores become overwhelming?*

3. *Is there any social influence in the process of product selection when
   shopping online?*

1.5 Expected Outcome

This research is initiated on the premise that the online can grant a great variety of choice and that the online retailers can profit from this since consumers are also seeking it. On one hand, the author will research whether variety is actually what consumers are looking for on fashion e-commerce sites. On the other hand, this research will also reveal if variety is an advantage or a disadvantage and leads to purchase. Lastly, it will show whether the purchase decision was independent or somehow collective. This will help establish if the process is social, and if it is, make retailers ask themselves whether unpopular products, that are to be found further in the tail, are worth investing in.

The niche products are the ones that are further in the tail: they are rare, obscure, the least popular. One could say that choosing an obscure product means that the consumer takes a socially independent decision (He drifts away from mainstream taste; yet he could also be part of a subculture and his choice stays "social" this way), but the online reviews and recommendation system that Anderson (2009) talks about – which he says connect the supply with the demand – does imply a socially-embedded consumption experience.

1.6 PURPOSE

The study will explore consumer attitudes towards variety of choice displayed on long tail fashion retailers' e-commerce platforms. Various consumption attitudes with regard to great volumes of clothing available on online stores and how does variety after the decision-making process will be revealed.

1.7 RELEVANCE

The advent of e-commerce and the democratization of both means of production and distribution, which reduced the costs of gatekeeping to zero, are consequences of the most important technological development of the last decades: the Internet. The Internet has changed the way individuals shop with the advent of e-commerce and retailers need to adapt to this trend. The long tail concept, pioneered by Chris Anderson (2009), is a response to this *new customer* who, instead of leaving his house, has learned that he can find much diverse offerings online and therefore a superiorly informed choice. Industries like entertainment and publishing have been researched through the lens of long tail

economy, yet long tail fashion represents an area that has not been yet enough explored and this might be due to the fact the clothing, as opposed to books or music, cannot be digitalized.

Although there is an established group of academics that have already analyzed, experimented and concluded on the idea of overchoice (Toffler, 1970), the tyranny of choice (The Economist, 2010), or the paradox of choice (Schwartz, 2005), there is no actual research on how variety is being displayed on online fashion shops and whether it can affect decision-making patterns and if it does influence it, in what way. There is no study on variety of choice when it comes to fashion online retailing. It has become relevant for fashion retailers to decide if they should cater to a larger spectrum of customers or stay focused on less assortment. Unlike publishing or the music industry, in which case the products can be digitalized, the inventory space in fashion cannot be reduced to zero, even when having an online shop. Moreover, if variety of choice can lead to the overchoice dilemma, instead of assisting consumers in making choices easier, retailers only overwhelm them and this may be psychologically draining (Mick et al., 2004, p. 207).

In the end, the study will inform online fashion retailers on how to rethink or strengthen assortment volume, be it long tail assortment or not, without overwhelming customers or affecting the perception of variety.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
The literature review for this research is vast and complex, with theories from different fields such as consumer behaviour, pshychology and retailing and theories about online shopping. Older research that was considered valid or at least relevant to the discussion was also added in the literature body.

2.1 THE LONG TAIL
2.1.1. The Long Tail Economy
The next section is mainly based on Anderson's Long Tail Economy. It pictures how a fragmented market or a market of niches has emerged, mostly because of the online world. Market fragmentation is an unavoidable fact and the niches are taking over the standard "hit" model. The discussion of the long tail is specifically relevant in the context of online shopping since the Internet enabled the lengthening the tail of the demand curve.

Lancaster (1990) argues that "demand for variety may arise from a taste for diversity in individual consumption and/or from diversity in tastes even when each consumer choose a single variant", yet the author points out that it is impossible to offer a full degree of variety potentially demanded due to scale economies (p. 189).

> "For long time, our cultures have been shaped by blockbusters and hits, and value has been increasing proportional with popularity", Anderson says (2009);

> "We define our age by our celebrities and mass-market products – they are the connective tissue of our common experience", the author continues.

Hit products are starting to count less. "Most of the top fifty best-selling albums of all time were recorded in the seventies and eighties (the Eagles, Michael Jackson), and none were made after 2000" (Anderson, 2009). What does this say about the way individuals consume? Access to innumerable media channels has made it possible for consumers to make choices rather that consume what is given to them. One has many TV channels, an infinite number of websites or magazines to browse from. The main effect of all this connectivity is unlimited and unfiltered access to culture and content of all sorts (idem, 3). Business wise, expanding the types of products that can be profitably sold by retailers may provide artists and other producers with incentives to create products to serve more varied tastes (Brynjolfsson et al., 2006, p. 70).

Chris Anderson (2009) states that there are three forces driving the long tail economy. Yet this specific economic context is generated by a shift "from a focus on a relatively small number of hits (mainstream products) at the head of the demand curve and moving toward a huge number of niches in the tail. In an era without the constraints of physical shelf space, narrowly targeted goods and services can be as economically attractive as mainstream fare" (p. 52). But he is being realistic in pointing that "Demand must follow this new supply and the long tail but is not meaningful until those niches are populated with people who want them (idem).

2.1.2. The Connection between Supply and Demand

Anderson suggests that in the long tail economy, the connection between supply and demand are the search engines, recommendation systems, blogs and customer reviews. Doherty and Ellis-Chadwick (2010) say that the Internet has enabled this huge accumulation of customer data of which, in the future, retailers will know how to profit from even more. This will allow e-tailers to even better predict consumers' needs and wants (p. 952).

Niche products have always been there, just that they were not visible or easy to find (Anderson, 2009, p. 6). The search engine and consumer reviews are playing this part now. Anderson is confident that consumers can play as the most useful guides and that there is a burgeoning consumer wisdom that sustains itself – through blogs, consumer reviews, communities, forums. Sviokla (2010) states that ratings and popularity drive increases in sales, which in the end, facilitate the choice-making process (Harvard Business Review Blog). It has become easy and fast to look for what one likes and then check for information on that product, The Long Tail author asserts (Anderson, 2009). "IT-enabled tools can enhance the effect of Long Tail markets by allowing consumers actively and passively to discover products that they otherwise would not have considered" Brynjolfsson et al. (2006, p. 71) argue.

2.1.3. The Social Aspect of Consumption

Solomon and Rabolt (2009) assert that consumption is highly dependent on reference groups, especially that their study is focused on fashion consumption. These have relevance upon an individual's evaluation, aspirations or behaviour and the influence may manifest as informational, utilitarian or value-expressive. The authors write an example of how one's choice of regular clothing shall not be very complex and is primarily based on utilitarian evaluation, hence any personal influence is not accountable. While on the contrary, a "fashion item may be high in perceived risk if the item is not well tested by others and, therefore, may be high in susceptibility to influence" (p. 428). Additionally, they say that whether the piece of clothing is a luxury or a necessity also makes a difference, the authors say. Therefore the way consumers regard apparel necessitates a different interpretation of the way they make clothing consumption decisions. Lyst's Founder Chris Morton (in Business of Fashion, 2014) asserts that "the

consumer is now influenced by a radically expanded group of tastemakers, ranging from traditional retailers and magazines to bloggers and friends".

2.1.4. Socialization

In conceptualizing the online shopping experience, Trevinal and Stenger (2014) highlight the importance of the sociability of online shopping. Often enough, consumers chat about, comment, compare the products they consider buying over social media channels. They also share the link of the product and ask for opinions. Thus, the shopping experience becomes a decision contained in a collective process, as the authors frame it (p. 323). Piacentini and Maileras state that clothing can be viewed as a social tool in the lives of young people (as cited in McCormick and Livett 2012). Possibly the most important social tools, that has driven many changes in how consumers make decisions and check information are the recommendation, review and ranking systems. Not only consumer rankings are weighing more in e-tailing, there are also interactivity, fluidity and transparency attached to e-tail consumer communication, as Fernie et al (2014) put it. As an example, Net-a-Porter, the most successful e-tailer of luxury fashion, has introduced a real-time shopping map called Net-a-Porter Live, which enables consumers to see what other women are buying at one moment in time.

Another social aspect of online shopping is the influence of recommendation systems. The decision-making process in an online environment can be dependent on online recommendations (Senecal et al., 2004). Consumers engaging in the search for product recommendations are obviously pursuing a much more extensive external search than consumers who do not consult product recommendations. The latter have a more fluent, linear navigation pattern and they visit fewer pages whilst the former are pursue a more complex process. Once they started consulting recommendations, they would not stop at two websites but check for an average number of ten, as the authors' study reveals. Yet what is interesting is that no difference in the behavioural patterns of the two categories of consumers has been noticed (p. 1605).

2.2.1. The Long Tail Myth

This section exposes Anderson's long tail weaknesses, based on the Harvard author Anita Elberse. This is enlightening on the distinction between light and heavy consumers and also the theory of exposure, which ultimately leads to product popularity, adapted from McPhee.

Anita Elberse (2008), a Harvard Business School academic, is wondering who is actually driving the sales in the tail: "Is it just a small group of fanatics driving the demand for obscure products? Or are large numbers of consumers regularly venturing into the long tail?" she wonders (p. 92). Gauging the size of consumers' appetite and the degree of their satisfaction from having consumed those products in the tail imposes as highly relevant. What Elberse is attempting to gauge is actually the level of what Solomon and Rabolt (2009) call consumer involvement, which is "a person's perceived relevance of an object based on their inherent needs, values and interests" (Zaichkowsky as cited in Solomon and Rabolt, p. 128).

The research conducted by the Elberse (2008) shows consumption patterns that reinforce William McPhee's theory of exposure. The theory suggests a process of natural monopoly, which means that the popular products tend to attract the light users of a category. Since most consumers are marginal consumers – they have little or no implication in the field that they are trying to consume – the monopolization is a natural process (p. 93). McPhee states that "the more obscure a title, the less likely it is to be appreciated" (in Elberse, 2008, p. 93). Therefore, it is not only that they are not known, but even when they get known by a small number of people, these consumers would still prefer to buy the popular products.

2.2.2. The Theory of Exposure
Elberse's research on Quickflix, an Australian online movie streaming platform, consolidated McPhee's concept. The hits tend to monopolize light consumers whereas the heavy users are attracted to a *mix* of hit and obscure products. In other words, a mix of standard and long tail strategies works best in this case. Moreover, "obscure titles, on average, are appreciated less than popular titles as well as chosen less often". Elberse further highlights that even in the case of "enormous assortments found online, even when sophisticated recommendation engines aim to stimulate demand for long-tail products" (p. 92). As seen on one article on The Economist (2010) "It turns out, however, that despite the availability of all the extra stuff the hits are as important as ever, (...) However many niches there are, in other words, film-goers or TV viewers still want to watch what everybody else is watching, and musicians still manage to release mega-hits".

2.2.3. Light versus Heavy Consumers

Elberse has further elaborated on Anderson's theory by researching the same industry, entertainment. Firstly, she asks how the shape of consumption looks like in a context of vast selection and possibilities for an easy search. She noticed that the tail, instead of getting longer and fatter (as Anderson argues), it gets longer and thinner, therefore not profitable. "The tail represents a rapidly increasing number of titles that sell rarely or never". Another trend is that "independent artists have actually lost share among the more popular titles to superstar artists on the major labels. (...) Thus digital channels may be further strengthening the position of a select group of winners". Therefore, who is responsible for the growing volume in the tail? Is it just "a small group of fanatics driving the demand for obscure products?" she asks. Apparently, it is so, as hit-consumers are light customers and obscure product consumers are heavy customers (Elberse, 2008, p. 92).

In the end, there are light consumers that go for popular products and heavy consumers that opt for obscure products, the latter ending up appreciating the obscure products less than they do when they purchase the popular ones. "Heavy users are more likely to venture into the long tail, but they choose a mix of hit and obscure products" (Elberse, 2008, p. 93). Therefore, hit products remain dominant, even among consumers who venture deep down into the tail. Elberse's conclusion emphasizes that although a shift in the consumption curve has been seized, there is little to profit from in case of a purely long tail retailing strategy.

2.2.4. Undecided Customers?

Decisive consumers might get a sense of direction based on the reviews and recommendations they find, but this happens only when they know what they are looking for. This implies that consumers are aware of what they want to buy. Scheibehenne et al. argue that "More choice is better" with regard to consumption quantity and if decision makers had well-defined preferences prior to choice (2010, p. 421). Gene Pressman, the grandson of Barneys (an American luxury department store), said that in the past, consumers did not know what they wanted: "If you give customers what they want, then you die… The fact is they don't know what they want" (Business of Fashion, 2014). But "In the Internet Age, fashion consumers increasingly know what they want long before they visit retailers" (idem). The implication of Anderson's theory is that consumers are

becoming more autonomous in their choices since they know they can find what they are looking for. But when checking online reviews or recommendations, the author believes there is a social influence in the process and the decision-making becomes less autonomous. If a consumer sees a negative review on a product he likes and decides on another one that has positive recommendations and reviews instead, this is nothing but a choice to adhere to the popular product, one that has been already vouched for.

2.3. VARIETY OF CHOICE IN RETAILING
2.3.1. Less is More?
The next chapter describes different assumptions about variety in retailing. A limitation of the articles is that most of them refer to brick-and-mortar retailing.

There is an assumption in marketing that assortment benefits consumers because there are more chances that there will be a good match between consumers' own preferences and the product offering (Chernev, 2003, p. 170.). The choice overload theory challenges most choice models in psychology and economics according to which expanding a choice set cannot make decision makers worse off (Scheibehenne et al., 2010). Dhar says that wide offering can confuse consumers, increasing the probability of delaying their choice or not choosing at all (as quoted in Chernev, 2003, p. 170). In 1972, Brehm proposed that in terms of perception, retailers that carry large assortments create a sense of freedom of choice (as cited in Chernev, 2003, p. 171).

Greenleaf and Lehmann (1995) suggests that wider assortments cause uncertainty and ultimately delay (p. 188). Consumers are at times doubtful because they engage in thinking whether the available set is representative of the entire set of possible options (Chernev, 2003, p. 171). Yet, variety in assortment makes it unlikely for customers to think that a potentially superior alternative could be found in another store. But consumers differ in the sense that some of them do not have ideal attribute criteria whereas others do have this ready-formed preference set. The decided consumers make selections without detailed evaluation of other options, but the others find themselves in a more complicated process as the increased assortment size leads to an increase in the number of relevant attributes to be considered as well. The latter have a double task: to both

define an ideal attribute combination and to identify the best existing matches, on the spot. This is a complicated task for consumers (Chernev, 2003, p. 171). Even for the less hesitant consumers, having an established preference list to mind will not necessarily lead to better choices as the retailer might not have the product matching consumers' preferences (p. 172). Huffman and Kahn (1998) mention that non-experts, or consumers new to the category, may not have that knowledge and thus may have difficulty finding what they want (p. 492). An extensive array of options can at first seem highly appealing to consumers, yet can reduce their subsequent motivation to purchase the product (Yiengar and Lepper, 2000, p. 997).The author believes that this is where e-tailing comes in and proves its reason of existence: decided shoppers can go online and look for exactly what they want, assumingly they are aware of what that is.

Solomon and Rabolt (2009) argue that there are two types of decision making: one is extended problem solving which implies a thorough evaluation of possible options whereas the other is just a habitual decision, throughout which alternatives are not considered and could be associated with a reflex. Ideally, consumers reach a point when they do not perform complex mental calculations every single time they make a purchase decision, so they try to simplify the shopping process. They ground it on heuristics, or mental rules of thumb that lead to a speedy decision, although sometimes this thinking is not to consumers' best interest, the authors assert (p. 396).

2.3.2. Variety in Retailing
Already since the 1960s variety in retailing has been analyzed. Iyengar et al. (2000) say that people seem to enjoy extensive-choice contexts more than limited-choice contexts, but they may sometimes prefer to make available to themselves many more choices than they can possibly handle (p. 1004).

Baumol and Ide (1966) argue that phenomena like the rise of suburban shopping centers and supermarkets have urged retailers to question the optimal variety in their retail strategy. Suburban shopping centres and supermarkets (located usually at the outskirts of a city as well) had to make sure the trip to the store is worth the while of consumers. "The greater the number of items carried by the store he enters, the greater, ordinarily, is the consumer's reason for expecting that the shopping trip will in this sense be successful", Baumol and Ide argue (1956, p. 94). Great variety of choice makes a shopping outlet more desirable for

consumers and worthy of a trip to the store. Berger et al. (2007) suggest that the product variety a brand offers often serves as a quality cue since consumers are likely to infer that the given brand has more category expertise and therefore it is more likely to be selected (p. 460).

But even since then, authors have identified the potential downside of wide assortments: "the difficulty of shopping increases with the number of items stocked by the store – the more items stocked the further we must walk to get to the spot where some items are kept" (Baumol and Ide, 1956, p. 93). In an attempt to compare the investments that come with carrying greater assortments with its potential outcome, the authors state that "even neglecting considerations of retailer costs, it will not pay a store to proliferate limitlessly the variety of items it carries". This means that the more products a shop carries, the more chances there are that consumers can run into products that they had not planned to buy but on the moment seem irresistible. Kahn (2008) argues that "large assortments can be perceived as negative by consumers if instead of offering possibilities and choice, they seem monumental and frustrating. Too large an assortment can be irritating to consumers who may then resort to simplistic decision rules to make a decision quickly" (p. 49). Later on, Kahn and Wansink (2004) assert that "if actual variety is increased in a disorganized manner, the resulting impact on consumption will be less than if the actual variety were introduced in an organized or more easily appreciated manner" (p. 529). Moreover, "unfocused variety may sometimes backfire and negatively affect perceptions of expertise in a well-defined product category" (Berger et al., 2007, p. 471)

For retailers considering a reduction in assortment, Boatwright and Nunes (2001) point out several aspects. First, larger selections generate a better fit and even for hesitant consumers, it becomes highly probable that the store conveys flexibility. Consumers' choice is affected by the perception of variety among a selection, the space devoted to the category, the presence or absence of the consumer's favourite item (Broniarczyk et al as cited in Boatwright and Nunes 2001), the arrangement of an assortment and the repetition of items (Hoch et al as cited in Boatwright and Nunes 2001) and the number of acceptable alternatives (Kahn and Lehmann as cited in Boatwright and Nunes 2001). What is interesting in the case of retailers is that when considering reduction in assortment they want to not affect the perception of variety, since the perception of variety rather than actual

variety can influence consumption (Kahn, Wansink, 2004, p. 529). This means that the idea that the perception of variety increases customer interest has been acknowledged and retailers try to maintain it.

2.3.3. Decreasing Variety

Decreasing assortment variety can be a difficult task, but research shows (Boatwright and Nunes, 2001) that even in the case of consumers that did not welcome the assortment reduction and therefore stopped shopping in that particular outlet, the rest of consumers bought larger quantities and their increased purchases easily outweighed the loss in sales due to the minority that preferred the greater selection (p. 60). After all, a decrease in assortment might lead to a loss in the number of consumers, but the consumers that remain will buy more, which will cover the customer loss. This might be caused by the retailer's better selection which leads to better customer retention as well. Brat et al. in The Wall Street Journal (2009) state that in some cases, eliminating the clutter might translate into higher sales and profits. Other authors (Sloot et al., 2006) assert that on the short term, a decrease in variety can lead to customer loss, but there are long-term benefits such as improved search efficiency, which may even induce non-category buyers purchase new items and better assortment satisfaction (p. 547).

Boatwright and Nunes (2001) suggest the following: eliminate redundant attributes while, on the other margin, minimizing the number of brands, sizes and flavours eliminated. (...) The results suggest that simplifying choice can increase the sales of Web-based firms. Even when reducing assortment, when product-loyal consumers have their favourite brand and product eliminated from the store, many of them will switch to an alternative product (p. 60). Solomon and Rabolt (2009) assert that consumers engage in brand switching even if the brand that they are currently using satisfies their needs as they seek variety. This occurs especially in the case of fashion innovators and marketers can never rest assured that they have won a customer forever, specifically because in the fashion industry there are always emerging designers entering the market (p. 389).

Bentley et al. (2008) suggest that the optimal inventory cannot be infinite as the long tail is by no means a guaranteed success. This is because the sales proceed further and further into the long tail and become so small that the marginal cost of tracking them in rank order, even at a digital scale, might be optimized well

before a million titles and certainly before infinite tiles. To even further support this, they say that an individual is more likely to select a top-selling item than one with low sales (p. 695). The authors seem to point at what Anderson has overlooked, meaning the importance of social influence when it comes to consumption. Recalling the example of the world live map of Net-a-Porter, this holds as an example that social influence works. Consumers are actually interested in seeing what the other is buying and where is that person from as to check the popularity of a product. This might render an impression of social validation as well.

2.3.4. Exploration and Flow on the Web

The sense of exploration is one reason why individuals go for online shopping. Korzaan (2003) proves that the sensation of flow actually influences attitudes towards online purchase (p. 28). Demangeot and Broderick (2007) prove that "exploratory potential plays a central role in mediating the relationship between sense-making potential and involvement. Thus, sense-making potential is necessary but not sufficient to involve consumers with the content of a site". But consumers quickly become bored and they seek to expand the boundaries of their world, which applies to online environments. The authors further state that the exploratory potential leads to involvement. Moreover, the webshop experience is accompanied by a sense of flow (Smith and Sivakumar, 2004). The flow concept is composed of three elements: the loss of self-consciousness, time distortion and the sensation of pleasure/gratification. Finally, the flow may mainly impact the physical dimension evoked above, through time and senses perceptions, and the ideological dimensions through pleasure and gratification as Trevinal and Stenger claim (2014). As the author herself has observed, many social media channels and websites are designed with the flow principle in mind. Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter permit endless scrolling; the Zara webshop is a never-ending assortment. Csikszentmihalyi (as quoted in Smith and Sivakumar, 2004) was describing flow as a state of mind that causes individuals to enter a specific experiential state, "so desirable that one wishes to replicate it as often as possible" or "an optimal psychological state reached during engagement in numerous activities" (p. 1201). Furthermore, "computer-mediated environments facilitate flow experiences because they require high concentration, involve the distortion of time, and bring about increased levels of pleasure" (Csikszentmihalyi et al. as cited in Smith and Sivakumar, 2004). Mahnke et al. (2015) show that "information organization,

which includes aspects of arranging elements on the website, might play an important role in inducing flow experiences (p. 74).

2.4. THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

There are interesting views on the perception of variety and how choice is becoming an overwhelming aspect of retail. Variety of choice is a symbol that the capitalist societies are promoting through the idea of freedom. The way to maximize freedom is to maximize choice" as "the more freedom, the more welfare" says Barry Schwartz in his book called "The Paradox of Choice". But availability of content does not guarantee demand and as consumers, "we love to consume products that are also consumed by others" specifies Anita Elberse (abc.net.au, 2014).

2.4.1. Maximizers and Satisficers

Consumers can choose wisely the moment they have decided on their goal but this is no easy task. Barry Schwartz (2004) describes two typologies of individuals with regards to the way they make choices: maximizers and satisficers (p. 77-78). The ones seeking and accepting only the best are maximizers, whereas satisficing means that one is able to settle for something that is good enough and "not worry about the possibility that there might be something better" (p. 78). A maximizer needs confirmation that all alternatives have been checked out before he makes the decision. Yet there are other perspectives on how choices are being made. "Maximizers may be particularly likely to value larger assortments more than smaller assortments in their quest for the best, and this may seem to be a logical approach: the chances of finding an ideal alternative may seem greater when one has more options rather than fewer from which to choose". (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2009, p. 631) A utilitarian decision-making assumption would say that consumers collect the most valuable units of information and that they gather as much data as needed. Yet the amount of external search for most products is surprisingly small (Solomon and Rabolt, 2009). This reinforces the natural monopoly law that Elberse was highlighting: the popular products tend to attract the light users of a category, which represent the majority of consumers.

Schwartz strengthens his position by saying that "the goal of maximizing is a source of great dissatisfaction that it can make people miserable – especially in a world that insists on providing an overwhelming number of choices" (p. 79). In one experiment, "The Paradox of Choice" author discovered that maximizers engage in more product comparison than satisficers, both before and after they make purchasing decisions (2004). In this context it is important to reflect on the

importance of the online ranking systems and discussion boards. Are they really making consumers' life better (and easier)? One could argue that the long tail might be transforming consumers into maximizers because they engage in elongated searches via different channels to look for products tailored to their tastes.

2.4.2. No Failure Accepted

Schwartz compares the way choice is made when shopping from a video store in a small town versus a big town. When consumers go to big cities, "[the choice] is no longer a reflection of the quality of the store. Now it's a reflection of the quality of my taste. So the availability of many attractive options means that there is no longer any excuse for failure. The blame for a bad choice will rest squarely with me, and the stakes involved in my video choice have escalated". Therefore in societies where markets cater to individuals with an abundance of goods, a "missed" choice means that the consumer was in some way incapacitated at the moment of the purchase. In a shop that offers little to no variety of choice, the blame goes on the store and does not weigh on the consumer. Mick et al. (2009) say that in an extensive-option context, individuals end up feeling more responsible for their choices, "apparently because so much freedom of choice was presented to them" (p. 208).

2.4.3. Higher Standards

According to Schwartz, once consumers have seen fifty alternatives, their standards have heightened. They have added criteria that would have never occurred to them otherwise (2004). Therefore, the less choice, the more our decision can score high on attractiveness. Refraining from craving to see "the next alternative" can make consumers feel better about the choices they make. Gourville and Soman (2005) argue that "an increasingly large assortment can negatively impact consumer choice". Iyengar and Lepper (as cited in Broniarczyk and Hoyer 2010) found that when consumers chose a product from a large assortment they were less satisfied with their product choice. It seems that large choice set sizes may not be as alluring to satisficers as they are to maximizers (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2009, p. 635). These consumers experienced higher levels of regret over the idea that other, foregone, options might have been more preferable (p. 277).

2.4.4. Reversible Decisions

Consumers make decisions based on the reversibility of their actions. (Schwartz, 2004, p. 144). And we see this in the most successful businesses. Returns are a must for the retailers these days. Greenberg from E-commerce Times understood this already since 2001. Consumers complained that they found no information on returns, reason for which they did not buy (Greenberg, 2001). "When we can change our minds, apparently we do less psychological work to justify the decision we've made" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 145). But then again, knowing that they can always switch to the other option will put consumers in greater difficulty on long term as they keep on weighing the opportunities and ask themselves if they should settle with what they have or not.

2.4.5. Regret

There is post decision regret or "buyer's remorse" and anticipated regret, which is much worse. It will produce not just dissatisfaction but paralysis. If someone asks herself how it would feel to buy this house only to discover a better one next week, she probably won't buy this house. This is particularly occurring in the case of maximizers, who can avoid regret only by taking very best choice. And then again, Schwartz (2004) highlights "the more options you have, the more likely it is that you will experience regret, either in anticipation of decisions or after them" (p. 148). According to Iyengar et al. (2000) "choosers in extensive-choice contexts may actually feel more committed to the choice-making process; that is, that they may feel more responsible for the choices they make because of the multitude of options available. These enhanced feelings of responsibility, in turn, may inhibit choosers from exercising their choices, out of fear of later regret" (p. 1000).

People regret more what they failed to do rather than what they did, Schwartz says (2004, p. 149). When confronted with decisions, consumers often choose the option that minimizes the chances that they will experience regret. But individuals also come to experience regret aversion. It seems that regret aversion is connected with the omission bias, since the latter has a lot to do with the failure to act. The possibility for regret aversion to come up usually happens in risky situations. "Taking the sure thing is a way to guarantee that you won't regret your decision – you won't regret it because you'll never know how the alternative would have turned out" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 158). Although consumers encountering extensive options argues they enjoyed the choice process more than those

encountering the limited-option condition, they reported that the process was more difficult and lead to more regret over their choices and lower satisfaction (Mick et al., 2004, p. 208). Dar-Nimrod et al. (2009) show that "Choices made after sacrificing for more options (…) may be especially disappointing for maximizers because of regretting lost time and effort in the search process in addition to regretting unselected alternatives. It is also possible that sacrificing to gain more alternatives leads maximizers to increase expectations for what they consider to be the "best" alternative, thereby making it more difficult to actually attain the best alternative" (p. 635).

2.4.6. Inaction Inertia

Solomon and Rabolt (2009) refer to inertia as the type of decisions that are made out of habit because of consumers' lack of motivation to consider alternatives (p. 130). Yet there is another take on inertia that lies at the other end of the involvement spectrum. Prospect of regret is an important cause of many decisions and people make choices with the anticipation of regret in mind (Schwartz, 2004, p. 158). When it comes to retail, if "the over choice effect is driven both by cognitive overload and the anticipation of regret" (Gourville and Soman, 2005). The desirability to avoid regret can often lead to inaction inertia (p. 159), which means that instead of making a choice that seems satisfying, consumers keep on looking for the better. Broniarczyk and Hoyer (2010) argue that the decision difficulty, confusion, and negative affect associated with large assortments may lead consumers to walk away from the shelf display without purchasing (p. 277). Fasolo et al. argue that "a common reaction of consumers to information overload is unwillingness to choose, and dissatisfaction with what choices are made" (2007, p. 23).

Schwartz (2004) shows that when there is no choice, all consumers can get is disappointment. When there is an abundance of choice, the disappointment is reversed for regret, as the power lies in the customer's hand and not in the one of the retailers'. Regret increases as we analyze all the missed opportunities. "So opportunity costs will mount as the number of options increases, and as opportunities costs mount, so will regret" (p. 163). But there is an upside to the anticipation of regret. The idea of having bought something useless prevents us from making a worthless pick. One could say that taking our consumption habits seriously is nothing if not a sign of maturity in terms of consumption, something

that could help us consume wiser. So on one hand, anticipating regret can induce paralysis, on the other hand mindful consumption. Schwartz (2004) adds that "novelty can change someone's hedonic standards so that what was once good enough, or even better than that, no longer is" (p. 170) which is undoubtedly valid in the fashion industry.

2.4.7. Shopping Cart Abandonment as Inertia

Close and Kukar-Kinney (2009) acknowledge that the shopping cart is an important aspect in the online shopping behaviour discussion. Consumers make use of the shopping cart in order to place the items they like. If the offline shopping cart is an instrument that facilitates immediate buying, the online shopping cart, although intended for the exact same reason as the offline ones (p. 986), does not necessarily lead to purchase. The shopping cart could be used just for enjoyment – for consumers who do not afford to buy products and the act of placing the items in the shopping cart works as a substitute. Consumers might use shopping carts as an organizational tool instead of bookmarking or making wish lists: they place the items in the cart and come back to the website to buy the products later (p. 988).

The same authors, in a later study (Kukar-Kinney and Close, 2010), show that there is a phenomenon of shopping cart abandonment identified. Online shoppers abandon their shopping carts a quarter of the time (p. 240). This might be due to the use of the shopping cart purely for entertainment reasons. Moreover, the virtual cart is also a tool that provides consumers a sense of control. Consumers could place items in the cart because they are aware that the e-tailers will remind them about the items or when the items are on sale or they could also use it as a research tool and buy from other e-tailers or even a brick-and-mortar store. There are other factors that hinder the shopping act: technical issues, slow delivery, and extra taxes. Ultimately, the authors ask retailers to consider the fact that the online shopping cart abandonment is not a lost sale phenomenon since consumers do not always use the virtual cart for purchasing purposes. The use of the cart as an organizational tool shows that consumers intend to purchase in an organized way, the authors conclude (p. 249).

3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present research is built upon several two, out of which two are the most important: on one hand, the long tail, on the other hand, the paradox of choice.

Chris Anderson talks about the fragmentation of markets and the difficulties encountered by e-tailers nowadays of catering to niche markets. He is making the case for the autonomy of consumers' tastes and hence the necessity for a wide variety of choice. He might be referring to the heavy consumers that are determined in what they are looking for and make use of search engines, for whom the Internet is a great tool in helping them find exactly what they want, but what happens to the light consumers that are indecisive? On the other hand, Barry Schwartz argues that variety of choice is overwhelming to consumers and in the end it does not only not bring more satisfaction but it increases the chance of regret. The association of the two theories is not random and was planned to be researched in the context of online fashion shopping. Within this research, long tail e-tailers are defined as the ones carrying high volumes of clothing, although in Anderson's theory, it also refers to small retailers with niche products. The decision to focus only on the former was made based on the fact that big e-tailers cater to both mass and niche markets and it would have been more difficult to make this difference in the consumer survey.

4.1. METHODOLOGY

The current research is based on a deductive approach. The author started with gathering theories and build hypothesis and then a survey upon them. The main research question derives from the current literature in long tail and variety of choice. Marx (in Bryman, 2008) points out that intellectual puzzles and contradictions, or the counter-intuitive (p. 70) can be used to explore untapped areas when formulating research questions. In an industry developing at a fast pace like e-commerce, the diffusion of new retail models can be easily adapted and it is important to define their limitations and advantages. Moreover, the topic of this research comes from the author's personal experience and curiosity for the nature of behaviours in online fashion shopping. The results will assist fashion e-tailers in their strategic decisions at the prospect of adopting a long tail strategy in fashion retailing.

4.1.1. CONSUMER SURVEY

In order to obtain an overview of consumers' perception of fashion long tail e-tailers with regards to variety of choice, an online survey was deemed to be appropriate. A survey is "used to find out the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of persons who are contacted to participate in the survey and to obtain other factual information about members of this population." (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 860)

Definitions of concepts

ONLINE FASHION SHOPPING

variety of choice	less choice
big e-tailers	small e-tailers
the long tail economy (Anderson)	
the myth of the long tail (Elberse)	
light / indecisive consumers (majority)	heavy / decisive consumers (minority)
inaction inertia (Schwartz)	regret/anticipated regret (Schwartz)
shopping cart abandonment	

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

<u>Variety of choice</u> refers to consumers' shopping alternatives in the marketplace. It was adapted from Schwartz.

<u>Online shopping</u> is the activity of shopping via online e-commerce sites, as opposed to shopping from physical stores. It entails the process of browsing for products and placing an order that is delivered at the customer's intended location.

<u>Online browsing</u> is a concept that refers to checking assortments of retailers, making wishlists, sometimes even placing products in the shopping carts. It does not necessarily include a purchase.

<u>Big e-tailers</u> is a concept that in this research will also be referred to as <u>long tail retailers</u>. Based on Anderson's theory, e-tailers these days carry products that

would otherwise not be sold in physical stores because there is not a high demand for them. This happens because online stores require cheaper inventory space than would physical stores. Thus, many long tail products can make up for less "hits". These concepts are adapted from Chris Anderson.

Small e-tailers or niche e-tailers are online shops that carry very specialized assortment for heavy consumers. These are the decided consumers that know what they want and what they are looking for. Again, these concepts are derived from Chris Anderson's theory.

Regret / anticipated regret is the feeling of having taking a wrong decision or of having missed an opportunity. It can be associated with the concept of decision-making in a way that consumers see themselves in the future wearing / using a product and they are trying to see if it could be of real use to them. Based on Schwartz.

Inaction Inertia is a term used in relationship with the decision-making process and it can be used in the context of variety of choice. Given the subject of the present thesis, it refers to the fact that consumers, faced with great numbers of products to choose from, cannot make up their mind and postpone the purchasing decision. Adapted from Schwartz.

Product assortment represents a number of products that buyers are planning within retail strategy.

Shopping cart abandonment is a term often used in the context of online shopping. It refers to consumers' decision of abandoning an e-store without finalizing their purchase.

The concepts defined in the theoretical section were operationalized so as to be used in the survey sent out to online social media users. The survey addresses consumer attitudes, which reflect the degree of positivity or negativity that a person feels toward an object (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 39) and draws browsing and consumption patterns. According to Lavrakas, attitudes motivate and guide behaviour (p. 40).

The author intends through the chosen research method to confront the two theories which find common ground in the process of online fashion shopping. Although these two main theories do not fall into the same research area, one way

of doing problematization is by drawing connections between works and investigative streams not typically cited together (Jörgen and Mats, 2010). Anderson's research tackles a retailing problem and is business oriented whilst Schwartz's theory discusses a consumer decision-making perspective.

4.1.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey had the following structure:

1. Attitudes towards fashion e-stores' features
2. Popularity of e-stores and social influence
3. Level of preference for big or small assortments
4. Level of difficulty in making a purchase decision
5. Attitudes towards shopping cart abandonment, browsing and regret
6. Regret or anticipated regret attitudes
7. Level of interest in fashion and demographics

The survey consists of 31 questions, most of which are multiple-choice. The questions that had more than four options had a random order and not a hierarchical one. Among the questions that were attempting at bringing data about attitudes, the questionnaire was designed so as the respondents could express neutral positions ("I don't know" / "I'm not sure") to make sure their attitudes are authentic and not simplistically interpreted as "yes" or "no". The remaining questions are open-ended, so as the respondents could express their views on the reasons they shop online or what they like about their favourite online shop. The open-ended questions were meant for respondents to further express their attitudes in case the pre-defined multiple-choice answers were too limiting. The author considers a quantitative method appropriate at this stage of theory development – both for long tail and variety of choice concepts. The language used was clear and as simplistic as possible and the author avoided employing academic terms of industry jargon. One aspect that could have caused uncertainty was the usage of the terms "apparel", "clothes", "fashion". It was decided that they should not to be defined at the beginning of the questionnaire in order not to confuse respondents, especially since the distinctions between these terms are not relevant to the present research. The survey was conducted through Google Forms.

The concepts researched by Anderson and Schwartz are already trends (at least in Anderson's case) and would rather need a measure for their scalability and applicability rather than a confirmation of the theory. Therefore, a quantitative study was chosen instead of a qualitative one.

4.1.3. Reliability

According to Bryman (2008, 149), stability is one way to analyze the level of reliability in research design. Usually, a measure has to be stable over time and the results should not vary significantly over time for the research to be reliable (Bryman, 2008, 149). This research was conducted from August until September 2014 and considering the high development of Internet technologies and consumers' shifting online shopping patterns, as much as the results of this study should stay the same were it to be replicated, there could be minor variations as consumers get more tech-savvy and more used to shopping online. Shopping patterns might change over long time spans and might also be influenced by changes in e-shops' policies and, nonetheless, economies. All in all, if this study were to be replicated, unless consumers' accumstomance (?) to handling online shopping and their variety were to increase, it should generate similar results.

4.1.4. Validity

Validity refers to "the relevance of a measuring instrument for a particular purpose" (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 938). Bryman (2008) refers to construct validity as to the question of whether a measure that is devised of a concept really reflects that concept (p. 32). Prior to the questionnaire design, relevant concepts from the theoretical section that could test consumer attitudes were used. The current research was pre-tested and then discussed with participants in the pre-test. Considering the fact that this is merely a minor study, the analysis uses the percentages of responses instead of statistical interpretation of responses. The author deemed it sufficient since the percentages are revealling

4.1.5. Pre-test

A pilot test or pre-test is used to provide information about question comprehension, sensitivity, difficulty, and/or item nonresponse related to specific questions (Lavrakas, 584). A pre-test was conducted in order to point out potential errors, language ambiguities and to see if the survey was too lengthy. The pre-test was conducted with ten respondents and some minor language misunderstandings, along with unclear formulations that were signalled and

rephrased. Moreover, the author discussed with the respondents about the length and if there were too many questions to answer to. Respondents in the pre-test made comments on the questionnaire such as "Interesting point, I haven't thought of it before", "I felt there were repetitive questions" etc. Consequently, alterations were made to the original versions and it was spread over social media. Although there were twenty-seven questions, they were easy to understand and so their completion did not take more than ten minutes.

4.1.6. Likert Scale

The Likert scale is a common unit in quantitative research that measures one's level of agreement or disagreement with a statement or a hypothetical situation. According to Mattel and Jacoby, a "multi-step Likert-type rating scales provide two components of information – the direction and the intensity of an individual's attitudinal composition" (1971, p. 659). The author employed several questions with the Likert scale, with answers ranging from "I agree" to "I disagree", the total questions being of five per each question.

4.2. SAMPLING

Facebook was used as the main social media channel. Facebook is one of the most widely used social media channel today, with 1,23 billion monthly users worldwide, out of which 757 million log on Facebook daily as of 2013 (The Guardian, 2014). With the increase of mobile and tablet Facebook usage, the channel was regarded as relevant for the present study as it could grant a satisfactory response rate. Social media users along with discussion board users are thought to be spending a lot of time online engaged in different types of activities. Therefore, it was inferred that high Internet users would be more likely to shop online. It is more probable that a social media user or a forum user would exchange a physical store for an online shop since he is more accustomed to the online and how it works. Since the study is not pursuing a country-specific set of perceptions towards the variety of choice in fashion e-shops but rather intending to gauge a trend that is felt globally, the survey, which was posted on the author's Facebook page, was available to all her Facebook friends regardless of the country they come from. Since the author is Romanian, her Facebook friends consist of approximately 70% Romanians and 30% internationals.

The rest of 30% she became acquainted with during her master's degree in Sweden in Fashion Management. Because of the topic in question, it is more

probable that the author's international Facebook friends were attracted to the title of the survey more than other Facebook friends of the author. Furthermore, because the Facebook post was in English, the Romanian Facebook users could have thought that the survey does not address them and therefore did not read the whole description of the Facebook post. On the other hand, they might have felt uncomfortable filling out a survey in other than their mother tongue, which further withdraws users that are unaccustomed to long tail e-shops, of which one could say are predominantly international and therefore in English. In the end, only 16.03% of survey participants are Romanian, 36.79% Swedish, 15.09% from the US followed by a remaining 32.07% from other countries. Judging from the fact that 51.88% are Swedish and American, it is safe to say that a majority of respondents come from countries with high Internet coverage and Internet literacy. Even the ones in the less developed countries, the fact that the participants accessed the survey through an online platform signalizes that, to some extent, they are accustomed to the online shopping experience. 14 respondents out of 107 were male (13.08%), which means that the sample is skewed in terms of gender, but this may be due to the subject in cause which is online shopping and fashion.

COUNTRIES

ROMANIA   SWEDEN   the US   OTHERS

16.03
32.07
36.79
15.09
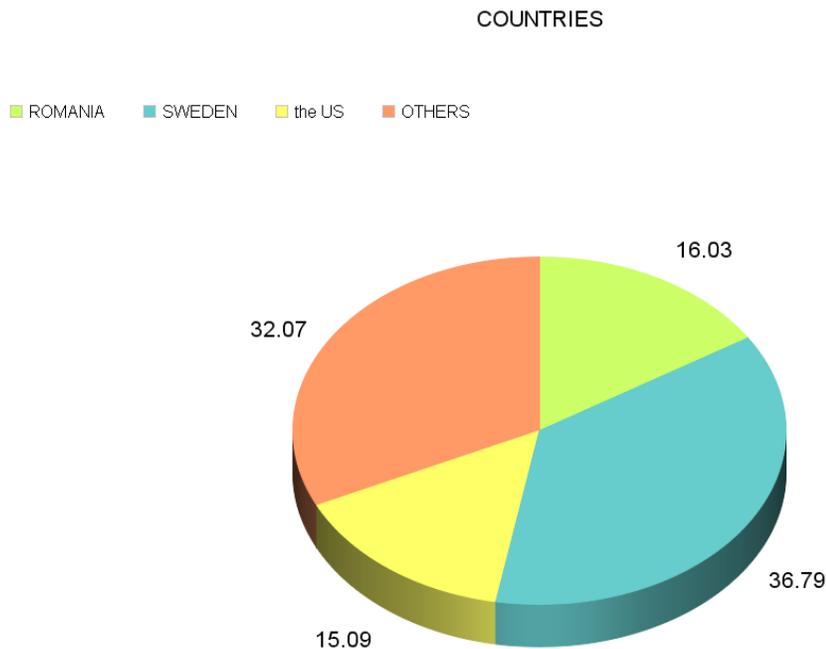
Figure 2: Countries where respondents live

35

GENERA
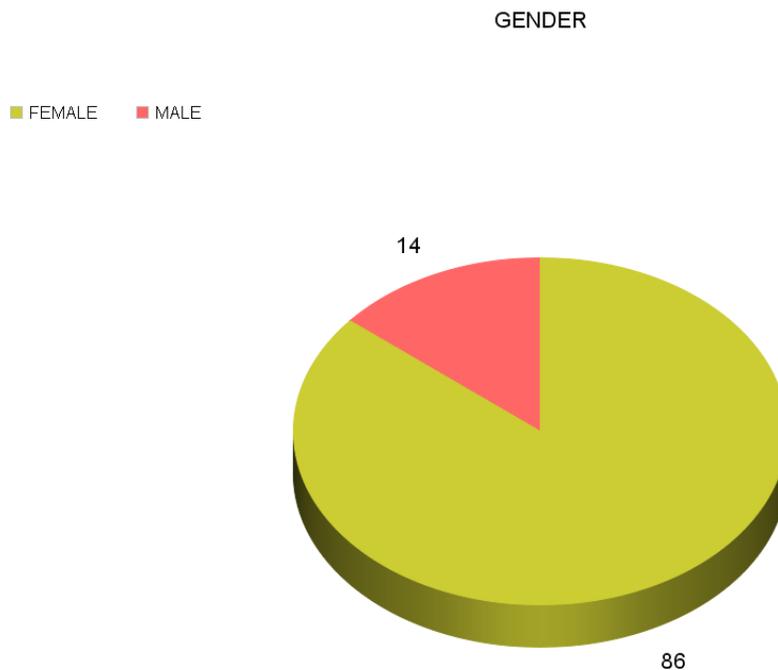
Figure 3: Gender

The second category of survey participants were gathered through the spread of the survey on two discussion boards: TheFashionSpot and YouLookFab. Both have a fashion focus which is crucial to determining a certain fashion interest since this kind of forums bring together users with high interest in fashion and apparel. TheFashionSpot is a media channel that hosts a big database of forum users. Since the profile of theFashionSpot revolves around fashion, trends and lifestyle, the author assumed that the forum users are fashion-oriented and would bring valuable contribution to the research. YouLookFab serves more as an advice platform for outfits that users want to discuss about. Moreover, it is assumed that the users of both channels are heavy Internet users since they are approached online, and an interest in fashion as well.

The third and last category of respondents is consisted of students at the Swedish School of Textiles from Borås, Sweden, where the author is currently pursuing a master's degree. They were sent the survey by the international coordinator of the university, Anelli Bentzlin, and had, together with the Facebook respondents, a high response-rate.

4.3. CONDUCTION

Respondents filled the questionnaire voluntarily. Since it was posted on the author's personal Facebook page, the description accompanying the survey read: "Have you ever shopped or considered shopping clothes online? I am sure you did, so I would be very grateful if you could fill out this survey: [link to survey]. It will take less than 10 minutes of your (vacation) time. To my Romanian friends, I am confident that although the survey is in English, you can make the effort and fill it out." The author did not consider crucial for the respondents to have a precedent in shopping clothes online since it was assumed that many of them had at least browsed sites a few times and maybe they could not decide upon what to order. Only four out of 107 respondents had never purchased clothes online before, but their responses were deemed to be valid based on the aforementioned rationale. The research seeks to gauge behaviours regarding to the overwhelming variety of choice and this usually translates into inaction inertia, as shown in the theoretical section, therefore it does not mean that the ones that had not purchased clothes online up to that date had not been spending time browsing fashion e-commerce sites.

No non-response rate was possible to collect since the respondents chose to participate in the study voluntarily and it could not be seen how many have accessed the study without completing it or leaving the page the survey was available at. All responses were recorded as valid since there were no missing values except from the few questions that were not compulsory to complete, which are four out of twenty-seven questions. Google Forms provides the possibility to mark with an asterisk the questions that are obligatory for completion and upon submitting the response, respondents are redirected to the unanswered questions, which are in this case highlighted, and only after filling in the gaps can they submit a response. Thus, the author was unable to see how many respondents have left the page without having completed to fill the survey.

4.3.1. Generalization

The final sample size is made of 107 respondents from countries all across the world, mainly Sweden, Romania and the US. Although the findings lead to an interesting insights into consumer patterns in the online, one should be cautious about assuming this number could be generalized at a global scale. The number is rather low to lead to generalization and this may be in part due to the fact that

the author had limited resources in conducting this survey and in order to gain authentic and voluntary responses, she did not to insist upon the ones that did not want to complete the survey.

4.3.2. Limitations and possible sources of error

No data collection errors were reported, but rarely is the case that a questionnaire is fully comprehended as intended. There could also be a data processing errors in the way the author interpreted the open-ended questions. One limitation to the research would be the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their real answer, in order to project a favorable image of themselves and to avoid receiving negative evaluations, a concept called social desirability, according to Lavrakas (2008, p. 825).

Another limitation is that in a survey about attitudes, people respond based on their previous experiences related to the topic in question. This means that the accuracy of the results might not be as high in comparison to an experiment or an observation. Furthermore, it is usual for people to respond to surveys based on an attitude-behaviour gap, which ultimately means that their willingness to act in a certain fashion does not translate into actual behaviour. But since the respondents were unaware of the desirable values that were being sought in the research, the author consider this limitation is minimized. Yet this represents a limitation applicable to all survey research and not only to this specific research.

5.RESULTS

In this section, the results of the research will be presented. The most relevant answers are explained since it was considered that not all questions have the same level of importance. Based on respondents' answers to the questionnaire, insights about their attitudes regarding variety of choice on online shopping sites will be revealed. The percentages resulted were used as measurement tool for the level of agreement or disagreement with the statements within the questionnaire. Most questions required a single answer amongst the multiple-choice questions, which means they made up a total of 100%. However, some questions could have multiple choices, which means the total sum would amount for more than 100%.

5.1. Attitudes towards fashion e-stores' features

1. When asked about what they like about shopping clothes online, the answers are quite revealing. As expected, besides from convenience considerations such as "I can shop anytime I want", "I can shop from anywhere I am", "It's faster than going to a shop"; price considerations and the fact that there are reviews online that consumers like to consult, wide variety of products scored as the second most important factor when considering to shop online. 56.1 % of respondents said that this is what attracts them to e-stores. Wide variety of brands scored 36.4 % which is again an advantage to an e-store.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT SHOPPING APPAREL ONLINE

Figure 4: Positive aspects about online apparel shopping

2. When asked about further aspects that they like with regard to online apparel shops, respondents pointed out characteristics that fall under categories highlighted before, such as convenience, variety and price. But variety took another facet, as there were responses such as "variety of sizing (petite, tall etc.)", "If my size is out of stock in stores, I can often find it online", or, even more interesting, "I can buy products that are not sold in my country", "I can get things that are not available in stores around

me". 19% out of 37 respondents (this was an optional open-ended question that came in completion to the previous question) revealed that what they appreciate about e-shops is the variety of sizing and the possibility to shop clothes that are not available to them in their area or country. These respondents probably engaged in multi-channel shopping, meaning that they had already seen a piece of clothing in a physical store but were unable to buy and checked that brand's online shop to see if it carries their size. Only one respondent was looking for something very niche, "I can find specialty products – vegan fashion for example" that is in line with Anderson's theory. There were other responses, such as "I do not feel self-conscious while in a changing room mirror".

5.2. Popularity of e-stores and social influence

3. One relevant question for the present study is where respondents find about the stores they like. Based on Anderson's theory, search engines, recommendations, reviews and blogs are important for the "new" consumer that is looking for very specific, niche products, yet the author of the present study finds this is a contradicting association. Making socially independent decisions about what one wants to purchase is one thing and being influenced by others in terms of purchasing decisions is something else. This happens because if one follows an influencer's suggestions, the recommended shopping destination cannot stay unpopular or obscure. In that sense, 56.1% of the respondents find information about e-shops via online press or blogs. This turns the recommended e-shops into rather popular destinations. The second most important influence factor are friends/peers, which scored 52.3%. Then, 28% of respondents reported that word-of-mouth recommendations are what they take into account when looking for an online store and yet influencers play another important role in leading their followers to e-stores since there were 22.4% of respondents that said they follow influencers' recommendations. This confirms Elberse's view on the long tail dynamic: consumers of the most obscure content are also buying the hits and heavy users are more likely to venture into the long tail, but they choose a mix of hit and obscure products (Elberse, 2008).

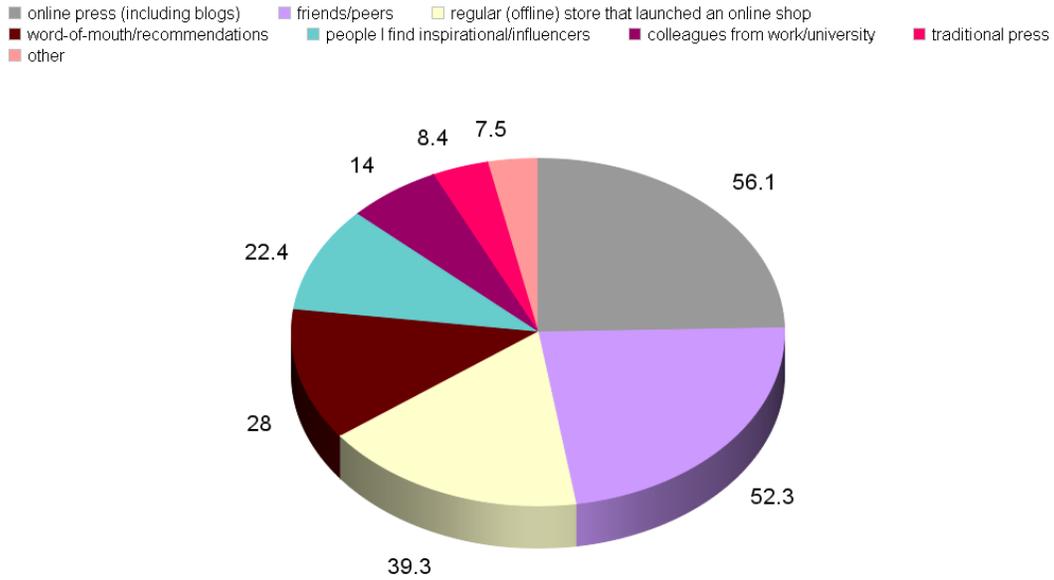WHERE DID YOU HEAR ABOUT FASHION E-STORES THAT YOU LIKE?

Figure 5: Sources for fashion e-stores

4. 27.1% of the respondents find it of average importance for an e-shop to be popular in order for them to shop on it, closely followed by a number of 26.2% of the respondents that think it is quite important for an e-shop to be popular.
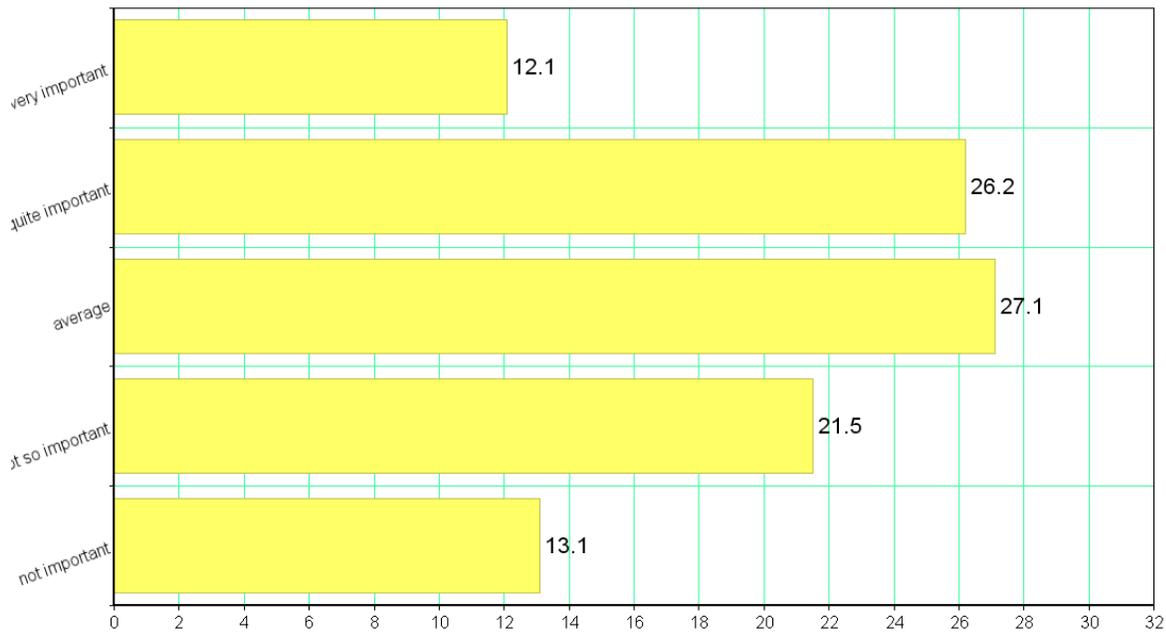
Figure 6: Level of importance of the popularity characteristic of a store

5. Still, it is quite surprising that when asked to state the level of agreement with "the content of a fashion online shop has to be shareable on social media", 52.3% of respondents found this not important at all, pointing that sharing a potential buy with their friends is something totally unimportant as if their friends opinions do not count at all. A remaining of 22.4% found this "not so important", while 12.1% found it of average importance. One issue with this question is that it might have sounded a bit too abstract to respondents.

6. 56% of the respondents find it from quite (33.6%) to very important (22.4) to read recommendations about the fashion products they want to buy. This is an interesting finding especially when thinking that in people usually seek to distinguish themselves from others in terms of fashion clothing. Yet 24.3% of the respondents believe this aspect is of average importance.

5.3. Level of preference for big or small assortments

7. One important questions that was expected to be highly relevant to the study was regarding the preference for big e-stores over smaller e-stores. The result is not conclusive for the present study since 54.2% of the

respondents said they like shopping from both big and small e-tailers. A remaining of 31.9% prefer the big e-stores and the rest of 14% respondents go for small e-stores.

BIG vs. SMALL E-SHOPS

■ big   ■ small   ■ both
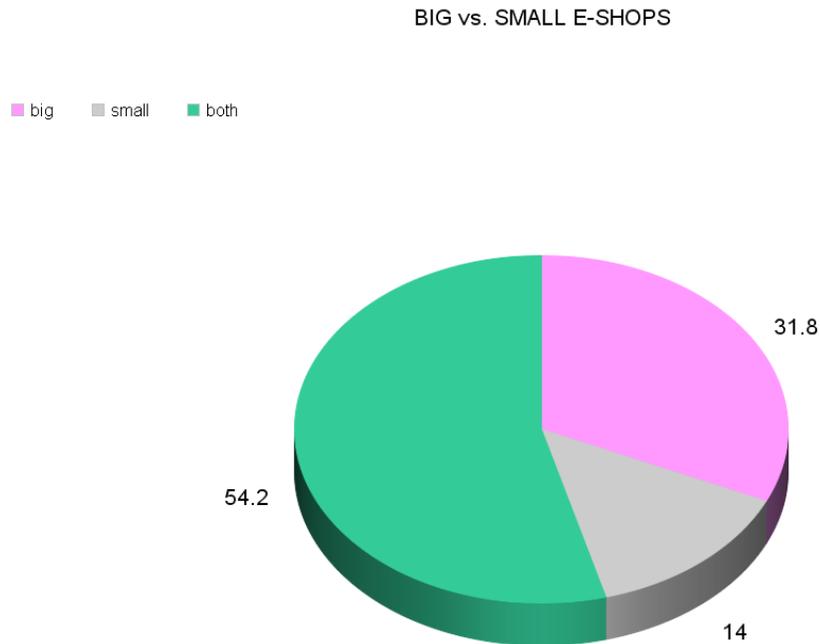
Figure 7: Preference towards big versus small e-tailers

5.4. Level of difficulty in making a purchase decision

8. A majority of respondents (79.4%) do not view the process of online shopping complicated, which means that the steps that need to be done for placing an order online do not hinder the actual online shopping browsing and choosing process. This was important to highlight before the following question.

9. A majority of 69.2% of the respondents to the questionnaire pointed that they had difficulties making a choice when shopping online for clothes. This is a telling result based on the assumption that they have no difficulties with the process of online shopping, but rather they find it hard to make a decision.

yes　　no　　I don't remember / care

16.8

14

69.2
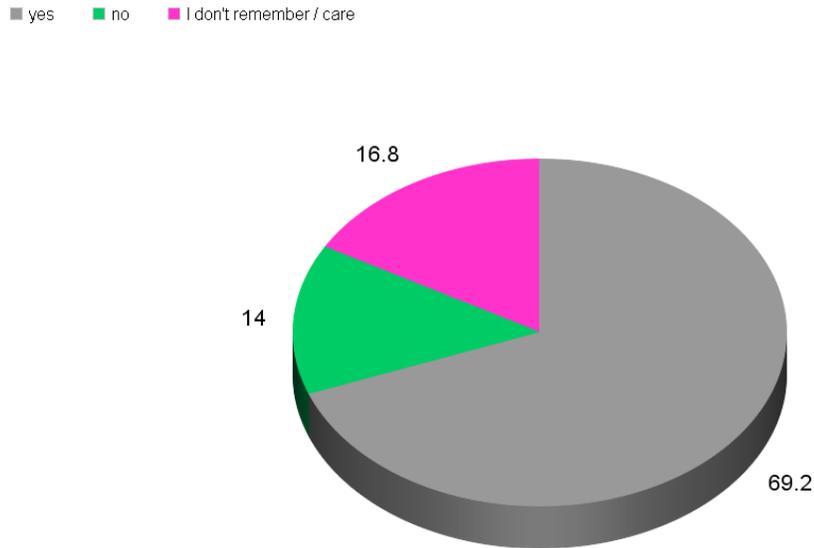
Figure 8: Encountering difficulties while making choices online

10. 46.7% of the respondents have felt at least once that there are/were so many products on a webshop that it was difficult for them to make a decision. 23.4% even left the shop due to being overwhelmed, whilst 22.4% enjoyed every minute of looking for clothes and making a choice.

11. A majority of 29% of respondents felt that they totally agree with the statement "it is easier to make product choices online, in traditional stores", with a remaining of 25% respondents that said they "somehow agree", 17.8% that were neutral to the statement, 16.8% that they "somehow disagree" and 13.1% which totally disagreed.

■ I agree   ■ I somehow agree   ■ Neutral   ■ I somehow disagree   ■ I disagree

13.1

29

16.8

17.8

23.4
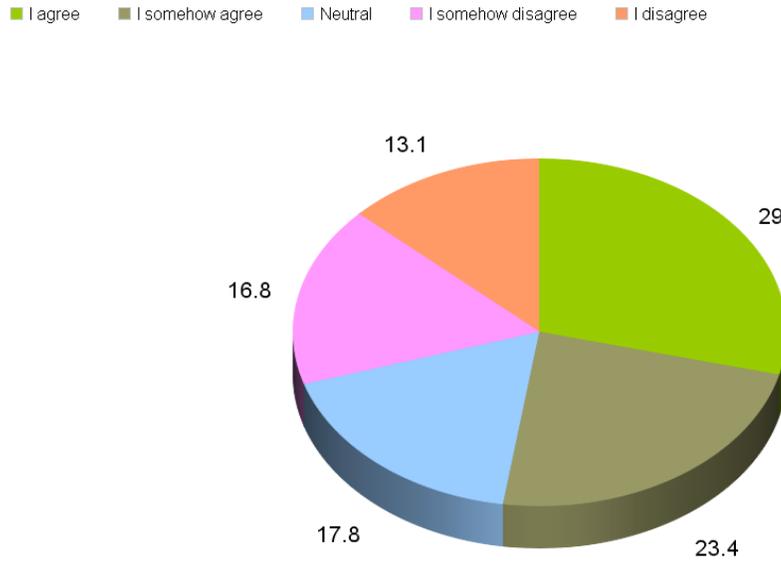
Figure 9: Level of difficulty of choice-making online versus offline

12. 33.6% of respondents somehow agreed to the statement that "sometimes choosing online become so overwhelming that I just leave the store". On the other hand, 19.6% said they somehow disagree with the statement, followed by the same percentage of respondents that said they disagree. Only 12.1% agreed that they, indeed, leave the store if the choice-making becomes too overwhelming and 19.6% disagreed.
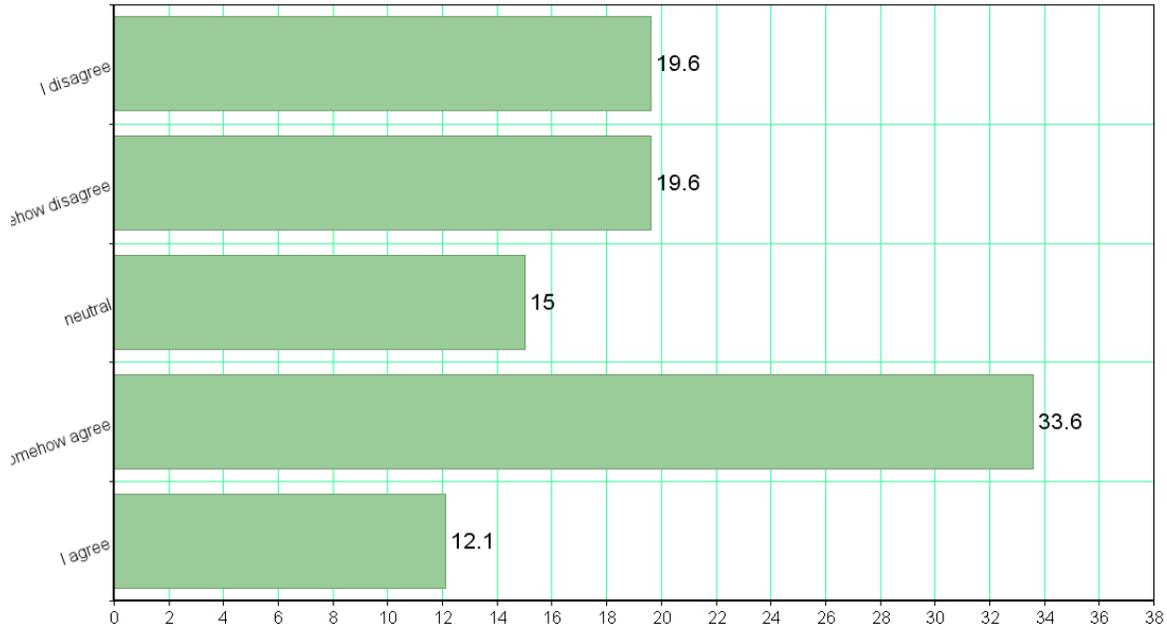
Figure 10: Choice-making online is overwhelming

13. When in a hurry, 60.7% of respondents prefer to shop offline rather than online. Although in the case of fashion, this might be due to the fear of fit, this percentage shows that traditional stores are preferred when one really has really got to finalize a purchase. This shows that consumers are aware that shopping online might take longer time than offline.
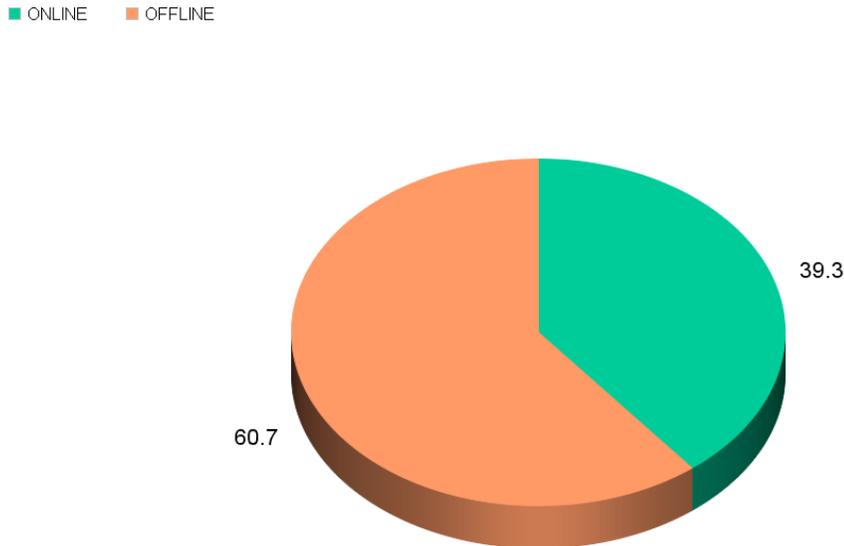
Figure 11: Preference towards online or offline while in a hurry

14. Then, a majority of 37.4% said they "somehow agree" to the fact that "great variety of choice is sometimes distracting me from what I want to buy", with a remaining of 19.6% that totally agreed and a same percentage that felt neutral towards the statement. There was a 12.1% that totally disagreed that great variety of choice is distracting them from what they wanted to buy and 11.2% that "somehow disagreed".

15. 56.1% of the respondents felt many times that they had spent plenty of time on an e-shop without making any purchase. 33.6% did that sometimes, whereas only 10.3% rarely do that or are decided and do not usually waste time.

5.5. Attitudes towards shopping cart abandonment and browsing and regret

16. In order to see if the choice options led respondents to rethink their initial purchase intentions, the respondents were asked to what extent they sometimes end up buying something different than initially intended, and a majority of 40.2% said they somehow agreed to this, while 28% totally agreed. According to Anderson (2009), consumers know what they want and they can look for the products they need, but in the light of the present

research, it seems like consumers are often changing their minds over a product and they are light consumers.

I SOMETIMES END UP PURCHASING STH ELSE FROM WHAT I HAD IN MIND
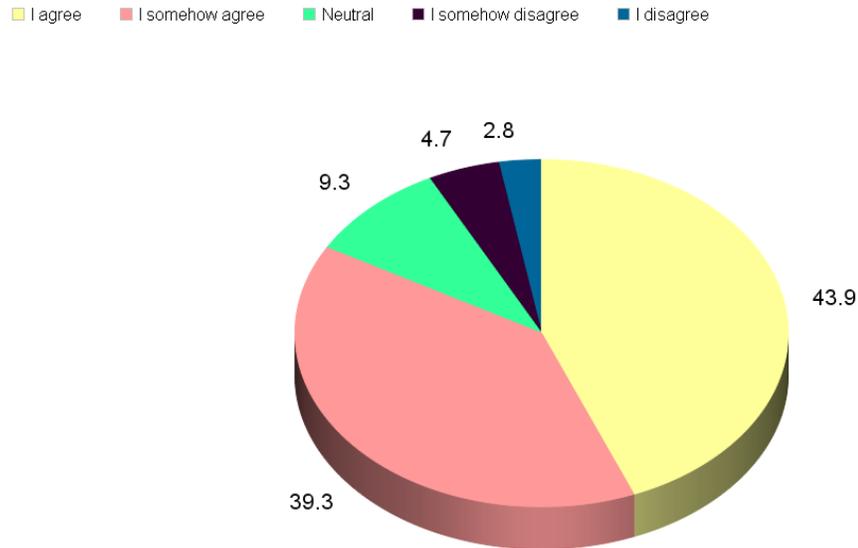
Figure 12: Purchasing something different than initial intention

17. 40.2% of respondents actually enjoy spending time online, looking for clothes, whereas 34.6% say that they somehow agree to this statement. This percentage proves that consumers find the browsing experience enjoyable. This confirms what Iyengar et al. (2000) and other researchers have proposed, meaning that consumers enjoy extensive-choice contexts more than limited-choice contexts.
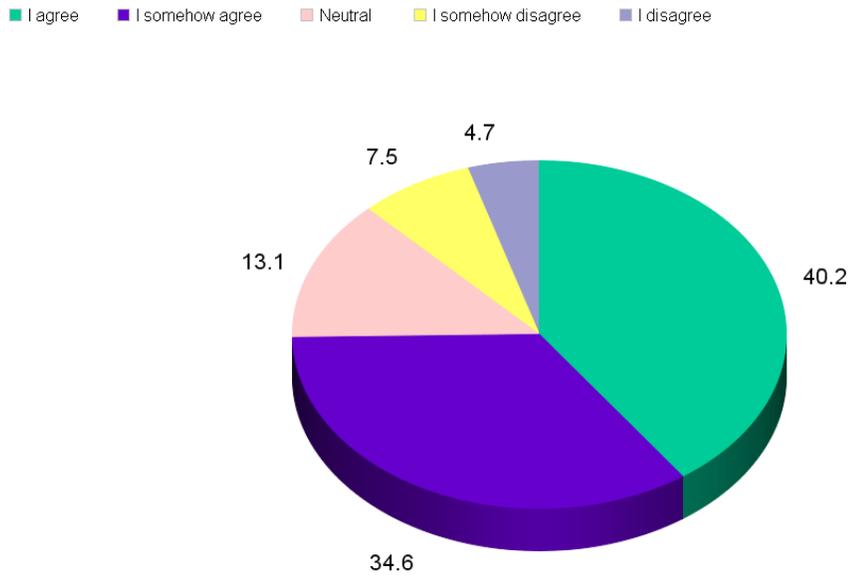
Figure 13: Degree of enjoyment while spending time online looking for clothes

18. A majority of 38% of respondents prefer infinite scrolling pages on e-shops. This was important to measure because infinite scrolling sites have their entire assortment on one page, as opposed to others that have their products displayed on separate pages. It was deemed that an infinite scrolling page would enhance the perception of variety and based on previous research, flow can be part of a web experience that leads to pleasure and gratification through the loss of self-consciousness, time distortion and the sensation of pleasure/gratification (Trevinal and Stenger, 2014).
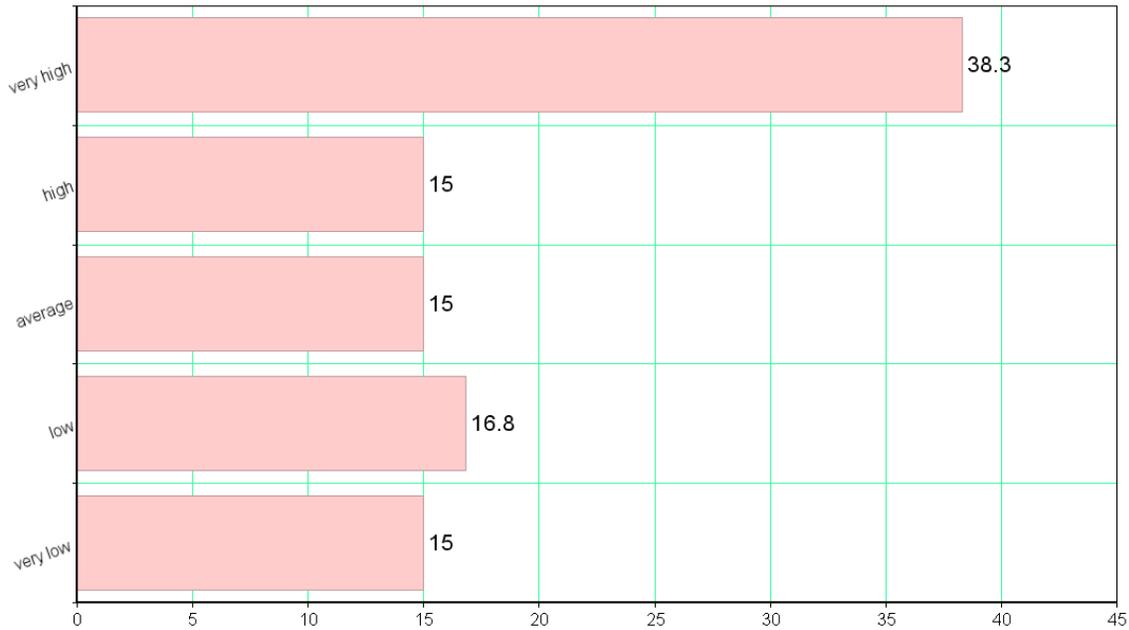
Figure 14: Infinite scrolling page level of preference

19. The flow supposedly makes the process of choosing online enjoyable (Trevinal and Stenger, 2014). In order to establish the level of enjoyment experienced by respondents, they were asked to what degree they felt good after they did a purchase online, and to what degree they felt good after they did a purchase offline. The comparison between these two would show the level of satisfaction post-purchase. 76.7% of respondents' answer range from "I somehow agree" to "I agree" to the fact that they feel good after purchasing offline, whereas 67.3% are also positive, meaning their answers varied from "I somehow agree" to "I agree" to feeling good after doing a purchase online in the case of online shopping. This shows that there is a slightly less strong satisfaction post-purchase when shopping clothes online, than offline.
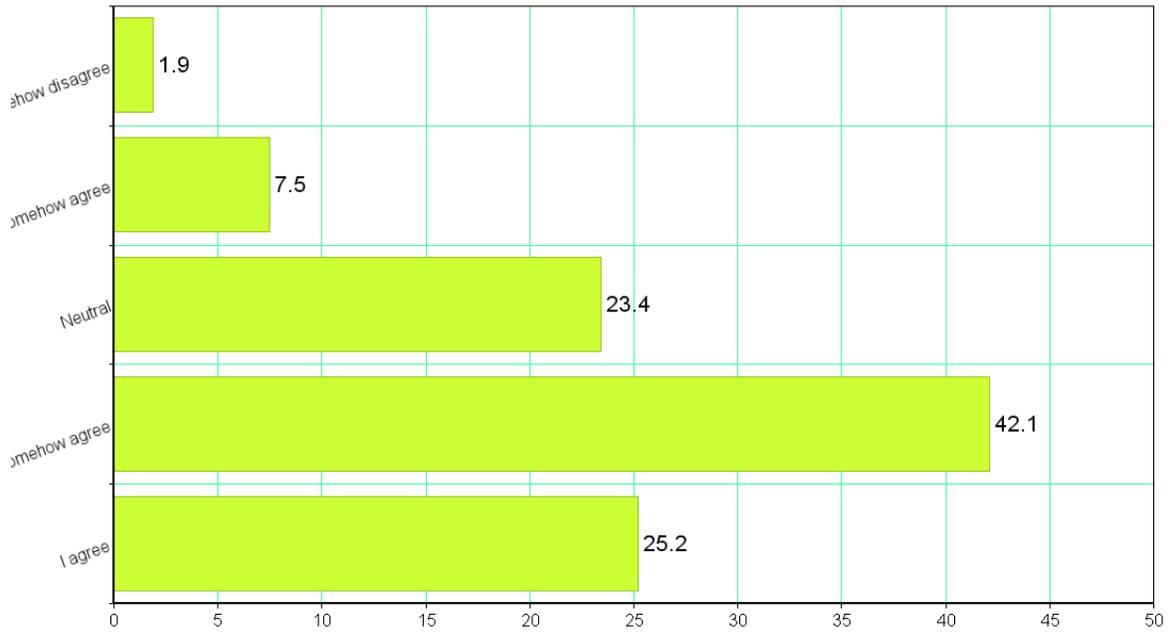
I FEEL GOOD AFTER DOING A PURCHASE ONLINE

Figure 15: Feeling good after purchasing online

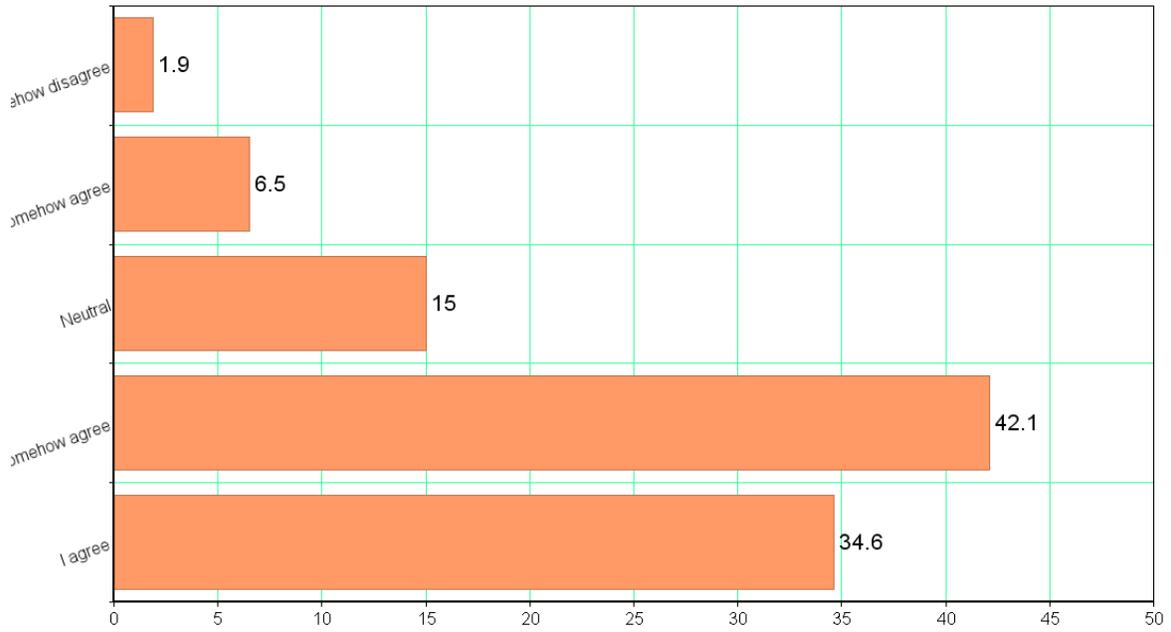**I FEEL GOOD AFTER DOING A PURCHASE OFFLINE**

Figure 16: Feeling good after purchasing offline

20. 56.1% of respondents have experienced the feeling of spending too much time on a webstore witout making any purchase. This is an important aspect because although consumers are experiencing a state of flow when online shopping / browsing, they are aware of the time spent online. Only 3.7 % of respondents actually know what they want so they do not waste any time.

21. When asked about how many hours they have spent on a website from the moment they first opened the website until they placed and order, respondents spent between 7 minutes and 30 days. This says that whereas there are decided consumers that make up their mind fast, there are others for whom online shopping can take more time.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT YOU SPENT PLENTY OF TIME ON AN ESHOP WITHOUT MAKING ANY PURCHASE?

■ yes, many times   ■ sometimes   □ rarely   ■ I know what I want so I don't waste any time   ■ other

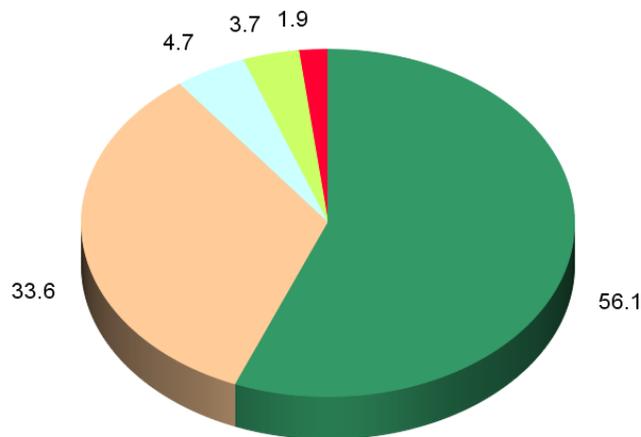*Figure 17: Time spent online without making any purchase*

22. To test if the respondents were maximizers or satisficers (Schwartz, 2004), it was important to ask them if they search a product they have in mind more than one e-store. 75.7% actually do want to make sure they cannot find anything better elsewhere, whereas only 17.8% order a product immediately after they have found it. This shows most of the respondents

are actually "maximizing" and not "satisficing", which usually leads to more loss of time, responsibility and commitment and less post-purchase satisfaction. (Schwartz, 2004; Dar-Nimrod et al., 2009)

23. In order to establish the level of anticipated regret, respondents were asked if they have ever placed products in the shopping cart and then abandoning it. A majority of 88.8% agreed that they had placed products in the shopping cart without actually making a purchase. Among the ones that had abandoned the shopping cart at least once, they were put an open-ended questions which led to the following results: 31.8% had answers that were interpreted as "anticipated regret" ("I decided I didn't need the items", "regret", "I wasn't certain whether to purchase or not" etc.) Other reasons for abandoning the shopping cart were price and shipping costs or that the respondents were "just browsing", the last reason being the lack of time to end the purchase.

5.6. Level of interest in fashion and demographics

24. A majority of respondents (54.2%) shopped clothes online more than ten times. The second group in terms of hierarchy (21.5%) shopped between one and four times, closely followed by the third group (20.6%) that purchased between four and ten times online. Only 3.7% of the respondents had never shopped online up to the point the questionnaire was spread, but since this research is focused on finding out the attitudes towards big variety of choice and not necessarily the process of an online purchase, their responses were deemed valid for the study.

25. It was considered important to determine the level of interest in fashion the respondents have so that the study is revelant for the fashion industry. 84.1% have an interest in fashion above average, with 45.8% claiming that their interest is rather high. Thus, the author considers that the respondents could be considered fashion consumers.
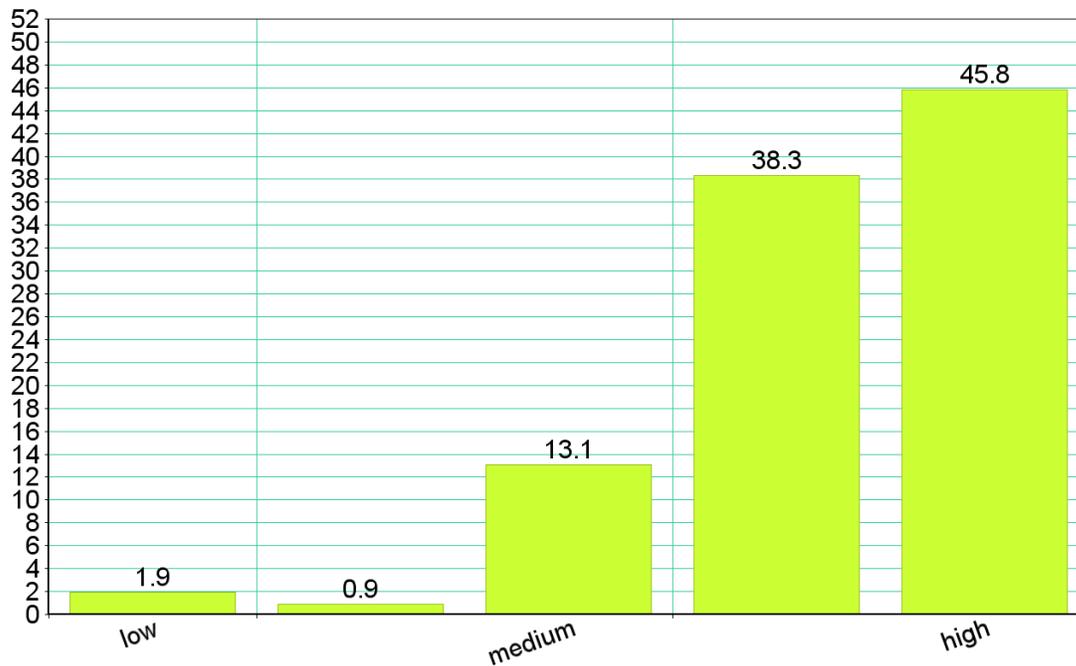
Figure 18: Level of interest in fashion

6. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1. *To what extent are consumers attracted by e-stores with great variety of products?*

6.1.1. Variety of choice is an attractive feature of an e-shop

Consumers are indeed looking for great product and brand variety in an online shop. The variety of sizing was one highlighted aspect the decided consumers were pointing at. They like the variety of online stores as they can find their sizes, especially when it comes to less regular features such as petite, plus-size or tall categories. Moreover, some brands are not available with physical stores in some countries, and the decided consumer knows he can find a shop and order apparel from that specific brand online. Due to local adaptations assortment strategies, a Hungarian consumer might not get to see the same product offering at an

international retailer as a Belgian one might see, and then he can, again, order it online. Indeed, a majority of respondents pointed out that what brought them to the e-shop is variety. Variety of choice is an important feature and unless a retailer has a very specific niche with a curated assortment (few choices), e-tailers should keep on leveraging on great assortments. Great variety of products is a good trigger for consumers as to bring them to an e-shop and should be a feature to be leveraged on. Furthermore, the fact that consumers appreciate an infinite scrolling feature shows that they get into a state of flow and exploration and enjoy browsing continuously. As shown by Trevinal and Stenger (2014), flow is consisted of the loss of self-consciousness, time distortion and the sensation of pleasure/gratification. The first two aspects were definitely confirmed through the present study meaning that respondents are aware of spending too much time on fashion e-shops, sometimes even without buying anything. Yet when consumers were asked if they feel good after doing a purchase online versus doing a purchase offline, it appeared they feel less good when purchasing online. This proves that choosing among extended alternatives is slightly less satisfactory.

6.1.2. Browsing and Exploration

It appears that many consumers engage in browsing and exploration prior to the actual purchase of a product. The high level of shopping cart abandonment is also due to the lack of decisiveness in consumers' decision-making processes, but this not necessarily mean that they will not return to finalize their purchase. Smith and Sivakumar (2014) have argued that the loss of self-consciousness, time distortion and the sensation of pleasure/gratification are characteristics of the web pages that bring consumers into a state of flow and based on this, retailers should rethink on how they entice customers in their "just browsing" process. A visit to an e-shop should not by any means be understood as purchase intentions, as the purchase happens only later in the process. The idea of variety works well with the flow concept and it should be further exploited. Consumers like to spend time on e-shops just browsing through the products and this would not happen should the online environment not be appealing.

2. How can great variety of products on e-stores become overwhelming?

6.2.1. Variety of choice is overwhelming

As much as variety of choice might seem attractive, it has disadvantages as well. Consumers report that variety of choice can be overwhelming and that leads to

postponing the purchase or even leaving the e-store. Variety of choice can distract consumers from what they want to buy. Baumol and Ide's theory (1956) is partially confirmed and apparently, the difficulty of shopping increases with the number of items stocked by the store. Consumers often have difficulties in making choices when shopping online and great variety of choice is sometimes distracting them from that they initially planned to buy. Schwartz (2004) states that the more options you have, the more likely it is that you will experience regret, either in anticipation of decisions or after them and this study shows that many consumers have, for example, abandoned shopping carts based on anticipated regret, and this is confirmed in the present study. The results confirm partially that it is more difficult to make choices online, since a majority of respondents prefer to buy offline if they are in a hurry.

6.2.2. The decisive versus the indecisive consumer

Anderson argues that niches have always been there but they were difficult to find. Niches exist on the assumption that there is a target market for them. Yet when consumers cannot make up their mind on a product, this shows that they are the "light", undecided consumers that go with the flow and usually follow a number of influencers. In the end, it is probably right that the popular products tend to attract the light users of a category (Elberse, 2008). These are the light consumers that are indecisive, cannot make up their mind, can get easily distracted in their search and even worse: spend more time than initially intended on an e-shop, eventually without even making up their mind. A majority of consumers have sometimes ended up buying something different from what they have initially planned which, again, says a lot about their purchasing intentions and the difficulty of making a decision. Instead of saving one's time, it has been reported that while planning a purchase, consumers spend plenty of time online without making any purchase. Some consumers take even longer time spans and end up placing an order in a few days after they have initially visited the store with the plan to purchase in mind. Most of the times, consumers ended up spending more time than they had initially planned visiting online stores. Yet, they enjoy the time spend online, looking for clothes.

On the other hand, consumers do no always visit online store decided to buy something. The sometimes just engage in browsing and exploring. When in a

hurry, it is surprising that there is a slight preference for consumer to shop offline rather than online.

Only 10.3% of the respondents do not feel they waste time when shopping clothes online because they know what they want. This actually shows that out of 107 respondents, only 10% are the "heavy" consumers, the decisive ones that do not get distracted by variety.

6.2.3. Anticipated Regret and Inaction Inertia

Kukar-Kinney (2009) showed that the online shopping cart, as opposed to the shopping cart used in physical stores, does not lead to purchase. It can be stated that a majority of consumers usually abandon shopping carts and, except from the situations where they want to see shipping costs, this is mostly due to anticipated regret: they change their mind, they are not sure, they will think it over etc. are usual motivations for abandoning shopping carts. They want to think it over before they place an order or they realized they do not need the product in the end. Variety of choice can lead to inaction inertia, which means that instead of making a choice that seems satisfying, consumers keep on looking for the better (Schwartz, 2004). It seems like a great number of respondents are leaving their shopping carts based on the fact that they might be experiencing anticipated regret.

3. *Is there any social influence in the process of product selection?*

6.3.1. Social Influence

Consumers are influenced by their peers and influencers in their decisions about purchases. They care about what their favourite blogs say and what their friend think. They even want to read reviews about the clothes they are about to buy, although, it has been often stated that fashion consumers feel the need to distinguish themselves. Although consumers might not feel it necessary for an e-shop to have shareable content, based on the sources they look for when seeking e-stores, they are influenced by blogs, online press, friends and peers. On one hand, Anderson's perspective on the importance of review system and blogs – which he calls "consumer wisdom" is confirmed within the present study. Surprisingly, consumers do not find it important for websites to have shareable content. This does not necessarily mean they do not share the content of a website with their friends by sending them the link of the store, for example. This was

interesting to see based on the fact that they agree that they are influenced by their peers in their choice of an e-store. Based on the present study we partially disagree with Trevinal and Stenger (2014) in stating that "consumers chat about, comment and compare the products they consider buying over social media channels".

7.CONCLUSIONS

7.1.VARIETY OF CHOICE: A MODERN PARADOX

Responding to the main research question whether variety is benefitting or warding off consumers, this research shows that variety could ward off consumers, but it is a must for e-tailers, especially for big ones nevertheless.

It is not that consumers actually need variety in their choice-making, but when presented with a plethora of choices, they do desire it. We can conclude from this study that nothing can beat variety. Consumers are actually seeking variety online and they do a lot of browsing before the purchase. From a retailers' perspective, variety can backfire, making a small numbers of consumers feel overwhelmed that they even leave e-stores. The hypotheses are just partially confirmed since a large part of consumers enjoy variety and browsing.

At the end of the survey, where respondents could further express their position regarding online shopping and the variety of choice, one respondent said it best:

> *"It is a great modern paradox that we do have more choices indeed, which are meant to make us more satisfied and to increase our experience in buying, but that slows down the process and adds on an extra layer of stress that we are often not aware of. It also makes us less happy overall, in contrast with the intended purpose of having high diversity" (quoted from the consumer survey, 2014).*

It is vital that e-tailers carry more products online that offline, and those products have to come in all sizes. The inability to provide wide assortments can lead to dissatisfaction, yet the idea of offering limitless assortment can do great damage and can make some consumers leave e-stores. On the other hand, depriving consumers of wide variety of products affects the sense of variety that might have actually brought consumers to the store in the first place. Somehow, creating a brand that is distinct might make consumers not go to further explore other sites

since they are convinced that what they found on that particular website cannot be found elsewhere. The long tail theory is valid but variety of choice should be added to popular e-tailers' assortment since consumers prefer buying from popular e-tailers. Thus, Elberse was right in saying that popular products (in this case, retailers) attract a majority of (light) consumers. In the end, the paradox of choice theory is partially confirmed through this study: consumers want choice and although they might get distracted by it, most of them enjoy making product choices online.

7.2.Implications for the Retailing Sector

The paradox of choice variety is quite challenging for businesses since it does not clearly state if variety is and advantage or a disadvantage for business. The present study shows that consumers want variety on online shops but in terms of decision-making great variety is of no help. Somehow, e-tailers are turning consumers into maximizers that always keep on looking for something better and, in the end, they do not even experience high levels of satisfaction. Retailers must aid consumers in their choice-making through filters, categories, by inquiring them about their preferences before they start browsing, as they might get "lost" in the variety and end up being overwhelmed. With regard to the theory of long tail economy, again, it is true, indeed, that retailers should provide choice to more tastes, yet they must make sure that there is a market for the product they want to add into their offering and that specific consumer is decisive in his choice-making and will not get distracted by other options when he sees them. The present study showed that only 10% of consumers are decisive in their choice-making and online shopping. This leaves a 90% of consumers having difficulties in decision-making, which again means that they need to be helped in defining their preferences and enticed by pleasing, burden-free shopping experiences that keep them from leaving e-stores.

7.3. Limitations of the Study

One of the most significant limitations to the study was the fact that the questionnaire had different types of measurement scales: multiple-choice questions with one possible answer, multiple-choice questions with more than one answer possible, Likert-questions etc. This made it difficult to compare the questions and to make correlations between different questions. Another limitation would be that whereas the theoretical section was complex, the

questionnaire did not measure properly all concepts from the literature review, or at least not equally.

The present study sought general attitudes regarding variety of choice in fashion e-tailing. A problem in general with surveys and questionnaires is that respondents answer based on their idea of how they would think, act and process information in an online shopping context, yet without actually finding themselves in that situation. There could be an attitude-behaviour gap that could be missed when employing a questionnaire. Lavrakas (2008) explains this is the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their "true" answer (p. 825). In spite of this, the fact that the answers were anonymous might have reduced the "self-censorship" of respondents.

Recommendation systems and search filters have not been researched in the present study, although they represent an important part of what e-commerce and the long tail mean today, and probably the only way to assist consumers in their search and make their navigation on big e-stores smooth.

7.4. Future Research
This paper sets the stage for research on variety of choice in fashion e-tailing. Future research could be focused on more specific aspects that have not been tapped into within the present study. For example, one fertile area could be choice filtering. This feature of online shops is crucial in the process of decision-making but due to limited scope and length it was not tackled in the present study. More research could be done on the personas of maximizers and satisficers and how do they operate online and their level of satisfaction post-purchase. With regard to the long tail economy and its pros and cons, it would be too simplistic to state that one performs better than another, still, it could be researched in what conditions long tail works and in what conditions it does not.

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9.APPENDIX

9.1. Questionnaire

"This is a survey related to the online shopping of clothes and it will take about 10 minutes of your time to complete. Please think about your recent apparel purchases online. If you haven't bought any clothes online but considered it, you are also welcome to fill out the questionnaire.

Don't forget that ALL questions refer to the online shopping of clothes/fashion/apparel, so even if you've experienced shopping online other types of products, tick only the answers that apply to your experience with apparel online shopping.
Your (complete) response is highly appreciated and will lead to more accurate results.
THANK YOU for being honest in your answers,
Mădălina, the author"

1. Have you ever bought apparel online?

Never
Once / up to 4 times
4 to 10 times
More than 10 times

2. What do you like about shopping apparel online? (maximum 3 answers)

I can find stuff easier
It's faster than going to a shop
I can look for reviews about the product I am about to buy
Variety of products
It's comfortable
I can shop anytime I want
I can shop from anywhere I am
I can find more information about a product online
Wide variety of brands
There are cheaper products online

3. Other things that you like about online shopping that were not previously mentioned:
……..

4. How important you find the following on online shopping fashion sites:

	Not important at all	Not so important	average	Quite important	Very important, crucial
The e-shop has to be fun and entertaining					
A fashion online store has to provide me with great customer experience					
The content of a fashion store has to be shareable on social media					
Reviews and recommendations are important for fashion products that I want to buy					
The image/visuals have to be of high quality					
The design and layout of the e-shop have to be appealing					
The e-shop has to be popular in order for me to shop on it					

5. Do you prefer buying clothes from big e-stores (Amazon, ASOS, Zara, eBay etc.) or do you prefer smaller online shops?

Big e-stores
Small e-stores
Both

6. Think of the e-stores you usually visit. Do you prefer e-stores that have infite scrolling or e-stores that have products on separate pages (after every 20 products, a new page and so on)? (Facebook and Zara's online shop have infinite scrolling websites, number 3 on the scale means neutral)

7. Infinite scrolling e-stores -----1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Separate pages

8. You have decided to buy a bag/belt and you want to press "order", but you cannot find any info on the company's webpage about the company's return policy. Considering you very much like the product, are you still going to buy it?

9. Yes, I don't care about the return policy
No, I want to be able to return the product in case I don't want it anymore
No, because I want to be able to return the product in case it is faulty
Other: _____

10. Remembering your last purchase, was it easy or difficult to make a choice when shopping online?

11. Choosing clothes online is easy-----1------2-----3-----4-----5----- Choosing clothes online is difficult/complicated, takes time

12. We have all visited shopping websited without actually making a purchase. Have you ever placed products in the shopping cart and then abandoned it?

Yes
No

13. If yes, why? (you weren't planning to shop anyway, it was taking too much time etc.)
……

14. Have you ever had difficulties in choosing products when shopping online?

Yes
No
I don't rememer/care

15. How often do you visit fashion online stores with other reasons than to shop? (looking for inspiration, making wishlists etc.)

16. Once a week or more
Once a month / up to 3 times a month
Rarely
Never, I just visit online fashion stores when I want to buy

17. One (specific) aspect you like about a fashion/clothing online store:
……………..

18. When you know what kind of product you want and you found it on a website, will you look it up on other online stores as well?

Yes, I want to make sure I can't find anything better elsewhere
No, I found it so I'm ordering it immediately
Other: _____

19. Do you find the process of shopping clothes online complicated?

Yes

No
Other: _____

20. Have you ever felt that there were so many products on a webshop that it was
difficult for you to make a decision?

Yes
Yes! And I left the shop.
No way! I enjoyed every minute of looking for clothes and then making a choice.
I don't remember
Other: _____

21. Please think about the following statements and to what extent they apply to you:
(please check one box for each statement):

	I agree	I somehow agree	Neutral	I somehow disagree	I disagree
It is getting more and more difficult to make choices online.					
Sometimes choosing online becomes so overwhelming that I just leave the store.					
I enjoy spending time online, looking for clothes.					
I sometimes share pictures with/message my friends on social media about the product that I am about to buy.					
It is easier to make product choice offline, in traditional stores.					
I feel good after I did a purchase online.					
I feel good after I did a purchase offline.					
Great variety of choice is sometimes distracting me from what I want to buy.					

I sometimes end up purchasing a different product from what I had in mind when I first checked the e-shop.					
I sometimes end up spending more time than I initially intended on online stores.					
It is easier to make product choices online.					

22. It is known that the Internet is a great distraction and it can lead to a lot of procrastination. Have you ever felt that you spent plenty of time on a webstore without making a purchase?

Yes, many times
Sometimes
Rarely
I know what I want to I don't waste time
Other: _____

23. Remembering your last purchase, please make an estimation in minutes of the time it took you from the moment you opened the website until you purchased the product: _____

24. When you are in a hurry, you prefer shopping:

Online
Offline

25. To what extent do the following apply to you: (please check one box for each statement):

	I agree	I somehow agree	Neutral	I somehow disagree	I disagree
I am not always planning to buy when I visit an online store.					
Shopping clothes online has saved me a lot of time.					
I like that there is more variety online.					

Shopping online is more democratic.					
Great variety of products is an attractive aspect in an e-store.					

26. Where did you hear about the fashion e-stores you like? (maximum 2)

Friends/peers
Colleagues from work/university
People that I find inspirational/influencers
Traditional press
Online press (including blogs)
Word-of-mouth/recommendations
Regular (offline) store that launched an online shop
Other: _____

27. On a scale from 1 to 5, please indicate your interest in fashion:

Low interest -------1-------2------3------4-----5 High interest

28. Are you male of female?
Male
Female

How old are you?

29. Under 20 or 20
21-25
26-30
31-35
35-40
41-50
51-60
Older

30. What country are you currently living in?
……..

31. Anything that you would like to add related to shopping clothes online?
……..