TIME FOR A CLOSET CLEAN-OUT?

– CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES RELATED TO CLOTHING DISPOSAL

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to explore how consumers reason through closet clean-outs and clothing disposal decisions, how they perceive their knowledge of disposal practices and how habits, potential uncertainties, values, emotions and relationships with clothing influence these decisions. The qualitative research approach was applied using semi-structured interviews with consumers in Sweden and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the empirical material. Theoretical frameworks and concepts that were used were the Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Practice Theory and Product Attachment in order to analyze the given empirical material and to demonstrate how individual intentions and perceptions interact with social and material conditions surrounding clothing disposal. The findings show that clothing disposal is not a single or linear decision-making process, but instead an ongoing process involving evaluation, uncertainty, emotional negotiation and reconsideration. The interviewees generally demonstrated knowledge of common disposal options and positive attitudes towards responsible disposal, however practical barriers such as limited time, energy and accessibility to disposal infrastructure could prevent intentions creating a behavior. Emotional attachment, consumption habits, social relationships and meanings attached to clothing further influenced whether clothing were kept or removed and how they were further disposed of.

This study is written in English.

Keywords: Clothing Disposal, Consumer Behavior, Closet Clean-Out, Social Practices, Emotional Attachment

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Table of contents

1 INTRODUCTION ..... - 1 -
1.1 BACKGROUND ..... - 1 -
1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION ..... - 2 -
1.3 PURPOSE ..... - 3 -
1.3.1 Research questions ..... - 4 -
2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ..... - 5 -
2.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLOTHING DISPOSAL RESEARCH ..... - 5 -
2.2 CLOTHING DISPOSAL AS PART OF THE CONSUMPTION PROCESS ..... - 5 -
2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DRIVERS OF CLOTHING DISPOSAL ..... - 7 -
2.4 EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF CLOTHING ..... - 8 -
2.5 CONTEXTUAL AND PRODUCT-RELATED INFLUENCES ON CLOTHING DISPOSAL ..... - 9 -
2.6 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND EMPIRICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH ..... - 11 -
2.7 IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAP ..... - 12 -
3 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ..... - 14 -
3.1 THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR ..... - 14 -
3.2 PRODUCT ATTACHMENT ..... - 16 -
3.3 SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY ..... - 17 -
4 METHODOLOGY ..... - 19 -
4.1 RESEARCH APPROACH ..... - 19 -
4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN ..... - 20 -
4.2.1 Qualitative research ..... - 20 -
4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews ..... - 20 -
4.2.3 Sampling Strategy and participants ..... - 21 -
4.3 DATA COLLECTION ..... - 23 -
4.4 DATA ANALYSIS ..... - 24 -
4.5 QUALITY OF RESEARCH AND METHOD REFLECTION ..... - 25 -
4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ..... - 26 -
5 RESULTS & ANALYSIS ..... - 28 -
5.1 THE PRACTICES OF CLOSET CLEAN OUTS ..... - 28 -
5.2 EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLOTHES ..... - 33 -
5.2.1 Relationship to fashion, identity and consumption ..... - 33 -
5.2.2 Nostalgia, memories and sentimental value ..... - 34 -
5.2.3 Favourite garments and attachment through utility and identity expression ..... - 35 -
5.2.4 Emotional durability and repair ..... - 36 -
5.2.5 Favorite garments, boredom and shifting attachment ..... - 37 -
5.3 VALUE AND RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND USE ..... - 38 -
5.4 NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTIES IN DISPOSAL DECISIONS ..... - 40 -
6 DISCUSSION ..... - 44 -
7 CONCLUSION ..... - 48 -
7.1 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH ..... - 49 -
REFERENCES ..... - 50 -
APPENDIX ..... - 58 -
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE ..... - 58 -

1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the study's introduction and background of the research topic which includes information regarding consumption, short lifecycles and disposal methods. It moves further into a problem discussion where the motivation of conducting the study is presented and where the chapter later ends in defining the purpose and the chosen research questions.

1.1 Background

Time for a closet clean-out? Sorting through overflowing wardrobes and deciding which garments to keep, donate or discard is a familiar experience for many people (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). What often appears to be a simple and even satisfying routine can involve piles of clothing being removed from wardrobes and difficult decisions about where those garments should go next. The process has also become a visible part of contemporary culture, where videos on platforms such as TikTok frequently document "Wardrobe decluttering", "Closet detoxes" or "Closet clean out hacks", showing large amounts of clothing leaving people's wardrobes (Cowgirlgodfish, 2026; Hisimpsy, 2026; Kiyana.ebrahimi, 2026). One video humorously captures the dilemma with the text: "When you've finished the wardrobe clear out but now you have to bag it up and decide what's charity, rubbish and Vinted (I want to die)" (Livpughx, 2026). Before TikTok, closet clean-out practices were influenced by Marie Kondo's famous method KonMari. The method impacted people's approach to doing a closet clean-out where it encouraged individuals to only keep items that spark joy and to discard, donate or recycle the rest (KonMari, n.d).

While these decisions may seem small and personal, they reflect a broader pattern of how clothing moves through households and disposal systems. Clothing and textile products are amongst the most intensely consumed goods, yet their lifespan is getting shorter (Naturvårdsverket, 2025a). While clothing production has doubled in a short period of time, between 2000 and 2015, the number of times a garment is worn before it is thrown away decreased by 36% (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). In Sweden, the yearly textile consumption was counted to 13.6kg per person (Naturvårdsverket, 2025b). While the yearly disposal of textiles equals 11kg per person (Klimat- och näringslivsdepartementet, 2023). Garments are often discarded long before reaching their physical end of life, often due to changes in personal preferences, poor fit or perceived value rather than material failure (Laitala, 2014).

Garments are bought whenever wanted and often without considering the need for them. Some garments are loved, worn frequently and kept for many years while others are used only a few times before being forgotten and losing their value to the consumer (Fletcher, 2014). The rise of fast fashion has contributed substantially to this problem by offering more trend-driven, cheaper and low-quality clothing. The business model encourages consumers to purchase more frequently and replace as fast. Garments are bought for the sake of newness, and sometimes for the idea of only wearing it to one specific event (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Joung, 2014; Khan, Wang and Padhye, 2023; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009).

Deciding what to do with unwanted garments is in the hands of the consumer but clearly not an easy decision. Clothing disposal can be influenced by a variety of interrelated factors which include practical, psychological and situational influences (Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Laitala,

2014). At the same time, consumers may lack information and knowledge about available disposal methods and what can and cannot be donated or recycled (Joung, 2014; Paço, Leal Filho, Ávila and Dennis, 2021).

New regulations are also a part of undergoing change. On first of January 2025, new EU requirements under the Waste Framework Directive (Directive (EU) 2018/851) became applicable for EU member states that affected the sorting of textile waste (European Parliament and Council, 2018).In Sweden this change meant that textiles could no longer be sorted into residual household waste. Instead, everything had to be sorted into dedicated collection systems, usable textiles into secondhand collections and non-useable textile waste to recycling facilities (Naturvårdsverket, 2025a). However, this implementation faced some challenges as well. Second hand and collection centers were quickly overfilled with products that could not be resold or materials that could not be recycled. Consumers were seen making the wrong decisions when choosing how to dispose of their textile products resulting in systematic errors of management in the municipalities. As a consequence of the lack of ability to manage this, an exception was introduced on first of October 2025, allowing certain damaged or contaminated textiles to be sorted into the residual waste again (Naturvårdsverket, 2025a).

What happens after the closet clean-out is not only a matter of waste sorting. It is a multifaceted consumer practice embedded in everyday life. Decisions about whether to keep, donate, resell or discard garments are shaped not only by environmental awareness but also by meanings, emotions, personal values and routines. While textile waste and disposal are increasingly discussed, less attention has been given to how consumers themselves experience and navigate these decisions.

1.2 Problem discussion

The growing volume of textile waste has increasingly become a pressing sustainability issue, closely related to increased clothing consumption and shorter lifecycles. As textile production and consumption continue to rise, so does the amount of clothing that reaches the post-use stage, where consumers must decide whether garments should be kept, reused, donated, sold, recycled or discarded. Large volumes of textile waste still end up in landfill or incineration despite the fact that reuse and recycling are considered more sustainable (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Wang et al., 2020; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017).

Clothing disposal behavior is shaped by various factors. Research has identified a range of disposal channels and factors influencing how consumers manage unwanted clothing. While knowledge and environmental awareness are often highlighted, disposal decisions are also influenced by convenience, accessibility, garment attributes and condition, storage space, habits and economic considerations (Degenstein et al., 2020; Jahura and Sadachar, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Koch and Domina, 1997; Laitala, 2014). Also, people may be emotionally attached to their clothes, garments may carry symbolic value and personal meaning which can make it harder to let them go or affect the preferred way of disposal (Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Vieira and Fonseca, 2021). Clothing disposal needs to be understood in relation to the use phase. Research has shown that garments are often discarded before their physical end of life because of poor fit, low perceived value, changing preferences, no longer seen as useful or just boredom (Laitala, 2014; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013). At the same time, clothes that have been worn often, cared for, repaired or emotionally valued may be managed differently

from garments that were rarely used or quickly replaced (Degenstein et al., 2020; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013).

Hence, it seems that use-phase affects the disposal decision more than what previous research has yet explored. How consumers use, value and relate to their garments seems to shape the final decision of disposal. One video found on TikTok further displayed this problem saying, “When I try to clean out my wardrobe but I’m emotionally attached to my clothes” (Malintomkins, 2025). This video had 29k likes and comments were saying “girl same”, “literally”, “that’s so me” and “omg so real”.

Other studies have also revealed that disposal may function as a part of continued consumption. Clothes are not always removed because they are worn out, but rather because they no longer align with current trends or personal taste. Further limited storage makes consumers get rid of clothes in order to bring in new purchases (Kwon, Choo and Kim, 2020). In that sense, clearing out clothing can create room for something new which makes disposal a part of the continuous cycle of consumption, replacement and renewal. This was also evident when researching closet clean out on TikTok as videos for example mentioned “clear out time, need to make space for a fresh spring wardrobe”, “One in, one out”, “so I officially run out of hangers in my closet, which means we have to do a spring closet clean-out”, “Helping my mum clear out her clothes, to make room for new The RealReal items” (Elirallo, 2025).

However, consumers are often unsure about how and where clothing should be disposed of as well as what can actually be donated or recycled and what happens to garments after they have left their household. Research has revealed a general lack of knowledge about disposal practices. Misinformation and uncertainty may affect whether consumers view garments as still having a usable life or as waste (Joung, 2014; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Norum, 2017; Paço, Leal Filho, Ávila and Dennis, 2021). This confusion was also highlighted by Naturvårdsverket (2025a), who reported that consumers have recently been seen to make the wrong decisions when choosing how to dispose of their textile products as a result of unclear directions. This suggests that disposal decisions are not only shaped by the available options, but also how consumers understand, interpret and make sense of them in practice. Further, these decisions seem to be made under some level of uncertainty.

This suggests that clothing disposal is a complex decision-making process guided by an interplay between emotions, relationship to garments, practical considerations, norms, routines and uncertainty. Taken together, research shows that clothing disposal is shaped by a collection of practical, emotional and contextual factors. It is known that consumers have access to different disposal options and that one’s relationship with a specific garment and use phase experiences seem to influence how clothing disposal is managed. At the same time, there is limited understanding of how consumers themselves perceive and reason through disposal decisions. Specifically, less is known about how consumers experience their own knowledge, navigate through the uncertainty and how emotions, values and relationships to garments take place and are expressed within their reasoning process. There is also limited insight into how consumers understand and make sense of the changing systems and regulatory pressures. This creates a need to research more than what consumers actually do and expand this with how they understand and navigate clothing disposal from their own perspective.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how consumers navigate through the practices of closet clean-outs and resonate about disposal decisions. The study examines how relationships with garments, emotions, values, habits, perceived knowledge and potential uncertainties, impact and shape the decision making process.

1.3.1 Research questions

Connecting to this study's purpose the following research questions have been established and will be answered throughout this study:

RQ1. How do consumers reason through their closet-cleanouts and clothing disposal decisions?

RQ2. How do consumers perceive their knowledge of clothing disposal?

RQ3. How do habits, values, emotions and relationships with garments influence clothing disposal decisions?

2 Previous research

This chapter reviews previous research on the disposal of textile products and closet clean-out practices. Firstly, the topic is presented based on its different directions and how it has evolved. The consumption process and the role of disposal within this process are then explained followed by a review of its psychological and social drivers, how emotional attachment and contextual factors shape these practices. Lastly, previous methodological approaches are summarized to lead into this study's research gap. The purpose of the chapter is to showcase the current study's position within the chosen field and identify key perspectives and methods previously used.

2.1 The development of clothing disposal research

Clothing disposal and post-use management have been addressed across consumer behavior-, waste management- and environmental psychology research and has evolved from each stream considerably over time. Early studies on product disposal came from consumer behavior research during the 1970s and 1980s, where disposal was outlined as the final stage in the consumption cycle. The primary focus for these studies was to understand how consumers remove products from their households and identify different disposal pathways such as reuse, donating, reselling or discarding. Here, the topic was mainly approached from a consumer decision-making perspective where clothing was not yet included in the products studied and limited attention was given to environmental implications (Hanson, 1980; Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst, 1977).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, research on disposal increasingly focused on an environmental perspective and was more addressed in connection to environmental psychology and studies of sustainable consumption. Researchers began during this time to explore psychological and social drivers of environmentally responsible behavior, including attitudes, norms, and perceived behavior control (Bagozzi and Dabholkar, 1994; Birstwistle and Moore, 2007; Koch and Domina, 1997; Koch and Domina, 1999).

In more recent years, clothing disposal has gained attention connected to fashion studies and sustainability research as a response to the concept of fast fashion evolving and increasing concerns about the environmental impacts of the fashion industry. The focus can be seen to be expanded beyond disposal decisions alone to include the role of the use phase of garments, emotional attachment to clothing and the broader systems that shape post-use management. As a result, clothing disposal has gotten the common understanding to be a complex process influenced by psychological, social and contextual factors (Joung, 2014; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024).

2.2 Clothing disposal as part of the consumption process

Research on clothing disposal behavior is growing alongside increasing interest in textile waste and sustainable consumption. Within sustainable clothing consumption, the phase of disposal is a much less explored area than the purchase phase (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Laitala, 2014). Within consumer behavior research, clothing disposal has long been conceptualized as part of the broader consumption process, encompassing acquisition, use and disposition.

A foundational framework frequently referenced within the field is the product disposition model developed by Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977). This model introduced and conceptualized disposal as an integral stage of consumption and identifies multiple pathways through which consumers may remove products from their possession, including donating, reselling, storing or discarding. It further distinguishes between keeping products, temporarily disposing of them and permanently discarding them. This perspective positions disposal not merely as an end-of-life action, but as a decision-making process embedded within the consumption process.

Building on Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977) framework, following research on clothing disposal has examined how these conceptual categories work in practice. Studies show that garments tend to follow similar yet context dependent disposal pathways. Commonly identified channels include donation to charities, resale through second-hand markets, passing them to friends or family, textile recycling, reuse, repurposing and discarding clothing as household waste. These alternatives differ in terms of environmental impact, value retention and perceived convenience (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Cruz-Cardenas and del Val Nunez, 2016; Degenstein et al., 2020; Jahura and Sadachar, 2025; Koch and Domina 1999; Norum, 2017; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017).

Despite these differences, the previous literature has consistently shown that consumers' choices of disposal channel are influenced by a set of key factors. In particular, economic considerations, environmental awareness and convenience are identified as central drivers of disposal behavior. Consumers motivated by economic value are more likely to resell or reuse garments, whereas those who prioritize convenience tend to choose simpler options, such as discarding the garments directly as waste. Lower levels of environmental awareness are also associated with less sustainable disposal choices. These patterns are consistently observed across multiple studies (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Wang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

The circular economy is widely presented in the literature as a framework for shifting towards sustainability and more sustainable consumption by transitioning from linear to closed-loop systems, where the value of products is maintained for as long as possible. Within this perspective, consumption is not limited to acquisition but includes a range of practices such as reuse, repair and disposal. Accordingly, research has investigated consumer behavior across the entire consumption process, including attitudes and intentions towards sustainable consumption as well as factors influencing sustainable behavior from purchase to end-of-life management (Chaturvedi, Kulshreshtha and Tripathi, 2020; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024).

In this context, consumers are conceptualized as active participants in a circular system, often referred to as circular consumers (Rabiu and Jaeger-Erben, 2022), who contribute to value retention through circular practices. Therefore, from this perspective disposal is not treated as a final step but as a critical decision point within the consumption process, where garments may be redirected into different pathways to extend their lifecycle (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013).

Research on clothing disposal also highlights the role of purchasing behavior in shaping waste generation. Disposal is often understood in relation to the production and acquisition of garments, as waste generation is linked to the volume of products entering the consumption

cycle. Accordingly, consumers influence environmental outcomes not only through disposal decisions but also through purchasing patterns, which affect the overall quantity of garments that eventually require end-of-life management (Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Vidal-Ayuso, Akhmedova and Jaca, 2023). Hedlund et al. (2020) explain that preventing waste involves both minimizing the quantities produced which are connected to the companies involved but also through promoting reuse at the end-of-life which is directed towards the consumers. The literature also agrees that it is essential to understand why consumers choose to discard directly rather than recycle or do any other circular economy activity for functioning or repairable items. In order to advance waste prevention strategies within circular economy transitions (Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Vidal-Ayuso, Akhmedova and Jaca, 2023).

Scholars have emphasized that the environmental impact of fashion cannot be fully understood by only focusing on the production and purchasing processes but must also account for how garments are used and eventually disposed of, as an equal part of the responsibility is held by the consumers. Consumers influence environmental outcomes through decisions related to the amount, frequency and type of clothing purchased, how these are used, maintained and how they are disposing of them while they no longer want or need them. Consequently, disposal is increasingly conceptualized as an integral phase of the clothing lifecycle together with acquisition and use (Gwozdz, Steensen Nielsen and Müller, 2017; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021).

While early studies focused on categorizing what consumers do with unwanted products, more recent research has increasingly shifted towards understanding why these decisions are made. This shift portrays a development within consumer behavior research, where disposal is no longer treated as a purely functional stage in the consumption process but as a complex and reflective process embedded in everyday consumption practices. Researchers have begun to study how consumers evaluate different disposal options, how they justify their choices and how prior experiences from the acquisition and use phases influence disposal decisions. This evolving perspective highlights the importance of moving beyond only describing disposal behavior towards a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes underlying clothing disposal (Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst, 1977; Koch and Domina, 1999; Kundu and Sharma, 2025; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024).

2.3 Psychological and social drivers of clothing disposal

Research on clothing disposal has increasingly investigated perspectives from psychology and sustainable consumption research to explain why consumers dispose in the way that they do and not always in line with environmental goals. Within this stream disposal behavior is often studied in relation to attitudes, values, social norms and emotions rather than only practical access or information. Previous studies on clothing disposal show that consumers with stronger environmental awareness and attitudes are more likely to choose disposal options such as donating, reusing, reselling or recycling instead of just throwing garments away (Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Wu et al., 2023). This is also shown in studies based on the theory of planned behavior and similar behavioral models, which shows that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are factors influencing sustainable intentions and behaviors. The theory of planned behavior has previously been widely used to study sustainable purchase behaviors, but a few studies have now also started to adopt this theory when also studying disposal behavior (Liu et al., 2022; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017).

At the same time, literature has shown that positive attitudes do not necessarily result in sustainable behavior in practice. This is often discussed in relation to an intention-behavior gap or value-action gap, meaning that consumers might express environmental concern and willingness to support sustainable practices in principle without consistently acting accordingly in everyday situations (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Joung, 2014; Lewe and Niinimäki, 2026; Park and Lin, 2020; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Studies indicate that even when consumers have positive attitudes toward sustainable disposal, they may still fail to act accordingly if they feel uncertain about available disposal options (Joung, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017). In clothing disposal research, this is closely related to how consumers understand donation systems, textile recycling, resale channels and sorting practices. Respondents in previous studies have reported lack of awareness about available disposal options and what actually happens to the disposed garments (Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Norum, 2017; Paço et al., 2021). This makes the distinction between perceived and actual knowledge particularly important in the context of clothing disposal, as consumers often face unclear systems, rules and available channels (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009; Norum, 2017; Paço et al., 2021).

The concept of knowledge has been prominent in previous research when connected to sustainable consumption (Blazquez et al., 2020; Markkula and Moisander, 2012; Zhang, Zhang and Zhou, 2021). In Blazquez et al. (2020) research when studying intentions towards sustainable fashion practices, they used Theory of Planned Behavior as their theoretical framework but choose to add the dimension of consumer's knowledge. This was due that it was stated that it could affect the intention and also the behavior in sustainable fashion consumption. Zhang, Zhang and Zhou (2021) explained that claimed and actual knowledge regarding sustainability do not always relate and it is only the actual knowledge that contributes to the awareness. Markkula and Moisander (2012) mention a knowledge-action gap in their research where discursive confusion is seen as the most prominent reason that this gap exists. This confusion could arise due to multiple existence of discourses that say contradicting things regarding sustainable consumption.

Another theme is the role of social influence. Previous research indicates that clothing disposal decisions are also shaped by social expectations, subjective norms and influenced by friends, family, celebrities and peers. This means that what is seen as an appropriate or responsible way to dispose of clothing can often be socially defined (Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2022; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). At the same time, social influence can affect behaviors more indirectly as certain disposal practices become habitual and routine within everyday life. From this perspective, clothing disposal can be understood as a part of broader social practices, where behavior is shaped by routines and shared meanings and not only by an individual's own preferences (Hedlund and Jaca, 2025). This is connected in Hedlund and Jacas (2025) research where they use the Social Practice Theory. This theory together with Theory of Planned Behavior is a well applied framework within consumer behavior and consumption research, as it is seen to be suited well in this context. It is explained to offer a comprehensive perspective where it accounts for both contextual and material dimensions essential to understanding behaviors related to product management in the end-of-life phase.

2.4 Emotional attachment and symbolic meanings of clothing

Research increasingly highlights the emotional and identity-related dimensions of clothing disposal. Clothes carry value related symbolic meaning, memories and emotional attachment which can affect how consumers manage their garments (Guy and Banim, 2000; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013). Studies suggest that emotional attachment, nostalgia and perceived emotional value can affect consumers intentions to retain garments for longer or choose disposal options that preserve value, such as donating, passing items on or resell, rather than just throwing them away as waste (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges, 2009; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Vieira and Fonseca, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). At the same time, emotional detachment and changing relationships between clothing and identity may also trigger disposal. For example, boredom, declining social fit and a weakened connection between the consumer's identity and the garment have been shown to contribute to clothing disposal even when items are still physically usable (Abdallah et al., 2024; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Kwon, Choo, and Kim, 2020).

Since consumers often retain garments because of emotional, symbolic or identity related meanings attached to them, studies argue that clothing disposal cannot be understood only through environmental, practical or functional factors but also by how clothes play a role in consumers' lives, their emotions and identities. Research has shown that consumers may keep garments despite not using them because the clothing represents memories, important life periods, aspirations or imagined future selves (Bye and McKinney, 2007; Guy and Banim, 2000; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013). Emotional attachment has further been discussed by Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013) as a potential factor for extending garment lifetimes and postponing disposal. Stronger person-product relationships may encourage consumers to care for garments longer, repair them and delay replacement. Emotional attachment, functional satisfaction and social meanings associated with clothing may contribute to longer use or alternative disposal pathways such as repurposing them or transferring them within social networks (Fletcher, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Lee, 2025; Niinimäki and Koskinen, 2011). Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013) also suggest that attachment does not necessarily lead to active use, as some highly meaningful garments are preserved primarily for their symbolic or emotional value rather than practical function.

2.5 Contextual and product-related influences on clothing disposal

Clothing disposal behavior is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors which includes such as previously mentioned psychological but also, contextual conditions, product-related characteristics and systematic. It has been shown that clothing disposal behavior is not always determined by a single factor but rather an interaction between psychological, practical and situational influences. Understanding these factors that shape whether garments are reused, recycled, stored or discarded as waste can be better understood (Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Laitala, 2014).

Within the literature, practical and system-related conditions are frequently highlighted as important determinants of disposal choices. These include the availability of collection systems, the presence of recycling infrastructure and the perceived convenience of different disposal options. Limited access to appropriate infrastructure or inconvenient systems may act as barriers, discouraging consumers from engaging in more sustainable disposal practices. It has been seen in studies that when donation or recycling options are easily accessible and user-friendly it works as an enabler for consumers which results in that they will more likely choose

these practices than dispose of the garments directly into household waste (Domina and Koch, 1999; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung, 2014).

In addition to this, product-related characteristics play an important role in shaping disposal decisions. Factors such as the physical condition of the garment, the quality, durability and perceived remaining value can influence consumers to either keep, donate or discard it. Examples that have been presented is such as that the garment is worn out or damaged or the consumer have gotten bored of it and perceive it as outdated which will therefore most likely result in that it will be discarded as waste rather than reused in other ways (Abdallah et al., 2024; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013). High quality garments in good condition have been portrayed in previous literature as being more likely to be kept in circulation through resale or donation, whereas items that are perceived as low quality will more frequently be disposed of as waste. The perceived value of the garment can therefore be seen to contribute to determining its potential for extended use within circular systems (Koch and Domina, 1997). However, this has been seen in the literature by Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) as not always the case, where high quality garments do not equal to using sustainable disposal practices.

The use phase further contributes to disposal decisions, as the duration of use and the emotional and functional relationship between consumers and their garments influence whether items are kept or discarded. Clothing that holds personal significance or memories may be retained despite limited functional value, whereas garments with weak emotional attachment are more easily disposed of. These aspects highlight how disposal decisions are not only based on physical product attributes but also on the consumer's interaction with the product over time (Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013).

In addition to infrastructural, product-related, and use-phase factors, research has also emphasized the importance of contextual and socio-demographic influences on clothing disposal behavior. Purchasing behavior in the context of fast fashion is one such aspect, where individuals that are fashion forward often are the chosen sample (Kundu and Sharma, 2026). Women are frequently identified in the literature as key consumers of fast fashion and fashion forward clothing but are also seen to dispose of them quickly (Bianchi and Birtwislte, 2012; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024). Many studies focusing on this demographic examine women within the age range of approximately 17–30 years. However, women have also seemed to be the ones adopting different methods when disposing of clothes such as resale or lending out to family and friends (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017).

Women have been seen in the literature to be more connected to overall sustainable behavior where they are more likely to associate with sustainability terms (Brough, 2016). From the earliest as of the 1990s women have been portrayed in the literature as more probable to engage in more sustainable disposal methods such as clothing swaps, donating and reselling (Shim, 1995). This has also further been confirmed by Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) and Kundu and Sharma (2026) where they are more probable to extend end-of-life clothing due to being influenced by socio-cultural norms. Men on the contrary has therefore been portrayed as individuals that are not as participant in sustainable practices when choosing disposal methods. Domina and Koch (1999) discovered that men are seen to adopt simple methods when disposing clothing were throwing away the garments in trash bins are the most common approach.

Overall, while individual attitudes and intentions can play an important role, the actual disposal outcome is often reliant upon the surrounding infrastructure, the condition of the garment and the practices associated with its use phase. This highlights the importance of considering both external constraints and product-level characteristics when analyzing clothing disposal behavior within a sustainability context.

2.6 Methodological approaches and empirical characteristics of previous research

The field of research is characterized by variation in the use of methods. However, quantitative survey based studies clearly dominates the field (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Degenstein et al., 2020; Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Gwozdz et al., 2017; Jahura and Sadachar, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Koch and Domina, 1997; Lang, Armstrong and Brannon, 2013; McNeill et al., 2020; Nencková, Pecáková and Šauer, 2020; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Park et al., 2017; Shim, 1995; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). This methodological approach has contributed to a strong focus on identifying predictors of disposal behavior such as demographic characteristics, environmental attitudes, motivational factors and product conditions and attributes. Although it has been less common, the field also includes qualitative interview studies, mixed methods design and literature reviews which have provided extended, deeper understanding. These studies have contributed with insights of consumers behaviors, habits of managing their wardrobes, values, experiences, actions and the decision making processes (Abdallah et al., 2024; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Cruz-Cardenas and del Val Nunez, 2016; DeVoy et al., 2021; Kwon, Choo and Kim, 2020; Laitala, 2014; Norum, 2017; Vieira and Fonseca, 2021).

From a geographical perspective, the research field explores different national contexts primarily across North America, Europe and Asia. Countries include the United States, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Australia, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Serbia, China and South Korea (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Cruz-Cardenas and del Val Nunez, 2016; Degenstein et al., 2020; DeVoy et al, 2021; Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Jahura and Sadachar, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Koch and Domina, 1997; Kwon, Choo and Kim, 2020; Lang, Armstrong and Brannon, 2013; Nencková, Pecáková and Šauer, 2020; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Vlastelica et al., 2023; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017; Wu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020). As studies are bound to the national contexts and results are shaped by the local cultures, disposal infrastructures and laws, results might not be generalizable outside these countries. Available disposal options, values and meanings might differ between different national contexts. However, very few studies have been found with Swedish context regarding this field, where one example is Hedlund and Jaca (2025) who examined behavior on a recycling center focusing on Östersund.

Another pattern across this field of research included the sampling methods. Many studies relied on convenience samples and focused on specific consumer groups such as university students, gen z and fashion consumers. Further, most respondents were females. These choices were often motivated by the fact that young females purchase fashion garments more frequently than men (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Degenstein et al., 2020; Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Kwon, Choo and Kim, 2020; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). This sampling pattern suggests that much of the existing knowledge on clothing disposal behavior is shaped by groups already assumed to be very engaged in fashion consumption. Therefore, less is known about how a broader range of consumers reason about

these decisions in everyday life, rather than only as a behavior associated with fashion forward groups.

2.7 Identified research gap

Given the growing body of literature on clothing disposal presented above within consumer behavior, psychology and waste management research, several important gaps still remain. Previous research has resulted in valuable insight into disposal as part of the consumption process, identified key psychological and social drivers and mapped different contextual and product related barriers. However, this body of research has predominantly relied on quantitative approaches and has largely focused on observable behaviors. The studies have investigated what the consumers are doing right now, rather than on how they think, interpret and reason about disposal decisions.

Although several qualitative research have been executed and contributed with more in-depth insights into consumers disposal practices, a gap is still present. These studies have often focused on singular specific aspects such as particular disposal channels, motivations and sustainable intentions (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Cruz-Cardenas and del Val Nunez, 2016; Kundu and Sharma 2026). As a result, there is still limited understanding of how consumers themselves perceive their knowledge and actions of clothing disposal. Little is known about how individuals interpret their own level of knowledge and how confident or uncertain they feel about available disposal options. While a knowledge-action gap has been previously mentioned by researchers while studying sustainable consumption (Markkula and Moisander, 2012), the subjective experience of this gap when in the post-purchase phase remains underexplored. Thereby, in this study, multiple aspects that may influence disposal will be investigated in order to create a deeper understanding about the consumers' knowledge and what drives their disposal choices.

Only to a limited extent has existing research investigated how consumers reason in the actual moment of disposal. Disposal decisions have been previously conceptualized as outcomes of predefined factors such as attitudes, norms or intentions rather than as a situated and ongoing process for consumers (Abdallah et al., 2024; Joung, 2014). Where this process includes that the consumers actively evaluate alternatives, negotiate uncertainties and justify their choices. This leaves a gap in research where understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes that consumers go through when being met with disposal decisions.

An existence of an intention-behavior gap has previously been highlighted in clothing disposal research, where it has been seen that consumers that has stated their environmental intentions has not consistently translated into sustainable disposal practices (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). While these studies demonstrate a difference in attitudes and following actions, they provide limited insight into how this gap is experienced and navigated by consumers in practice. Through in-depth interviews exploring consumers' thoughts and experiences, this study seeks to provide insight into how the intention-behavior gap is experienced and managed in practice.

Factors such as values, emotions, habits and attachment to garments have been explored throughout research, however they are frequently examined separately or as singular predictors in disposal behavior (Kwon, Choo and Kim, 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Weber, Lynes and Young, 2017). Few studies have considered how these factors interact with each other, particularly in

the context of how people reason through clothing disposal decisions. While attachment and emotional bonds to clothing have been linked to disposal behaviors, there is still missing how these relational dimensions connect with consumers values, routine practices and everyday reasoning when they are making a disposal decision.

As explained previously, textile collection infrastructure, recycling systems and public awareness can vary between geographical locations, it is important to study how consumers understand and interact with these systems in their local context. In Sweden, where textile waste management systems are being increasingly developed at the moment, a limited number of studies have been executed within this geographical area and therefore there is still limited knowledge about how consumers perceive textile waste and what factors influence their disposal decisions (Naturvårdsverket 2025a).

These gaps in the literature point to a need for in-depth qualitative research that explores clothing disposal from the consumer's perspective. Using this type of approach in this study, it can generate richer insights into how individuals perceive their knowledge, experience certainty or uncertainty and reason through closet clean-outs and disposal decisions in everyday contexts. The aim is therefore to examine how consumers navigate closet clean-outs, clothing disposal and post-use clothing management practices that involve factors such as emotions, habits and values that can impact on how the behaviors are shaped.

3 Theoretical and conceptual framework

Following chapter includes a presentation of the theories and concepts that will be used to analyze the result from the collected empirical material. Firstly, the Theory of Planned Behavior will be presented with its original framework to later move on to the concept Product Attachment and lastly the Social Practice Theory is presented. Together these three theories and concepts are seen as the foundational frameworks for this study.

3.1 Theory of Planned behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a widely used framework for understanding how individuals make decisions and engage in specific behaviors. The focus of the theory is that behavior is primarily driven by behavioral intentions, which are shaped by three key determinants: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). The theory has its origin from the Theory of Reasoned Action, that was previously made in the 1970s (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, as cited in Madden, Ellen and Ajzen, 1992). However, Ajzen updated the theory to the one we call the Theory of Planned Behavior today by adding the determinant of perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Madden, Ellen and Ajzen, 1992).

Regarding clothing disposal and post-use garment management, the theory has been previously adapted and evolved in research to examine how consumers evaluate and act upon different disposal options (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Kundu and Sharma, 20256; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar (2022) in their study, removed both the determinants of subjective norms and perceived behavioral control from the theory. This was due to in their literature review being established to not have a strong connection to the actual intention. Subjective norms were previously seen in literature to not be able to predict intentions especially when studying young consumers. Likewise, with perceived behavioral control, the researcher's literature review revealed that the determinant had a limited role in specifically consumers purchase intention. Where the study had the focus on socially responsible consumer behavior including disposal habits and overall consumption of young consumers. It was perceived that these consumers have enough freedom of action to consume responsibly if they wanted to. Therefore, is their perceived behavioral control not an important determinant connected to their behavior and was therefore also removed from the framework. The researchers focused instead on attitude-intentions-behavior relationships as they argued that intentions based on attitudes better predict actual behavior. However, it was later established through their study that it could have been beneficial to use all determinants in the TPB as they may have proved relevant in shaping sustainable behavior (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022).

The theory has been extensively used in research connected to sustainable consumption, fashion consumption and some recycling and disposal intentions. However, the majority of studies have used a quantitative research approach when adapting the theory (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017). A limited number of studies have also used a mixed methods approach when having TPB as the main theoretical framework (Blazquez et al., 2020; Kundu and Sharma, 2026). In Kundu and Sharma (2026) mixed methods research approach, they used all determinants of TPB alongside another theoretical framework to understand what motivates consumers to adopt

sustainable disposition behavior. The three determinants were added as measurement items for the quantitative phase and in the qualitative phase the determinants were explored in greater depth by capturing participants lived experiences and personal reflections. The qualitative phase findings were also made to complement and reinforce the quantitative findings that were based on the TPB determinants (Kundu and Sharma, 2026). In this study the theoretical framework will be based on the 1991 version of TPB, including using all three determinants in the analysis of the empirical material. As the theory is not as established in qualitative research, this current study will use the original form from 1991, in order to establish a view based on the different approach and therefore not only base it on what previously been done for the quantitative approach studies.

For the three determinants that are based on Ajzen (1991) study, the determinant that is attitudes refer to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a specific behavior. According to the theory, attitudes are based on behavioral beliefs about the likely consequences of the behavior and the evaluation of these outcomes. The more desirable and positive the outcomes are evaluated, the greater the likelihood of the individual developing intentions to engage in such behavior is expected to be (Ajzen, 1991).

The second determinant, subjective norms, represents the perceived social pressure or social influence that individuals endure that results in performing or not performing a behavior. This component of the behavioral intention is grounded in normative beliefs concerning an individual's perception of whether important others, such as family and friends, approve or disapprove of the behavior. Together with the main individual's motivation to comply with these set expectations will form the subjective norm. Therefore, subjective norms do capture a social dimension of decision-making and the extent to which behavior is influenced by perceived expectations of others (Ajzen, 1991; Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022).

Perceived behavioral control, the last determinant of the theory, refers to the individual's perceived ability to perform a given behavior. It involves the individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform the behavior where it reflects their past experiences as well as the anticipation of potential barriers. The construct is based on control beliefs, including the presence of different factors that may facilitate or hinder behavioral performance, along with the perceived power of these factors that the individual obtains. It includes whether the individual believes they have the necessary resources, opportunities, knowledge and capabilities to act on the intention (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived behavioral control is mentioned to influence both behavioral intentions and behavior directly, particularly in situations where external constraints limit actual control (Ajzen, 1991; Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022).

It is said that individuals who have a high perception of behavioral control are generally more likely to form intentions and translate these intentions into behavior. However, Ajzen (1991) also argues that when a behavior or situation already allows an individual to keep control, perceived behavioral control becomes less relevant as a predictor of behavior. For example, a person wants to buy a t-shirt, you have money, the store is open and nothing is stopping you. Then it doesn't matter if you feel capable of buying the t-shirt, you can just do it. Further, perceived behavioral control does not always accurately reflect actual behavioral control, if someone believes that they can do something it doesn't always mean they can. As described in Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar (2022) research, individuals' perceptions of control are often based on imagined future scenarios rather than actual situational conditions.

These perceptions may be unrealistic when individuals have limited information about the behavior or when situational factors change over time which result in that the perceived behavioral control may be unstable.

An important assumption of TPB involves that when individuals form intentions and make decisions, it is based on reasoned and systematic processing of information. The framework thus emphasizes conscious and planned behavior, where individuals consider available information and potential consequences before acting on the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Due to this, among other aspects, the theory has received some criticism. Researchers have argued that the theory has a strong emphasis on rational and cognitive determinants of behavior, while forgetting to include the routine based, emotional- and unconscious influences. This acts as a limitation when using the theory, as it suggests that all dimensions of human behavior may not be fully captured. Particularly, in contexts where emotions or routines play a significant role (Blazquez et al., 2020; Sniehotta, Presseau and Araújo-Soares, 2014).

In summary, regardless of the criticism and the lack of use in qualitative study approaches, the Theory of Planned Behavior is a widely accepted theory and has proved its validity in regard to sustainable behaviors (Blazquez et al., 2020; Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017). It provides a structured framework for understanding how intentions are formed and how they guide behavior. Its focus on attitudes, social influences and perceived control makes it a valuable theoretical foundation for analyzing decision-making processes. While at the same time highlighting the need for complementary perspectives in context characterized by complexity and non-rational influences. Therefore, in this study TPB determinants will help explain answers that are received through the interviews together with the concept of Product Attachment and the Social Practice Theory.

3.2 Product attachment

Product attachment refers to the emotional tie and the strength of the emotional bond that consumers develop with specific products and possessions (Mugge, Schifferstein and Schoormans, 2006; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). This perspective views products not only as functional objects, but also as carriers of symbolic and personal meaning connected to identity, memories and self-expression (Belk, 1988; Mugge, Schifferstein and Schoormans, 2006; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim (2008) in their study about consumer-product attachment identified seven possible determents of product attachment which are: enjoyment, memories to people, places and events, support of self-identity, life vision, utility, reliability and market value. They further describe that a product to which a person is attached to is often considered very special and means a lot to that person. For that reason, the person is likely to feel emotional loss if the product is lost.

Product attachment is further understood as dynamic rather than fixed, meaning that emotional relationships with products may change over time. Consumers may develop emotional connections to products already before acquisition through aspirations and fantasizing about it. Attachment may strengthen over time through ownership, created memories and everyday experiences. At the same time, it can also be weakened due to changing identities, lifestyles, fashion preferences or product meanings which all contribute to detachment and eventually disposal (Dwayne Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). The highest level of attachment was seen in Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim (2008) research

to be to recently acquired products of less than a year or to products that have been owned for over 20 years. The difference in acquired time also impacted the main driver of the attachment, new products had the driver of enjoyment while the old products had memories as the driver. They further highlight however, that disattachment for many products starts soon after the product is acquired, given the large number of products that are bought and owned and that only few products remain cherished for a longer period of time.

The concept of product attachment has been widely used within studies regarding consumption and has been further used to see how it can be connected to the time period products are used before being discarded (Niniimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Niniimäki and Koskinen, 2011; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). In Niinimäki and Koskinen (2011) study when focusing on how to create sustainable design choices, they found that emotional bonds to clothing are formed by a combination of social, aesthetic, and physical experiences that is accumulated over time. Their research highlights how garments become meaningful not only through their visual appearance, but through the full embodied experience of wearing them across different situations and stages of life. The attachment to clothing was found to develop gradually, since frequent wear creates a personal connection between the wearer and the garment. The development and maintenance of these bonds were strongly driven by positive emotional associations, such as feeling confident, comfortable or beautiful.

As the concept is well established within literature, it is seen as suitable fit for analyzing results in order to connect to the thesis purpose and research questions. However, some criticism has been mentioned regarding product attachment as a concept where it has seen to be very individual in previous research and context specific which impacts the generalizability of it all. Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim (2008) for example, describe the concept to be difficult to define and measure due to these factors which are therefore taken into consideration of this current study. The concept is not handled as a one way definition of a result but instead as a guideline to a type of explanation.

In the thesis, product attachment is used as an analytical framework in order to complement missing aspects in the Theory of Planned Behavior. It will be used to understand how emotional bonds between the interviewees and garments can be formed and maintained. The concept helps examine how design features, user experiences and interactions with garments can influence use and perceived value.

3.3 Social Practice Theory

The Social Practice Theory (SPT) is a practice oriented theoretical framework that conceptualizes social life that is created through recurring routines instead of individual behavior or isolated decision-making. In contrast to for example, Theory of Planned Behavior that focuses on the individual attitudes, preferences or rational choices and how that affect consumer behavior. The Social Practice Theory shifts the focus instead to organized, collective understandings where social order is continuously reconstructed. The perspective builds on earlier theoretical development within what are often called the main theories of practice and there are multiple researchers that have made different versions of it (Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012; Sigaard, 2026). All versions, however, share the same basic assumptions but in this study Shove, Pantzar and Watsons (2012) version is utilized as the theoretical framework.

Together with TPB, the framework has been mentioned to be one of the most applied when studying consumer behavior in the circular economy and has also been used in disposal research and sustainable consumption for textiles and clothing (Evans, 2019; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Keshavarz, Alvarez and Garcia, 2025; Sigaard, 2026). However, the majority of these studies have not operationalized the three specific elements of Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) framework but instead used them as inspiration.

In Social Practice Theory the primary unit of analysis is emphasized to be practices. Practices can be understood as routinised forms of activity that are socially shared within society and repeatedly performed in everyday situations. These practices can be, for example, shopping, laundering, recycling or driving a car (Evans, 2019; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012; Sigaard, 2026). According to Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) framework, practices consist of the interconnection of three central elements, materials, competences and meanings.

The element that is called materials, refers to the physical objects, infrastructure, technologies and resources involved in performing a practice (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). In the context of consumption and disposal, Hedlund and Jaca (2025) included in this element such as product quality, the availability of spare parts for repairing and the infrastructure. Competence refers to the practical skills and knowledge required to carry out a specific practice. For example, reuse, repair and recycling knowledge and skills that the consumer holds and thereby shape their perceived ability to act sustainably (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025). The last element that is meanings, includes the symbolic and cultural understandings attached to the practices that can be for example norms, values, emotions and ideas of identity (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025). Hedlund and Jaca (2025) connected this element in their research to social norms and moral justification and how this can influence consumer behavior. Through being based on how social expectations and close environment can shape what is considered appropriate or a desirable action.

While the theory is an influential framework in sustainability and consumption research, it has also been criticized. A common critic to the framework is that it doesn't consider fully the individual and intentional decision-making as the focus is on socially shared practices rather than induvial attitudes or choices. This can impact the explanation capacity in variation in behavior between individuals participating in the same practice (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). However, despite these limitations it is seen as a good compliment to TPB that focuses more on the missing aspects of individual behavior. This framework will therefore be used in this thesis to analyze socially embedded practices that can occur regarding clothing disposal.

4 Methodology

The following chapter presents the methodological framework applied in this study and showcases the research design that is adopted in order to address the set research questions. The chapter begins with a description of the underlying research approach, followed by a presentation of the chosen research design and empirical setting. Further, the methods used for data collection are described in detail together with sampling strategy employed for participant selection. The chapter also explains the data analysis and the step-by-step procedure that was used. Lastly, considerations related to research quality, trustworthiness and ethical aspects are also discussed and presented.

4.1 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach grounded in an interpretivist perspective. Where the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions, experiences and attitudes regarding clothing disposal after conducting closet clean outs. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as the purpose of the study is to explore subjective meanings and individual interpretations rather than to measure predefined variables (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2018).

Looking at the philosophical assumptions within this research, this study is grounded in a constructivist ontology paradigm. Within constructivism it assumes that reality is socially constructed through human interaction and individual experiences. Rather than representing a single objective reality, from this perspective consumers' perceptions and behaviors are understood as subjective and are shaped by social and contextual factors. Therefore, this study assumes that there is no single, external, objective reality that will be presented. Instead, reality is seen as being multiple and as perceived by the different consumers (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Aligned with this ontological perspective, the study has adopted an interpretivist epistemology. Epistemology includes what constitutes as acceptable knowledge within a field of research and how such knowledge can be generated. Interpretivism argues that it is necessary in research to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors. Rather than aiming for universal outcomes, emphasis is on the necessity of interpreting the subjective meanings that individual attribute to their environments and experiences and therefore through the perspective of the participants themselves. Therefore, as the purpose of this study was to understand how consumers perceive and navigate experiences related to clothing disposal practices through semi-structured interviews. This philosophical foundation justifies the use of a qualitative approach, as it requires close interaction with the data and the participants to grasp their specific perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

The study has followed an abductive research approach characterized by a back-and-forth movement between empirical observations and existing theoretical knowledge. Abductive reasoning is explained to enable researchers to repeatedly go between theory and empirical findings and thereby allowing theoretical concepts to be continuously refined throughout the research process. This approach is therefore a mixture between inductive reasoning, that strictly generates theory from data and deductive reasoning, that tests predefined hypotheses. Using

abductive reasoning allows for the development of new theoretical insights through the interpretation of empirical observations (Bryman, 2016; Walton, 2004).

This approach was considered suitable for the present study as the chosen sample of investigating consumers perceptions, was seen in the previous research that it could include complex, context-dependent results that can be influenced by different factors. This can therefore impact which chosen theoretical framework is best suitable for the analysis (Laitala, 2014; Walton, 2004). Derived from the previous research, initial theoretical concepts were used to guide the formulation of the interview questions and overall provided a preliminary analytical framework. During the data collection and analysis process new emerging patterns and unexpected findings led to continuous reflection and refining the theoretical understanding.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 Qualitative research

Building on the interpretivist perspective and the abductive reasoning outlined in the research approach, this study employs a qualitative research design. Using an abductive approach requires also a methodological framework that is flexible and capable of capturing the subjective realities of the participants. Therefore, a qualitative research design was selected as the most appropriate for this study, as it provides the necessary tools to explore the complexity and variations of consumers' perceptions of handling clothing disposal in a natural setting. Unlike rigid quantitative designs that often follow a strict linear path from hypothesis to testing, qualitative design considers the continuous play between empirical observations and theoretical frameworks (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2024).

Qualitative research can be seen as having the aim of providing an in-depth understanding of the social world by exploring the subjective meanings, experiences and contexts of the chosen sample. While quantitative research instead has the aim of testing hypotheses and establishing statistically generalizable relationships between set variables. Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, that had the focus on how instead of for example, how many, a statistical design could thereby fail to capture the nuanced realities of the consumers lived experiences. Therefore, qualitative design allows for the flexibility required to examine underlying mechanisms and uncover rich and contextualized insights (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2024).

4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

In order to gather primary data on consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviors regarding clothing disposal, following the qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This method was chosen due to its ability to combine a thematic focus with the flexibility to explore spontaneous insights that arise during the conversation (Bryman, 2016). In contrast to structured interviews, that rely solely on a set number of questions, a semi-structured format was considered appropriate as it allows for a combination of predetermined questions through a set interview guide and flexibility to explore participants responses in greater depth. The authors used the interview guide as a framework, to maintain consistency across interviews, while still leaving room for new and unexpected themes to emerge during

the conversations or new follow-up questions and deeper probes into specific areas of interest (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2024).

An interview guide was developed based on information gathered from previous research and the initial set of theoretical frameworks prior to the data collection. The guide, that can be viewed in appendix 1, was structured around key themes that were found within the field. This was made to ensure consistency across all interviews while focusing on themes such as relationships with clothing, disposal practices and perceived knowledge. It consisted primarily of open-ended questions designed to encourage rich responses where participants could elaborate on their experiences and viewpoints in their own words, rather than simple yes or no answers. While it ensured that all relevant themes were covered, it was not followed rigidly, where the order of questions could be changed or skipped fully based on the participant responses.

The follow-up questions and probing techniques such as clarifying and confirming probes were an important part of the interview process, as they allowed for clarification and deeper exploration of interesting responses. Questions like “what do you mean with that?” or “why/why not?” were often used to dive deeper into participants answers. These were used often spontaneously during interviews where the authors felt needed and can therefore not be seen in the interview guide presented in appendix 1. The interview guide in appendix 1 have also been translated from Swedish as the interviews were held in Swedish. The flexibility is a key strength of semi-structured interviews, as it enables to not miss information that otherwise could go unnoticed when not questioned (Bryman, 2016).

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the main data collection in order to test the interview guide and ensure clarity of the questions. Following this initial interview, minor adjustments were made to improve, for example, the wording and structure of certain questions. This helped enhance the overall quality and clarity of the interview guide as much as possible before conducting the main interviews (Bryman, 2016).

Overall, all interviews were conducted in a conversational and open manner while still following the interview guide, in order to try to make a comfortable environment for the participants. This approach aimed to encourage honest and detailed responses and thereby focusing on enhancing the depth and quality of the collected data. The semi-structured format thus provided both structure and flexibility, making it particularly suitable for exploring complex and subjective consumer experiences (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2024).

4.2.3 Sampling Strategy and participants

This study has employed a purposive sampling strategy in order to recruit participants who were relevant to the research aim and would enable the fulfillment of the research objectives. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research in order to ensure that participants possess specific experiences or knowledge that can provide meaningful insights into the topic that is studied (Patton, 2015). In this specific study, the focus was on consumer behavior revolving around disposal practices and therefore the sampling needed to include consumers who actively engage in clothing use and disposal practices.

With the purposive sampling a selection criterion was further used where participants were required to achieve the following:

- *be responsible for their own budget*
- *buy clothing regularly*
- *have experience with managing their own clothing after use, including decisions related to discarding, donating or otherwise handling.*

Having this approach together with the criteria enabled the study to capture a range of perspectives on how consumers perceive and navigate clothing disposal and post-use management.

A total of 14 participants were involved and interviewed in this study. The chosen sample size was seen as appropriate for an in-depth qualitative analysis, where the aim is not statistical generalization but rather to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and reasoning processes (Bryman, 2016). The sampling process aimed to include variation in terms of age, gender and consumption habits, in order to capture diverse viewpoints. The final sample size consists of 9 female and 5 male interviewees with ranging ages from 24 to 59. The participants are anonymous and have therefore been given other names than their original.
See table 1 for participants distribution.

The participants were recruited through the authors' personal networks, which facilitated access to individuals willing to share their experiences. These individuals were asked to participate due to having previously established their fulfillment of the criteria through preliminary questions. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate for the study as it enabled the recruitment of participants with experiences relevant to the research purpose (Bryman, 2016). Recruiting participants through existing networks also facilitated access to individuals who met the criteria and contributed to a more comfortable interview setting that potentially can foster greater openness. However, this sampling approach may have limited the diversity of perspectives represented within the sample, as participants recruited through similar networks may share similar experiences or viewpoints (Bryman, 2016). Despite this limitation, the approach was considered suitable due to the importance of collecting rich and relevant qualitative data.

(Table 1: Presentations of participants)

Interviewees	**Gender**	**Age**	**Occupation**	**Date of interview**	**Interview form**
1	Freja	24	Student & part time employee	4/5-2026	Online
2	Mira	24	Full time employee	27/4-2026	Online
3	Linn	26	Full time employee	27/4-2026	Online
4	Josefine	26	Full time employee	29/4-2026	Physical
5	Sara	27	Full time employee	26/4-2026	Physical
6	Lovisa	29	Full time employee	20/4-2026	Physical
7	Emma	45	Full time employee	1/5 2026	Physical

8	Kathrin	56	Full time employee	20/4-2026	Physical
9	Lotta	59	Full time employee	15/4-2026	Physical
10	Adam	25	Student	15/4-2026	Physical
11	Gustav	27	Full time employee	27/4-2026	Online
12	Sebastian	30	Full time employee	20/4-2026	Physical
13	Filip	40	Full time employee	23/4-2026	Physical
14	Markus	46	Full time employee	3/5-2026	Physical

4.3 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with consumers that were established as relevant to the research topic. The data collection process was designed to ensure consistency across interviews, following the semi-structures interview guide, while still allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. This approach enabled the authors to gain in-depth insight into consumers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviors as the consumers themselves explain and reflect on their practices regarding closet clean outs and clothing handling.

After finalizing the sampling of participants as explained in 4.2.3, they were contacted and informed about the purpose of the study, that it was fully voluntary to participate and how the data would be. They were also informed that they would stay anonymous, and no original names would be revealed in the study. All participants have before the interviews provided informed consent to being a part of the study. A total of 14 interviews were conducted between April to May 2026. Each interview lasted approximately 20-45 minutes and was done mostly in person or via Microsoft Teams, depending on participant availability and preference. The interviews were made one on one where the two authors held approximately half interviews each.

All interviews were conducted in Swedish, as all participants were native Swedish speakers. This resulted in that the interview guide was developed in Swedish in order to facilitate clear communication and enable participants to express their experiences and perspectives more naturally and in greater depth. Therefore, it was considered important for reducing the risk of misunderstandings during the interviews.

To ensure accurate capture of the data, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. Additionally, brief notes were taken during the sessions to document initial impressions or contextual details where relevant. After each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure participants responses were preserved accurately for analysis. Transcribes were both made manually for some of the interviews and through Klang AI for the rest. For the AI made transcribes, manual checking was still made, where accuracy was compared to the audio recordings. Access to the data was limited to the research team in order to ensure full anonymization of the participants and that it was handled in accordance with ethical guidelines.

The process was iterative in nature, allowing for reflection after each interview before continuing on to the next one. After each interview, it could be noted if adjustments needed to be made, in for example follow-up questions or how the questions were formulated to the participant, to create a better understanding in the next interview. While the content and structure of the interviews were always guided by the set interview guide, described in the previous section, minor adjustments were made where necessary to explore emerging insights. This approach ensured that the data collection remained aligned with the research objectives while remaining flexible to capture new perspectives.

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected empirical material was analyzed using thematical analysis. Thematical analysis is explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) to be a flexible method used to identify, analyze and interpret patterns within qualitative data. It was therefore considered appropriate for this study due to its flexibility and suitability for identifying further patterns and themes.

The analysis process began with the finished transcribes of all interviews where they were read repeatedly in order for the authors to familiarize themselves with the data. This first phase in the analysis aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the material and to identify preliminary patterns and recurring ideas relevant to the research purpose and questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), this step, familiarization with the collected data, is important in thematical analysis as it enables researchers to further engage deeply with the material before fully initiating the coding process.

The data coding orientation used in this study can be explained by following predominantly an inductive orientation (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Themes were therefore primarily developed from patterns and meanings identified within the empirical material. Although, during previous theoretical framework investigations and literature reviews, certain understanding and expectations of themes that had previously been seen prominently in the research field were developed and impacted the coding process in some ways. The process still remained flexible and open to new and unexpected insights that emerged from the data. In line with an abductive reasoning, the analysis involved a continuous interplay between empirical observations and theoretical interpretation. Where the authors moved between theory and data throughout the analytical process in order to better understand the findings (Bryman, 2016).

The coding process was conducted systematically by assigning codes to segments of the data that included the participants' answers, that were considered meaningful or relevant to the research questions. These codes were set at the subthemes that were later grouped into broader categories and themes based on similarities and recurring patterns across the participants. The process was made though the platform Canva, where main themes and subthemes were connected through color coding post it notes to facilitate following analysis. In table 2, the final main themes together with grouped sub themes can be seen. As emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is not only concerned with identifying patterns within data, but also with interpreting the underlying meanings represented within those themes. In this process it was therefore important to look beyond what the participants' exact words were and interpret their responses in relation to broader patterns and meanings.

During this process, the themes were continuously reviewed, refined and compared against both the empirical material and the theoretical framework to ensure analytical consistency and

relevance to the study. All coding was also made in Swedish where relevant and selected quotes were later translated into English for presentation in the thesis. This meant that certain care was taken during the translation process to preserve original meaning from the participants' statements.

Thematical analysis was seen as appropriate practice in this study as it enabled the authors to move beyond surface-level descriptions and develop a deeper understanding of the subjective meanings, attitudes and behaviors expressed by the participants. Additionally, the flexible nature of thematic analysis aligned with the study's qualitative and abductive research approach, allowing both theoretical perspectives and empirical insights shape the interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

(*Table 2: Classification and division of main themes and included subthemes)*

Main themes	Subthemes
The practices of closet clean outs	Triggers and routines of closet clean-outs, disposal as a part of continued consumption, delayed disposal and temporary storage, convenience, accessibility, economic factors, social influence
Emotional attachment and relationships with clothes	Relationship to fashion, identity and consumption, nostalgia, memories and sentimental value, favorite garments, attachment through utility and identity expression, emotional durability and repair, shifting attachment, hard to let go
Value and responsibility beyond use	Perceived economic and remaining value, resale or donation, extending use through others, social and moral responsibility, emotional justification of letting go
Navigating uncertainties in disposal decisions	Perceived and actual knowledge, uncertainty about disposal options and soring, changing regulations, uncertainty about donation and recycling criteria,

4.5 Quality of research and method reflection

The quality and trustworthiness of this study were ensured through its connection to established principles of qualitative research explained by Bryman (2016) and Adler (2022). Quality in qualitative research can be strengthened according to Bryman (2016) through careful research design, transparency in data collection procedures and a systematic approach to analysis. Therefore, in this study it was important to follow a structured research process which included a detailed and clearly defined interview guide, using consistent procedures during data collection process and being transparent with the analytical approach.

Trustworthiness is seen as a criterion of how well a qualitative research is and is further connected to quantitative research criteria as reliability and validity. Which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Adler, 2022; Bryman, 2016).

Credibility that is seen to be connected to internal validity of the thesis, was supported through the use of semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016). Using this research design, it enables the participants to express their own experiences in their words and where the analysis only takes into account what and how they have expressed their answers. In each interview the ending questions also included that the participants have the ability to change or add any other thoughts that may have occurred to fully present a correct picture of their answers.

Dependability that connects to reliability of the study focuses on full transparency where records should be kept of all phases of the research process. It is described as allowing readers to understand how findings have been generated (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, the methodology in this study has included step by step instructions to fully show how the empirical material has been collected and analyzed. Also connected to this is the transferability that connects to the external validity of the study. This criterion includes that the study shall have so called thick descriptions to increase the transferability to other studies (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, alongside step-by-step instructions, detailed descriptions of the research context, sampling strategy and participant characteristics are also provided in this study. While qualitative research does not aim for generalizability, giving contextual details enables readers to assess the potential applicability of the findings in other settings (Bryman, 2016).

The last criterion within trustworthiness is confirmability that is connected to the objectivity of the study. Although full objectivity is hard to achieve within any research, this was supported in this study through ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the empirical material rather than only being shaped by the authors assumptions. Additionally, given the abductive analytical process, the continuous movement between data and theory helped ensure that interpretations remained data-driven and transparent.

While the methodological choices were considered well suited in relation to the research purpose, certain limitations should be acknowledged in this study. Since the study adopted a qualitative research approach, the findings are context-dependent and not intended to be statistically generalizable (Bryman, 2016). Instead, the aim was to develop an in-depth understanding of consumers behavior and perceptions.

A limitation that has been previously mentioned regards the purposive sampling strategy. As mentioned by Bryman (2016) purposive sampling can risk sampling bias which results in less representation from the population. As the aim was to deepen understanding in regard to consumers in Swedish context, the sample strategy was picked in regards to facilitate access to participants who met the given criteria and was therefore seen as appropriate. Another limitation includes the possibility of social desirability bias in the interviews. Since the interviews addressed personal attitudes and consumption related behavior, there is a possibility that some responses were influenced by social pressure (Bryman, 2016). To reduce this risk, the interviews were conducted in an open and non-judgmental manner. Lastly, regarding thematic analysis where it is inherently interpretive, the author's own preunderstandings and theoretical perspectives may influence the interpretation of the empirical material (Braun and Clarke 2022: Braun and Clarke 2006). To address this, continuous reflection was maintained through the analytical process on how interpretations were developed in relation to data.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Throughout the entire research process, ethical considerations were taken into account in order to ensure the protection, integrity and well-being of the participants. The study followed well known ethical principles for qualitative research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the responsible handling of empirical data (Bryman, 2016).

All participants prior to the interviews were informed about the purposes of the study, the research topic, and how the collected data would be used. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study if they wished to do so. Consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews.

To protect participants' identities and ensure confidentiality, all personal information was treated anonymously throughout the research process (Bryman, 2016). No information that could be connected to a participant was included in the transcription material or in the presentation of the findings. Participants were therefore referred to using pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity.

The interviews were conducted in an open and non-judgmental manner, allowing participants to decide how much information they wished to share. Furthermore, the researchers remained aware of their role and potential influence during the interviews and throughout the interpretation of the empirical material. The material saved from the interviews was stored securely and was only accessible to the researchers involved in the study.

5 Results & Analysis

In this chapter, the results from the collected empirical material are presented along with the analysis. Key themes have been established through the thematical analysis and connections between the results, the theoretical framework and previous research are presented. The themes that are presented include the practices of closet clean outs, emotional attachment and relationships with clothes, value and responsibility beyond use, navigating uncertainties in disposal decision.

5.1 The Practices of closet clean outs

Laying out the whole wardrobe on the floor, the bed or going through drawers one by one. Sorting out different piles with different intentions, bag them up in large IKEA bags and then what? The interviewees had similar ways of tackling the practice of a closet clean-out and across interviews it emerged as a recurring but irregular practice that was often shaped by practical needs rather than planned sustainability efforts. Interviewees rarely described closet clean-outs as a continuous or structured process. Instead, the action was typically triggered by situational factors such as lack of space, accumulation of unused garments, seasonal change or moving homes.

A recurring pattern among interviewees was that clean-outs were closely related to maintaining order and creating physical space within the wardrobe. Many interviewees described feelings of frustration when wardrobes became disorganized or overly full. Not being able to close the doors or drawers, visual chaos and feeling emotionally overwhelmed appeared to be cues that it's time to get rid of some clothes. This can be interpreted through TPB, explaining the attitude-intention-behavior concept. The feelings associated with having an overfull wardrobe create negative attitudes, leading to the intention of starting the clean-out. As the attitude is also connected to positive associations with having a less full and cleaner space, it creates the urgent intention that will likely further lead to the actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

From a Social Practice Theory perspective, closet clean-outs can be understood as a recurring social practice. As interviewees did not really make closet clean-outs according to a structured schedule but rather in response to these specific circumstances such as overfull closets or accumulation of unused garments. These circumstances represent material elements of the practice shaping when the practice is performed (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). Further when interviewees were actually performing the practice in question, the physical arrangement of garments during the closet cleanouts, making different piles, laying clothes on beds or floors and storing them in large IKEA bags also functions as practical tools. These practical tools enabled the organization, evaluation, and temporary storage. In sense of meanings related to SPT (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012), the feelings of frustration associated with overly full closets, drawers that cannot be closed and the aspiration to have an organized and tidy wardrobe space makes the practice carry symbolic meaning.

However, it became evident during the interviews that for many, regular closet clean-outs are a part of an ongoing circulation of clothes and continued consumption. Josefine reasoned that she couldn't keep all her clothes and further said "*if you buy clothes all the time, it eventually doesn't add up*" and hence, has to clean out some items every now and then to make room for new purchases. Linn explained that when she's been shopping a lot, she realizes the closet is

very crowded and has to make space and also feels that she needs the money to be able to shop even more.

Markus explained that he recently had to clean out his closet because he ran out of hangers, "*I've ordered clothes, and then I don't have space for it, so I have to make space*". Kathrin likewise explained that she wanted to make more space because she hoped to buy more clothes in the future. These findings suggest that closet clean-outs often are embedded within broader consumption routines rather than being understood solely as a sustainability act. The majority of garments leaving the household of interviewees are not torn but rather they are being thrown out due to the fact that they are never or rarely used, feels outdated, untrendy and no longer matches the style of the owner. Participants connected clean-outs to wardrobe renewal and replacing garments that no longer suited their preferences or lifestyles.

Kwon, Choo and Kim (2020) have previously precisely highlighted this phenomenon by stating that limited storage makes consumers get rid of clothes just to be able to bring in new purchases. These findings also align closely with other previous research emphasizing that disposal practices are frequently integrated into ongoing cycles of consumption and replacement, where removing garments enables the acquisition of new ones. For example, the research of Hedlund and Jaca (2025) as well as Vidal-Ayuso, Akhmedova and Jaca (2023) highlights how waste generation is fundamentally connected to purchasing patterns and the volume of garments continuously entering consumption cycles. Rather than being endings to consumption, disposal practices therefore frequently appeared as enabling continuous purchasing and consumption. From this perspective, wardrobe clean-outs appear to be connected to managing flows of clothing through the wardrobe over time.

Another recurring pattern was that disposal decisions rarely were immediate or straightforward. Instead, interviewees often described prolonged negotiation processes where garments remained stored in bags, piles or hidden sections of wardrobes long after they had decided to not actively use them. Kathrin and Emma similarly described how unwanted garments were frequently left in a bag or box at the top shelf of the closet before they felt ready to permanently part with them. Filip explained that while the clothes are laying in bags, waiting to be sold, he might realize he actually likes some things and then take them back. Gustav and Sara also put things aside for a longer time to really consider and negotiate decisions. Gustav reflected that this prolonged decision-making process also reduced the risks of feeling regret once garments were eventually permanently removed.

> *"It is rarely, or I have probably never regretted a disposal decision since I hold on to it and consider them for such a long time. The things that disappear are probably things that are meant to disappear, even if it can feel a bit difficult in the moment"* - Gustav

Sara described her clean-out practice as highly structured but at the same time very prolonged and also reversable. She explained that she empties the entire wardrobe on the floor before separating garments into different categories for keeping, donating and throwing away. However, even after garments had been categorized and initial decisions had been made, these decisions appeared not to be final.

> *"I usually want to wait a little before actually getting rid of them. So once I've decided 'okey these I should donate' I'll put them away for maybe a month. In that way, if during that month I suddenly realize 'wait I actually need this' I can*

take it back and put it back into my wardrobe rotation. Just to make sure I don't donate a sweater and then suddenly realize later that I actually liked it, I just didn't think about it properly during the clean-out." - Sara

Rather than being immediate or purely rational about decisions, these results indicate that disposal decision making processes appeared emotionally and practically negotiated over extended periods of time. Even though garments were decided to leave the closet, these transitional stages seemed to function as a continued negotiation process, reassessing and reassuring the usefulness, emotional significance and future potential of garments before the interviewees felt comfortable enough to let them go permanently.

These findings could possibly relate to the product disposition model presented by Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977), which suggests that there is a distinction between keeping products, temporarily disposing of them and permanently discarding them. While Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977) mean that temporarily disposing of a product could be done through lending out clothes to friends and later be able to have it back. This behavior of the interviewees might function in the same way. As they have decided to dispose of them, but not permanently gotten rid of them, they are still able to take it back.

Further, looking at these behaviors from the perspective of TPB, the plans of disposing the garments get disrupted due to later changes of attitudes. Leading on to another behavior than what was initially planned, when they realize they want to take some garments back (Ajzen, 1991). As explained by Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar (2022) this can be connected to that perceived behavioral control can be instable. When the clothes are left in the bags, it gives the consumer a picture of the future that includes control. However, due to the decision to dispose of the garments are dragged out over time, conditions and control start to fail. Which often leads to the behavior is interrupted or backed up, where the clothing is looked through again before removing permanently. This could also be an example of the mentioned intention-behavior gap (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022).

Convenience emerged as particularly central in shaping disposal practices. Although many interviewees expressed positive attitudes toward donation, resale and recycling, these intentions were frequently compared against practical barriers, accessibility and required effort. The bags of unwanted clothing also remained untouched for a longer time due to the time and effort it takes to actually get rid of them. Both selling and making the way to stations of donation and recycling includes additional efforts, more work to be done and time to be set aside. Waiting for the owner to have the energy and time to actually take care of it. Sara had decided to sell some clothes but expressed that *"it was too much work to take care of and I didn't have the energy for it. So yes, they are still sitting in a bag, gathering dust".*

This shows a connection to low perceived behavior control in TPB where it works directly as a barrier to the behavior. Although the attitude of disposing was positive, the consumers experience a loss in resources and control that is needed to turn the intention into a behavior. Resources that are seen as missing from the consumers include time and energy and external factors like lack of available recycling stations decrease their control (Ajzen, 1991). This example also portrays the previously examined intention-behavior gap. Where the consumer has already built an intention for the behavior but doesn't act accordingly (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022).

The same thoughts were explained by Linn and Josefine, waiting for the time and energy to put clothes up for sale on Vinted and Tradera. Which requires the users to put garments up for sale one by one, taking photos, publishing them with descriptions and shipping them to different people once they are sold. Markus explained that he rarely engaged in resale practices simply stating that he does not have the energy to manage the process, so he just gives them away instead because it is *"the easiest option".* Several interviewees described platforms such as Sellpy positively and as a preferred resale option because the platform simplifies this process by taking bags of clothing, handling the whole process of pricing and logistics.

> *"Sellpy is pretty good because you just put everything in a bag and send it off, and then they handle the pricing and everything else. Compared to Vinted, where you have to do almost everything yourself. So then I prefer Sellpy even though you don't make as much money from it"* - Adam

This case also exemplifies how convenience and practical simplicity outweigh potential economic benefits when choosing between different disposal alternatives. Similarly, Mira reflected on how convenience frequently outweighed the possibility of earning money from resale. Although she expressed feeling tempted occasionally by the financial gains associated with resale.

> *"Economically, I'm choosing the worst option for myself. But for me, I'm weighing this against the effort it takes. It's easier to for me to just donate the clothes [..] it's the simplest, fastest and most convenient option for me"*

Practical accessibility additionally appeared central in shaping how consumers managed their unwanted clothing. Several interviewees described recycling stations and donation systems as insufficiently placed, making them not really integrated into everyday routines, making sustainable disposal practices easy to postpone or avoid. Although many interviewees expressed intentions to dispose of clothing responsibly, they simultaneously acknowledged that lack of time and limited accessibility often resulted in simplified or imperfect disposal decisions. Sebastian felt that he probably would get rid of more clothes textile collection systems were physically easier to access.

> *"I mean, I still have to go to some kind of recycling center. It would have been easier if there were clothing recycling bins closer to people's homes and things like that".*

Lotta similarly described textile recycling as inconvenient due to the fact that disposal often requires travelling to larger recycling stations that were not integrated into everyday routines.

> *"It feels like you have to go to a large recycling station, and because of that you end up collecting everything in a big bag since it is not somewhere you go every week or anything like that. Maybe you go once or twice a year. And then the clothes just end up laying there. Eventually, instead of keeping a black garbage bag around somewhere, you end up just throwing them in the trash because you don't want it just laying around."*

This aligns with previous research explaining that when recycling options or similar are easily accessible it works as a momentum for consumers to use them. In this way also prohibiting the behavior of disposing directly as waste (Domina and Koch, 1999; Joung, 2014). These findings

can also be interpreted through Social Practice Theory and clearly shows how practices are shaped by the interaction of materials, competences and meanings (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). In these cases, interviewees generally expressed positive attitudes toward textile recycling and understood how it should be done, connecting to the element of having competence for conducting the practice. The element of meanings can be seen when interviewees expressed desire to dispose of clothing responsibly. Responsible disposal appeared to be associated with sustainability and a sense of what needs to be done, indicating that positive meanings were attached to responsible disposal practices. While materials, in terms of accessibility of disposal infrastructure were lacking, constraining the interviewees to actually perform the practice. Therefore, these findings suggest that disposal practices are highly dependent on all three of the elements were having one or the other does not always lead to the practice.

When unwanted garments have been accumulated in bags over long periods of time while the interviewee is waiting for appropriate opportunities to recycle them, they eventually become frustrating to store, leading Lotta to abandon intended recycling practices. Similarly, Kathrin explained that garments occasionally ended up in the trash because of lack of energy, making other disposal options feel too demanding at the moment. Although she acknowledged that throwing away garments in residential household waste did not feel like "*the most appropriate*" option, convenience outweighed sustainability intentions sometimes. These results suggest that disposal practices were not shaped only by environmental awareness or intentions but also how practically manageable and accessible different disposal systems felt within their everyday lives. Reflecting previous research discussing the intention behavior-gap or value-action gap within sustainable consumption practices (Cesarina Mason, Pauluzzo and Muhammad Umar, 2022; Joung, 2014; Lewe and Niinimäki, 2026; Park and Lin, 2020; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021).

Similar to previous studies, the interviews revealed that intentions did not necessarily translate into consistent behavior. In these situations, convenience, accessibility and practical limitations outweigh initial ambitions. Importantly these findings additionally imply that these gaps were not necessarily due to lack of concern but rather disposal systems failing to integrate smoothly into the interviewees' everyday routines and practices. This further connects to previous research emphazising how practical and system-related aspects strongly shape clothing disposal practices. Earlier studies have shown that the availability of collection systems, recycling infrastructure and convenient disposal alternatives influence whether consumers participate in these actions. Where limited access or inconvenience related to appropriate systems might be barriers, discouraging consumers for engaging in more sustainable disposal behavior (Domina and Koch, 1999; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung, 2014).

The interviews additionally revealed how closet clean-outs also were socially shaped practices rather than entirely individual decisions. Several participants described how family members partners and friends influenced both clothing consumption and disposal routines Adam explained that his girlfriend often encouraged him to dispose garments he no longer actively used, making him reflect on pieces he otherwise might have continued keeping in the wardrobe. Similarly, several interviewees described discussing about garments with friends or family members during clean-outs, asking for opinions regarding whether specific garments should be kept, sold, donated or discarded. In some cases, unwanted clothing was also circulated directly within social relationships through passing them on to siblings, parents or friends.

These findings align with previous research highlighting how clothing disposal are shaped through social expectations and interpersonal influence ideas on what is perceived as

responsible behavior (Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2022; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). These findings further shows that the practice of closet clean-outs is a socially constructed practice. Which can be understood through combining TPBs determinant subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991) with the element meaning from SPT (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). The examples of where Adam's girlfriend urges him to clear out clothes and the interviewees' habits of consulting friends and family, illustrate not only an individual cognitive social pressure that is the subjective norm which can impact performing or not performing a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It also illustrates how the element of meaning is actively reproduced and maintained through social interaction. In this practice, the meaning is shown as the shared social expectations and cultural representations regarding what is seen as a well-structured and acceptable wardrobe (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). To clean out the closet shifts therefore from being an isolated, rational decision to being an interactive social action where norms regarding consumption, order and disposal are constantly negotiated with the social network.

5.2 Emotional attachment and relationships with clothes

5.2.1 Relationship to fashion, identity and consumption

Interviewees related to clothing very differently depending on their personal relation to fashion, clothing and consumption. Some carried a very high interest and described fashion as deeply connected to identity, emotions, self-expression and creativity, while others related clothing to more functional needs. These differing relationships appeared to shape both consumption habits, wardrobe size and in turn disposal behavior.

Interviewees like Sara, Josefine, Linn, Markus, Emma and Gustav who initially described a strong interest or even that they love fashion, clothes and shopping often demonstrated more emotionally driven consumption patterns and stronger identity-related attachments to their wardrobes. For these people, clothing frequently functioned as a form of self-expression and emotional experience rather than only fulfilling practical needs. These interviewees more frequently described having more garments than needed and more garments than actual time to use them. Their wardrobes also appeared to be more dynamic, with higher wardrobe turnover, more frequent clean-outs and stronger emotional negotiations about disposal decisions. Linn described herself as a very emotional shopper who based her purchase decisions on feelings, inspiration and creativity. This had led her to impulsively buy things that later on does not feel right because they were not really necessary or felt hard to style with other things in her wardrobe.

> *"I have so many clothes, way to much clothes. I will never be able to wear all of them, and I don't even use all the clothes I already have. So I have probably done a lot of bad purchase decisions because I am quite emotional when I shop. I go with my feelings, like 'oh, I think this is really pretty"* - Linn

> *"When you buy nicer clothes, you tend to buy more of them than you actually have occasions to wear them for. As a result, some garments remain unused. And then eventually, trends have already changed and you no longer want to use them"* - Markus

In contrast, some interviewees like Lotta, Adam and Lovisa described more practical and functional relationships to clothing. Adam for example repeatedly emphasized that what is "*clean and neat works*", suggesting lower emotional investment in fashion. Interestingly, interviewees with more practical relationships to clothing generally described lower wardrobe turnover and less emotionally difficult disposal decisions compared to the interviewees who expressed stronger emotional investment in fashion and style.

These findings align with previous research that emphasizes how clothing disposal behavior is shaped also by broader consumption patterns and relationships to fashion. Previous studies have highlighted that fashion-oriented consumers often have a higher purchase frequency, stronger trend engagement and more rapid wardrobe turnover (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024). However, the interviews simultaneously demonstrated that these interviewees often developed stronger emotional relationships with clothing, making disposal decisions more emotionally negotiated.

While previous research has frequently associated these consumption patterns particularly with women and fast fashion consumers (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Schiaroli, Fraccascia and Dangelico, 2024), the interviews in this study suggest that emotional engagement with fashion and identity expression may be more influential than gender alone in shaping wardrobe turnover and disposal behavior. Several male interviewees, including Markus and Gustav, similarly described strong fashion interest emotional attachment to clothing and recurring clean-outs connected to continued consumption and wardrobe accumulation.

5.2.2 Nostalgia, memories and sentimental value

Despite differences in fashion interest and consumption patterns, emotional attachment emerged across nearly all interviews in relation to garments connected to memories and nostalgia. While some garments gradually lost emotional relevance over time, others seemed to gain sentimental value through memories, experience and personal history. Nostalgia emerged as one of the strongest reasons why the interviewees continued keeping garments despite no longer actively using them. Several interviewees described specific garments as emotionally irreplaceable because they represented life events, memories or eras. Both Sara and Adam mentioned t-shirts bought at concerts being kept for their sentimental value. Adam gave the example of a T-shirt from a Håkan Hellström concert in 2015 that he could never get rid of even if it broke.

Gustav described that some garments from his early teenage years are still kept because they remind him of old memories and give him flashbacks from his high school era. These garments necessarily no longer fit but he described some of them as real gems or mascots in his wardrobe and for every year passing by it is getting harder and harder to let them go. This statement significantly reflects earlier findings presented by Bye and McKinney (2007), Guy and Banim (2000) and Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013) suggesting that consumer may keep garments despite not using them because of the memories and important life periods. Mira also similarly described that specific memories are tied to some specific garments. That the clothes are connected to the feelings that she felt in those moments, making it harder to get rid of them.

These findings suggest that clothing frequently retained emotional and symbolic value a long time after practical use has ended. Garments therefore appeared to function as emotional archives, preserving memories and previous identities. Also, this connects to previous research

stating that attachment does not necessarily lead to actively using garments but are instead kept for the symbolic and or emotional value rather than practical function (Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013).

In some cases, garments were additionally kept because interviewees imagined emotional value extending into the future rather than only reflecting the past. Several interviewees described keeping specific and beloved garments because they hoped that both existing and future children might inherit them.

> *"I have Prada dresses that I bought in my twenties [..] and I feel like I want my daughter to be able to inherit them some day. So that is the reason why I keep them."* - *Emma*

> *"I have garments that I have had since I was very young, and I would never get rid of them because I think that one day my child could have them"* - Josefine

These examples suggest that emotion extended beyond nostalgia and previous memories but were also expected to mean a lot to someone else in the future. While previous research has largely focused on how garments are retained because they preserve memories, emotional experience and previous life stages or what type of disposal options are chosen because of these connections (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges, 2009; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Vieira and Fonseca, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). The interviews in this study additionally suggest that clothing might also be preserved because of imagined future value and emotional continuity across generations.

5.2.3 Favourite garments and attachment through utility and identity expression

While some favorite garments carried emotional meaning through memories and nostalgia and were emotionally valued despite limited practical use, another form of attachment emerged through garments that were deeply integrated into participants' everyday lives and routines. Attachment also appeared strongly connected to garments associated with good fit, comfort, style, utility and how the garments make them feel in relation to identity and confidence during everyday wear.

Interviewees frequently described repeatedly wearing favorite garments over long periods of time and using them more often than other pieces in their wardrobe. Mira for example, described that she uses her favorite blouse all the time because she feels that it's an easy one to just throw on, it makes her feel pretty and confident. She integrates it into her daily life and routines and uses it for any occasion, even when just staying at home. Similarly, Lovisa described that her favorite garment is a pair of black suit pants due to the fact that they go well with almost everything, suits for any occasion and can be both dressed up and down and can be worn at home.

Unlike nostalgic garments that were primarily valued for symbolic or sentimental reasons despite limited use, favorite everyday garments instead appeared more emotionally significant precisely because they remained actively used and emotionally comforting. Attachment therefore emerged also through repeated wear, familiarity and the emotional experiences connected to actively using them.

Beyond comfort and practicality, these favorite garments also frequently appeared emotionally significant because they reinforced interviewees' identities and aligned with self-image, how they want to perceive themselves and be perceived by others. Sara for example described one of her favorite sweaters as "*this is so me*", suggesting that certain garments are connected to the feelings of self recognition. Similarly, Josefine described that her favorite garments are dresses as they visually represent her identity, making her feel pretty and feminine. Markus likewise described strong attachment towards garments that made him "*look really good*" and gave him greater authority, making him feel confident, stylish and highlighting his body shape in the most attractive way.

These results suggest that favorite garments were not only valued because of practical utility or repeated use, but also because they enabled the interviewees to emotionally experience desired, authentic or idealized versions of themselves. These garments therefore appeared closely connected to identity construction and self-perception. Hence, emotional attachment emerged through how garments made them feel like themselves. These findings strongly reflect theories of product attachment, which describe how emotional bonds with products emerge when products become connected to identity, self-expression and personal meaning (Belk, 1988; Mugge, Schifferstein and Schoormans, 2006; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Several of the attachment determinants were clearly reflected throughout the interviews, particularly support of self-identity, enjoyment and utility. Further, these findings align closely with research by Niinimäki and Koskinen (2011), emphasizing how emotional attachment and bonds to clothing are formed by a combination of social, aesthetic and physical experiences appearing over time. How clothes become meaningful through embodied experience of wearing them. Overall, the findings suggest that emotional attachment toward specific garments was not related to single factors alone, but rather through overlapping emotional, practical and identity related experiences.

At the same time, attachment could also lead to limited use of garments considered especially valuable. Markus described that he sometimes hesitates to use his favorite items in everyday situations, even though he feels that he probably should. He expressed that he feels worried that they will need washing, become worn out or lose their value over time. As a result, he avoids using them and instead saves them for special occasions. However, he realizes that those occasions rarely occur. In this sense, the desire to preserve emotionally valuable garments sometimes became more important than actively using them, which ultimately limited garments' actual use. These findings suggest that emotional attachment shaped garment use in multiple ways. While many strengthened attachments through repeated everyday wear, emotionally valuable garments could also be preserved by limited use. This reflects theories of product attachment emphasizing how emotionally significant possessions are often considered special and difficult to replace, resulting in a fear to lose this particular garment or that it will eventually become damaged (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008).

5.2.4 Emotional durability and repair

Similar to Markus's previously mentioned hesitation to actively use particular valued garments in order to preserve them, emotional attachment additionally appeared to influence how interviewees cared for, maintained and repaired garments over time.

All interviewees described engaging in various forms and methods of garment care, such as minimizing washing, washing according to care labels, using lower temperatures and hanging garments outside to freshen them instead of washing unnecessarily. Nearly all interviewees had also previously repaired garments by stitching together broken seams, replacing missing buttons or patching up jeans.

However, several interviewees explained that they were significantly more willing to repair their favorite garments and clothing they really like or felt emotionally attached to. Favorite garments were often described as worth saving, while less valued garments became easier to discard once damaged. Suggesting that emotional significance strongly shaped whether garments were perceived as deserving continued care and repair.

Filip explained if he really likes a garment he would "*make the effort to keep them alive for as long as possible"*, but garments that he does not value as much would just disappoint him if they broke and then he would just get rid of them. Similarly, Markus explained that garments that have "*meant a lot*" became particularly difficult to dispose of, even when damaged, and that he would attempt to use them if possible. He even explained that he would go a bit "*manic*" when some of his favorites broke beyond repairable condition, he would search everywhere to find an exact replacement. These results indicate and reflect the concept of product attachment and earlier research by Niinimäki and Armstrong (2013), that emotional attachment is a potential factor that motivates people to extend garment lifetimes and postponing disposal. And additionally, encourage consumers to care for garments longer, repair them and delay replacement.

When analyzing the practices of repair from a Social Practice Theory, it is clear that repair practices depend on the interaction between competences, materials and meanings (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). In order to repair garments, interviewees need to possess practical skills and access to essential tools, while also attaching value to the garments in order to motivate the effort required.

5.2.5 Favorite garments, boredom and shifting attachment

Across interviews, emotional attachment for clothing rarely appeared fixed or permanent. Instead, participants frequently described how relationships with garments changed over time depending on changing styles, identities and the introduction of new purchases. Several interviewees described how certain garments temporarily became favorites and then gradually lost emotional significance once replaced by newer items. Filip, Adam and Gustav similarly described that new purchases often became favorites. Filip drew the conclusion between favorite songs, listening to them very intensely until being replaced by another favorite. Aligning with research that has previously highlighted that emotional detachment and changing relationships to clothing may also trigger disposal. And that boredom, declining social fit in terms of changing trends and a weakened connection between the consumer's identity and the garment could contribute to clothing disposal even though garments are still physically usable (Abdallah et al., 2024; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Kwon, Choo, and Kim, 2020).

Several participants also described how emotional attachment to garments fluctuated over time rather than disappearing completely. Mira for example described keeping a leopard print skirt that she likes a lot despite only wearing it during certain trend cycles. Although the skirt could remain unused for years because leopard print was not "allowed" to be used when out of trend,

she explained that she hesitated to dispose of it because she anticipated that the style would eventually feel relevant and appealing again. Similarly, Linn described how certain garments moved in and out of "like cycles", where pieces that remained unused for periods of time could suddenly become favorites again depending on mood, trends or changing style preferences. Emma likewise described keeping garments she no longer currently used because she believed she would likely return to them during another phase or style cycle.

While previous research has demonstrated that emotional attachment are closely related to connection to identity, self-expression and changing life phases and that changing relationship may trigger disposal (Abdallah et al., 2024; Kundu and Sharma 2026; Kwon, Choo, and Kim, 2020). The findings in this study additionally suggest that emotional attachment may fluctuate cyclically over time rather than simply strengthen or disappear over time. Garments could temporarily lose relevance or active use without fully losing their emotional value, resulting in postponed disposal because of imagined reconnection in the future.

5.3 Value and responsibility beyond use

Across the interviews, the interviewees rarely perceived unwanted clothing as immediate waste once they themselves stopped actively using them. Instead, clothes were continuously evaluated according to their remaining value, usefulness and potential beyond the interviewee's own wear. Disposal decisions therefore emerged not simply as process of getting rid of clothing, but as negotiations, valuations and thoughts regarding what garments were still worth after use had ended.

Interviewees frequently evaluated garments according to their perceived economic value before deciding how they should be disposed of. Clothing associated with higher quality, expensive brands were more commonly described as "worth selling", while garments that were bought for a cheaper price or brands were often donated, stored or discarded more easily.

> *"For more simple garments, I usually throw them away or donate them to clothing collections if I think they are something someone else might want. And if they are a bit nicer, I try to sell them on platforms like Vinted or through Sellpy" - Filip*

> *"Sometimes I try to sell things through platforms like Sellpy when they are more like branded clothes that I have found in my wardrobe but haven't used in a while. But if it is just like a regular white T-shirt, I'll usually put it in donation bins instead." - Adam*

Further interviewees were evaluating the potential value or profit gained from selling a garment against the required effort it takes to sell them. Interviewees frequently described that lower quality or worn-out garments as "not worth the effort" required for resale. Particularly when photographing, uploading and communicating with buyers is required and was perceived as too time- and energy consuming in relation to the potential return.

> *"I usually consider whether I can sell it first. But it feels like the item has to be something special, because far from all garments feel worth selling considering how little you might get for them." - Gustav*

"If the garments had been designer or branded clothes that I felt I was truly done with, maybe I could have considered reselling them [..]. But I find it hard to see that I would actually make much money from it. So instead, I often choose the easiest option and simply dispose of or give them away instead. [..] I don't have the energy to process the reselling, so I just give them away, simply because it is the easiest option." - Markus

At the same time, garments were not only evaluated according to financial value. Several interviewees instead describe that the clothes might still hold value because they could be useful to someone else. When garments were considered not to hold any financial value, interviewees described evaluating them based on whether someone else could appreciate them. Donation or passing clothing on to family members or friends was framed as a way of giving garments a second life rather than simply removing them from the wardrobe.

"Considering that most of the clothes were still in good condition, it felt better for someone else to be able to use the clothing directly rather than having it recycled" - Adam

"If I feel that an item no longer suits me, for example, if it is too small or something, and I know that it might fit or appeal to someone else, then I will usually check with someone first and see if they want it" - Lovisa

These results reflect previous research explaining how perceived garment quality and economic value shape clothing disposal pathways. Similar to findings by Koch and Domina (1997), interviewees in this study frequently evaluated garments according to whether they were considered valuable enough to remain in circulation. At the same time the findings also align with another view of previous research suggesting that higher quality garments not necessarily result in certain disposal practices (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009), as interviewees also described sometimes prioritizing convenience or practical limitations over the ability and economic gain of reselling clothes. Perceived garment value therefore appeared to shape decisions but were not relied on solely when determining what disposal practices were actually carried out.

For some interviewees, donation also functioned as a way of emotionally justifying disposal decisions that otherwise felt difficult. Mira for example described struggling to let go of garments because she still thought they were really nice. However, she explained that disposal became emotionally easier once she realized that they were potentially more valuable for someone else. Knowing that another person might become "much happier" by purchasing or receiving the garment allowed her to negotiate between personal attachment and feelings of responsibility.

Similarly, Emma described actively attempting to be more "*ruthless*" in her disposal decisions. She described feelings of ethical discomfort connected to owning excessive amounts of clothing while others are lacking. She explained that having way too much clothing felt "*greedy*", particularly when thinking about people who had significantly less. For Emma, disposal decisions therefore became connected not only to wardrobe management or sustainability concerns, but also to general ideas of social responsibility, privilege and fairness. The act of giving away clothing to people who are in bigger need of them arose feelings of pride.

"Especially because I give things to mothers that I know are really struggling financially. I remember giving away a black blazer once, and she became so

incredibly happy. My friend called me and said that the mother had almost started crying and said 'Oh my god, now I can wear this when I go out and meet my girlfriends. I have always wanted something like this.' Moments like that sometimes make me realize how much I have, and how little it costs me to pass things on to someone else. That exchange feels very good" - Emma

These results in some ways reflect previous research within sustainable consumption and psychological approaches to clothing disposal, relating to the suggestion that disposal decisions are shaped also by emotions, values, attitudes and subjective moral considerations. While previous studies have often connected sustainable disposal practices such as donation and reuse to environmental awareness and positive attitudes toward sustainability (Goudeau and Lee, 2021; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Wu et al., 2023). These interviews suggest that social responsibility, emotional and moral motivations also play a significant role in shaping disposal behavior.

5.4 Navigating uncertainties in disposal decisions

The interviewees were asked directly how they perceive their own knowledge about disposal options. Most interviewees initially described themselves as relatively familiar with available disposal alternatives and generally capable of deciding what to do with different garments in different situations. However, several interviewees instead described their knowledge as incomplete, limited or largely based on personal assumptions rather than clear information. Even participants who initially perceived themselves as relatively informed later on revealed uncertainty, hesitation and self-doubt when discussing specific disposal decisions more detailed.

Even though interviewees were generally aware of sustainability issues related to clothing consumption, wardrobe management and textile disposal, uncertainty was not limited to a lack of knowledge in that aspect but instead emerged through several stages of the disposal process. Interviewees frequently described feeling unsure not only about recycling systems and donation requirements, but also about how garments should be categorized, about the value, usefulness, potential future of garments and what disposal options were most appropriate. Ultimately also if they were actually making "the right" decisions. Hence, disposal decisions appeared not to be straight forward routines, but as ongoing negotiations influenced by subjective evaluations, incomplete knowledge and practical aspects.

Interviewees additionally described that their knowledge regarding clothing disposal practices was often shaped through personal learning processes rather than through official information or actively researching. Several interviewees referred to learning disposal habits from family members, friends or social surroundings. Suggesting that disposal knowledge appeared quite socially shaped and experience based.

These findings can be seen to align with the concept of knowledge-action gap explained by Markkula and Moisander (2012). Confusion regarding alternatives and practices can be connected to hearing different things from multiple sources which instead only hinder the behavior. Researchers such as Joung (2014) and Kundu and Sharma (2026) mention as well that even when consumers have a positive attitude, they still don't always follow the intentions due to the uncertainty.

Several interviewees described that they mentally and physically put garments in different piles or categories before deciding how to dispose of them. Filip for example explained that he mentally categorizes garments according to whether they were valuable enough to sell, tidy enough to donate or too damaged to go anywhere other than the trash.

> *"Is this something that someone is willing to pay for? If so, then I will probably try to sell it. And if I feel it is not, but still has more life to give, then I try to recycle it [...] and if I think it is worthless, then I throw it in the trash. Although I am probably wrong sometimes"* - Filip

Despite describing a relatively structured disposal decision making process, his acknowledgement that he is "*probably wrong sometimes*" illustrates how uncertainty remained present even after garments had been evaluated and sorted. Likewise, Josefine described disposal decisions involving continuous questioning in her mind regarding what garments were suitable to go.

> *"Okey, what should I do with it? Should I give it to someone [...] or is it not in shape for anything, then I will maybe throw it away. Or can I sell it?* - Josefine

Uncertainty additionally appeared related to interviewees' own perceptions of whether garments still held value for others. Several interviewees questioned whether clothing they personally no longer wanted could still be desirable or useful for someone else. Lovisa reflected on previous resale experiences where garments she personally thought were unattractive or low value were unexpectedly sold on secondhand platforms.

> *"I have actually noticed that sometimes I think 'No I can't sell this, who would even want this? But then i have tried selling things anyway thinking 'Who would want this crappy sweater?' and then, people actually buy them. So I have realized that just because I obviously do not like something anymore, since I am getting rid of it, doesn't mean that there aren't other people who might actually like it."* - Lovisa

This suggests that interviewees' own evaluations of garments do not necessarily align with how others perceive the value of certain garments. Hence, clothing disposal decisions appear to go through uncertain and highly personal and subjective assessment criteria where usefulness, desirability and value were negotiated based on personal thoughts rather than objectively determined.

During interviews it became evident that uncertainties were also linked to disposal systems. A considerable amount of interviewees expressed uncertainties and confusion regarding textile collection rules, recycling systems and expectations on donated clothing. Several viewed socks and worn underwear as immediate waste whereas Adam questioned whether these types of garments counted as hygiene products or should be disposed of in residential waste, explaining that he often felt unsure about if he is "*doing right or wrong and if the product or textiles could somehow be saved*". Similar uncertainties were expressed by another interviewee.

> *"What can I actually not donate? I don't really know. I have mostly just assumed that if something is damaged, then it can't be donated. But then there are things like a swimsuit that is completely intact, but it is still a hygiene product. So maybe it can't be donated. But I am not entirely sure about that."* - Sara

These reflections suggest that relevant information and instructions might be lacking from a more systematic perspective. This confusion also seemed to be related both to inconsistency of these rules from time to time and also between different collection places, organizations and recycling stations. When asking Lovisa for example if she felt sure about what options to choose in different situations, she said:

> *"No, not at all. Sometimes it is to know what you are actually supposed to throw away and what can be donated. And it also feels like different collection organizations have different standards. Sometimes they want everything to be clean, sorted and undamaged, no stains or holes. And sometimes everything is accepted. So it really varies a lot."* - Lovisa

This interviewee also explained that she has occasionally even brought garments to donation stations only to hesitate and take them back home because she became unsure whether the items were acceptable to donate or not. Which further exemplifies the unclarities of disposal systems.

The recent changes of laws back and forth were by some referred to as creating confusion about whether only clean and tidy garments are allowed or whether any textile goods could be recycled. One interviewee explained that the new regulations had disrupted previously habitual disposal routines and created uncertainties, particularly around household textiles and really worn-out items. She described becoming increasingly uncertain regarding where the boundary between recyclable textiles, donation worthy garments and immediate waste actually existed. Concerns about disposing of textiles incorrectly additionally created anxiety around potentially risking penalties, while also reflecting how this reasoning stood in contrast to earlier disposal habits.

> *"I used to feel confident. But after this law came, I have become a bit unsure. Like, what am I supposed to do with things such as socks, towels, bed sheets, things that you feel like no one else would really want if they are handed in to places like Myrornas recycling thing. They obviously can't resell those things. Those are the kind of things that you really just want to throw away. And then you end up sitting there wondering 'Am I allowed to throw this in the regular trash, or could I get fined for that? Or am I supposed to donate it or take it to recycling center?' So I think the law has made me more uncertain. Previously, I think I mostly acted out of habit and didn't think about it as much."* - Lovisa

This reflection suggests that disposal practices have previously been about routinized behaviors not requiring any additional thoughts. However, changing regulations appeared to disrupt previous behavior and forcing the interviewee to more actively reflect on decisions while also experiencing greater uncertainty about how the systems should be interpreted. From a Social Practice Theory perspective, this illustrates how clothing disposal has previously functioned as a routinized practice embedded within everyday life. Rather than involving conscious decision-making, disposal behaviors were reproduced through habitual performances explained to be supported by existing infrastructures, competences, and social norms (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012).

At the same time, several interviewees described actively trying to improve their knowledge and becoming more informed regarding sustainable disposal practices. "*I want to be conscious and to do the right thing, but I think it is difficult. [..] I'm trying to get better and better at it"*.

Other interviewees also acknowledged that they should probably know more while some stated that they were just lacking engagement.

However, Sara was questioning whether the responsibility for understanding complex disposal systems should rest entirely on individuals. She explained that if sustainable disposal required too much effort or information seeking, responsibility should be taken by society. "*As a human being, you are very, very lazy [..] I think it should be the responsibility of society. They should make it easy for people to recycle things and easy to do the right thing*". Textile recycling was compared to bottle recycling systems, describing successful recycling practices as those that become intuitive, easily accessible and integrated into everyday life without requiring extensive thought or effort. This reflection signals broader expectations of society to provide clear, accessible and effortless systems in order to enhance sustainable behavior in everyday life.

The above described perceived knowledge and navigation through uncertainties among interviewees reflects previous research suggesting that uncertainty about disposal systems, sorting practices and available channels may prevent consumers from consistently acting in line with sustainable disposal intentions. Previous studies have shown that even though people hold positive attitudes toward sustainable disposal, they may still fail to act accordingly if they feel uncertain about available disposal options (Joung, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017).

Similar tendencies emerged through the interviews in this study where several interviewees initially described themselves as relatively informed and confident regarding disposal practices but later on exposed uncertainty, contradictory understandings and incomplete knowledge of recycling systems, sorting rules and appropriate disposal channels. The results in this study also suggest a distinction between perceived and actual knowledge, as the interviewees frequently navigated disposal decisions through assumptions, uncertainty and partial understanding rather than complete knowledge or confidence. As the interviewees sometimes also revealed a distinction between perceived and actual knowledge by initially describing that they were relatively informed but later on exposed uncertainty and incomplete knowledge regarding recycling systems and lack of confidence in disposal decisions. Which is similar to what has previously been discovered by Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), Norum (2017) and Paço et al. (2021).

6 Discussion

The following chapter includes an interpretation and discussion of the findings, where they are explored in greater depth. It reflects on the patterns and relationships identified in the analysis and considers how these can be understood through the perspectives of the Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Practice Theory and Product Attachment. The findings are further discussed in relation to previous research, with attention to how different factors interact in shaping clothing disposal practices.

At the beginning of this study, closet clean-outs were introduced through social media videos showing overflowing wardrobes, piles of clothing on bedroom floors and frustrated captions about deciding what should be kept, sold, donated, recycled or thrown away. What initially appears to be a simple act of decluttering and sometimes even an aesthetically satisfying routine, emerged throughout this study as something far more emotionally and practically complex. The humorous TikTok quote stating "When you've finished the wardrobe clear out but now you have to bag it up and decide what's charity, rubbish and Vinted (I want to die)" (Livpughx, 2026) captured more than temporary frustration. In many ways, it reflected the actual tensions interviewees in this study described when navigating and negotiating clothing disposal decisions.

Our study aimed to contribute to existing research regarding the topic of closet-clean outs and clothing disposal decision making processes. Previous research within this field has already shown that clothing disposal is influenced by a combination of practical, emotional, social, and contextual factors. Previous studies have highlighted how disposal decisions are often connected to ongoing consumption practices, emotional attachments to garments, sustainability concerns, and the concept of knowledge (Blazquez et al., 2020; Hedlund and Jaca, 2025; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Markkula and Moisander, 2012; Zhang, Zhang and Zhou, 2021). Further, what has also been stated by previous research is that clothes are frequently disposed of before reaching its physical end of life due to changing preferences or perceived loss of value (Laitala, 2014; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013).

Interestingly, findings in our study have shown both similarities and differences from previous studies. Consistent with previous studies, our findings suggest that clothing disposal is closely connected with consumption habits and as an enabler for continued consumption, alike for example, Kwon, Choo and Kim (2020) research. However, our study found factors going beyond just the connections between consumption habits and disposal practices. Our study showed that for many interviewees, their interest in fashion and general relationships with clothing and fashion was linked to consumption habits, wardrobe size, and how frequently wardrobes became overfilled. Hence, this study demonstrates how different levels of engagement with fashion and clothing can shape the conditions under which disposal becomes necessary.

Our study also supports previous research suggesting that garments are often disposed of before reaching their physical end of life (Laitala, 2014; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013). Interviewees rarely disposed of completely torn out garments, a majority of clothes removed from wardrobes were still physically useable and in such a good condition that they could be resold, passed on or donated. Unwanted garments were instead determined because of changing style, identity, or just boredom. Furthermore, emotional attachment emerged as an important factor that both influenced and complicated disposal decisions. All interviewees described sentimental value, memories, and personal meanings attached to certain garments.

In several ways, our study also confirms previous study on how uncertainties influence clothing disposal decisions. Similar to previous studies (Joung, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Paço et al., 2021; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017), interviewees expressed some extent and varying extents of uncertainty regarding disposal alternatives, recycling systems and appropriate destinations for unwanted garments. However, the findings in our study also show that uncertainties extend beyond lack of information. Interviewees showed struggles of assessing the value, usefulness, and possible future relevance of their garments. Which indicates that disposal decisions and perceived value were based on highly subjective evaluations and assumptions. Interviewees' own assessments of whether garments were desirable did not necessarily align with how others might perceive them which further reflects on the personal and subjective meanings and values attached to clothes.

However, some contradictions from previous research have also occurred, bringing new contributions to the existing field of research. Previous research within clothing consumption and disposal studies was seen to focus mostly on female consumers. Women are described in the literature to be more connected to sustainable disposal practices and adopt most frequently different methods when disposing clothes to extend the life. Men have been described to use more simpler options when choosing disposal practices and not be as active in sustainable disposal practices (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Domina and Koch, 1999; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). Within this study, this assumption has not been prominent as a distinction between men and female cannot be seen regarding disposal behavior. Male interviewees demonstrated similarly to female interviewees, strong emotional attachments to their garments, engaged in frequent closet clean-outs driven by continued consumption and using multiple different disposal practices. This suggests that a consumer's individual emotional engagement and use of clothing for identity expression are significantly more influential in shaping disposal behavior than gender alone. The given results of such emotional negotiations and practical routines observed are instead seen as deeply human responses tied to the social practice of clothing consumption and personal product attachment.

An interesting and new finding to the research field that has emerged from our study is the phenomenon that we would like to call "out of sight, out of mind" that had a prominent role in delaying or altering final clothing disposal decisions. As explained in the results and analysis, the interviewees frequently relocated unwanted garments to transitional storage such as IKEA bags, boxes on top of shelves, or hidden sections of the closet. Some interviewees described how these bags remained untouched for long periods of time, occasionally revisited or reopened when interviewees reconsidered whether garments should actually be kept. While this action is initially intended to result to the behavior of permanent disposal explained by Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977) like selling, donating or recycling, it unwittingly solves the consumer's immediate problem that is visual chaos or physical crowding of the closet. Once the clothes are put away and hidden, the initial frustration and intention that triggered the closet clean-out disappears.

This phenomenon can be seen to be explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior perspective where it disrupts the attitude-intention-behavior path (Ajzen, 1991). The negative attitude that is created through an overflowing closet generated an urgent intention to clear out clothes. By the consumers removing the items from the direct visual field the attitude disappears and the intention is also put on hold, which directly widens the intention-behavior gap. Perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991), can also be seen to come into play as the consumer regains the control over the newly created space but lowers the motivation to complete the actual

disposal behavior. This suggests that disposal is not always a one time decision making moment, but can develop into an ongoing process involving uncertainty, hesitation and emotional negotiation.

Moreover, while previous research has highlighted emotional attachment to clothing in relation to memories, nostalgia and sentimental value (Guy and Banim, 2000; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013), the findings of our study suggest that emotional attachment may take different forms and influence the perceived value and disposal decisions in distinct ways. The findings indicate that there is a presence of two different types of attachments. The first one was primarily linked to memories, sentimental value where garments were retained and kept because they represented important life events, relationships, or personal experiences. These garments were often kept despite no longer being used. This aligns well with what has already been established by previous research. The second form of attachment was connected to favorite garments that remained actively worn because of their functionality, comfort, style or because they perfectly expressed aspects of the interviewee's identities and aspirations. Also, a new and interesting finding presented in our study is that several interviewees described that newly purchased garments became favorites and were used extensively in the first period of possession. This further contradicts previous research stating that emotional attachment evolved over time in relation to accumulated experiences and the creation of memories (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges, 2009; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013; Vieira and Fonseca, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). It rather suggests that new purchases might be emotionally valued due to the positive feelings of being up to date with trends, and the garments resonate with present identity and self-expression.

Consistent with previous research, interviewees generally expressed intentions and positive attitudes leading on to preferring disposal options that allowed garments to remain in use rather than being discarded as waste (Joung, 2014; Kundu and Sharma, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Wan, Shen and Choi, 2017). Resale, donation or passing garments were described as desirable options as these alternatives enable continuous use by others. However, these findings suggest a potential overlooked aspect of these disposal practices. While interviewees did not really reflect on the future fate of garments after the point of donation or resale, these actions may be understood as transferring responsibility for future disposal decisions to another individual or actor. In this sense, responsibility does not disappear but rather shifts to a new owner, who will eventually face these very same or similar decisions regarding its use, retention or disposal. Hence, it is a part of an ongoing circulation of garments where they are continuously renegotiated.

The findings can further be understood through the three main determinants of the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Another attitude determinant was seen in the result as where most interviewees view responsible disposal as something positive and sustainable, which contributed to positive evaluations of the behavior and their intention to perform it. Subjective norm can be seen where partners, family and friends impact decision making around closet clean-outs and what should be done with the removed clothing. Perceived behavioral control was impacted by time, energy and availability of the recycling/donation facilities which impacts the possibility to actually conducting the disposal.

By applying the Social Practice Theory (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012), this study shows that clothing disposal is not merely a series of isolated individual choices, but rather a collection of deeply embedded social practices. Two primary intersecting practices were identified, the

practice of the closet clean-out and the practice of clothing disposal which further includes donation, resale and recycling. Within the practice of the closet clean-out, which includes the removal, sorting and evaluation of garments from the closet, several factors influenced when and how the practice was performed. Different circumstances triggered a closet clean-out among the interviewees, such as overfull wardrobes, moving or a desire for a more organized wardrobe. The practice also involved activities such as taking garments of out of the wardrobe, creating different piles, trying on or evaluating garments and temporarily storing them in bags or other spaces.

The second practice, clothing disposal, involved what happened to the clothes once they had been removed from the closet and could end up in different disposal routes, primarily donation resale and textile recycling. These practices involved different activities and considerations, such as deciding whether a garment was suitable for donation, determining if it could be resold, finding an appropriate place to donate or recycle it and physically transporting the garment to the chosen disposal point. The findings therefore show that the closet clean-out and clothing disposal can be understood as two distinct but interconnected practices. The closet clean-out creates the circumstances in which clothes are selected for removal, while the disposal practice determines how these garments are handled once they leave the closet.

Both of these found practices showed therefore examples of the three elements of Social Practice Theory, materials, competences and meanings (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). For the practice of closet clean-out, materials could be connected to the practical things as the closet, drawers that became overfull, the three piles that the clothing were sorted in and the IKEA bags that they later were put in. The competences for this practice can be seen as knowing how to evaluate and sort the clothing into the different piles and decide what should be kept. Lastly, meanings can be explained through the need for order, tidiness, frustration with an overfull wardrobe or through the shared social expectation and cultural representations regarding what is seen as a well-structured and acceptable wardrobe. For the second practice of clothing disposal, materials are connected to available recycling stations, donation points, resale platforms and transportation. Competences for this practice is instead knowing what can be donated/recycled/resold and where and how it can be done. For meanings it is seen through the responsibility, sustainability and the need for “doing the right thing” based on social expectations.

These findings of this study suggest that the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Practice Theory can be understood as complementary perspectives for understanding clothing disposal. Where TPB focuses on the individual-level determinants that influence behavioral intentions, SPT shifts the focus towards how behaviors are embedded within practices shaped by the three elements. The findings indicate that these perspectives are interconnected, as individual intentions and perceptions are influenced by social and material conditions in which practices take place. Seen from the result of where interviewees are impacted by partners and have habits of consulting friends and family which further illustrate social pressure that is TPB subjective norm but also SPT meanings where it is actively reproduced and maintained through social interaction. By combining these two perspectives it provides a more comprehensive understanding of clothing disposal through connecting individual decision-making with the wider social and material context in which these behaviors are performed.

7 Conclusion

The following chapter concludes the study by summarizing the main findings and addressing the purpose and the research questions; 1. How do consumers reason through their closet-cleanouts and clothing disposal decisions? 2. How do consumers perceive their knowledge of clothing disposal? 3. How do habits, values, emotions and relationships with garments influence clothing disposal decisions? It lastly highlights the key insights given from this study and reflects further on its overall contribution to understanding clothing disposal practices and how future research can proceed.

The purpose of this study was to explore how consumers navigate through the practices of closet clean-outs and resonate about disposal decisions, focusing particularly on how relationships with garments, emotions, values, habits, perceived knowledge and potential uncertainties impact and shape the decision-making process. This study have contributed with new insights into the research field of clothing disposal by exploring how consumers navigate closet clean-outs and reasons about what happens to garments they no longer want or use. The findings of this study suggest closet clean-outs and disposal is not a single decision but rather an ongoing process of evaluation and negotiation influenced by practical, emotional, social and contextual factors all of which interact throughout the disposal process.

Regarding how consumers reason through closet clean-outs and clothing disposal decisions, our findings reveal that the processes of closet clean-outs are recurring but irregular practices, most commonly initiated when wardrobes become overly crowded, garments are never used or there is a need for organized order and space. At the same time, findings demonstrate a strong relationship between clothing disposal and continued consumption. Creating space in the wardrobe to fit new purchases which makes the practice of closet clean-outs a part of an ongoing circle of acquisition. Clothes are further evaluated based on their use, perceived value, identity and emotional significance, while the intended disposal path is influenced by practical considerations such as time, energy and accessibility but also social influence from friends and family. Disposal decisions were therefore not necessarily final or linear, but could involve uncertainty, hesitation and reconsideration.

Further, the findings reveal that deciding to remove a garment from the closet does not necessarily result in its immediate disposal. Clothes removed from the closet were commonly sorted into bags, boxes, or piles stored for long periods of time. Enabling delays in actual actions and further negotiations. This highlights a gap between the intention to dispose and completing the intended behavior. The decisions could therefore extend over time as consumers reconsider the garments value and chosen disposal option. The process can therefore be understood as a process that continues beyond the initial closet clean-out and is shaped by required practical effort, uncertainty, and changing perceptions of value.

Perceived knowledge further complicated this process. Although many interviewees felt that they held knowledge about disposal options such as donation, resale and recycling. Uncertainties emerged when implementing it in practice, particularly regarding donation rules, recycling options, changing regulations and what would happen to the clothes afterwards. Uncertainty was also prominent beyond knowledge of disposal systems, as interviewees described it to be a struggle when assessing future usefulness and value of the cleaned-out clothing. Therefore, knowing how to dispose of clothing did not necessarily result in the disposal practice being completed.

Lastly, the findings showcase that habits, values, emotions and relationships with clothing strongly influence disposal decisions. Consumption habits and fashion interest can create the conditions for repeated closet clean-outs, while sustainability and responsibility preferences impacted disposal options where clothing to remain in use was preferred. Emotional attachment was revealed to take multiple forms, including sentimental attachment to memories and attachment to favorite clothes connected to identity, comfort and self-expression. Which could complicate decision making about whether clothing should be removed from the closet. Relationships to other people were also prominent in impacting these practices were partners, family and friends were seen to influence decisions through social expectations and shared understandings of what an appropriate wardrobe and responsible disposal is.

The study therefore demonstrates that clothing disposal cannot be understood solely as an individual decision-making process. The findings show how individual attitudes, intentions and perceived control interact with social relationships, material conditions and the meanings attached to clothing. By combining the Theory of Planned Behavior, concept of Product Attachment and Social Practice Theory, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how clothing disposal decisions are formed, negotiated and sometimes interrupted in everyday life.

7.1 Implications and future research

The findings of this study can have implications for companies and other actors within textile and circular economy seeking to encourage more responsible clothing disposal behavior. Since it was stated in the study that interviewees often have a positive attitude towards responsible disposal behavior and demonstrated knowledge of several disposal options, the main challenge seems to lie in practical barriers. Time, effort and limited accessibility can prevent intentions to create a behavior which suggests that disposal systems should be made more accessible, convenient and integrated into consumers everyday routines. For fashion companies the findings highlight the importance of considering the post-purchase life of clothing. Connecting with emotional attachment for favorite clothing items, further repair services can create longer use period. While resale and donation can extend garment use, they also transfer future disposal decisions to following owners. Supporting longer garment use and more transparent post-purchase pathways could therefore contribute to more sustainable clothing practices.

Future research could further investigate the “out of sight, out of mind” phenomenon that was identified in this study by examining how temporary storage influences more clothing disposal decisions. As disposal appeared to be an ongoing process rather than a single decision-making moment, longitudinal research could also provide greater insight into how intentions, uncertainty and emotional attachment change over time. Another research idea could also be to conduct the study while participants are in the moment of a closet clean-out to capture real time thoughts and behaviors. Future research could also investigate garments beyond the first disposal decision to what happens after donation or resale. For example, research within donation or recycling facilities to see what clothing is received and how it can be made better for the consumer from an infrastructure perspective.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Main question: Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and your everyday life?

Sub-questions:
- How old are you?
- What is your main occupation?
- What gender do you identify with?
- Where do you live?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your approximate income?

Main question: Can you tell me about your relationship with clothes?

Sub-questions:
- How often do you buy clothes?
- What do you think about when you buy clothes?
- Where do you buy clothes?
- How much do you spend on clothes each month?

Main question: How would you describe your wardrobe of clothes?

Sub-questions:
- Is there a lot/a little clothes?
- Can you describe more why there is a lot/a little?

Main question: Are there any garments that you particularly like? Can you give examples?

Sub-questions:
- Why do you particularly like these garments? Is there a reason?
- Are these garments used often?
- If not, why do you choose to keep them?
- If this garment breaks (e.g. gets a tear or a seam comes open) what would you do then?
- Would you have had difficulty getting rid of this garment?
- How would you proceed in such cases if you needed to get rid of it?

Main question: How do you generally take care of your clothes?

Sub-questions:
- Do you try to extend the life of your clothes in any way?
- What methods have you used?
- Have you ever mended clothes, either yourself or at a tailor?
- If they answer yes: Can you tell me about a time when you chose to mend a garment and what kind of garment it was?
- If they answer no: Why and if so, what do you do with the torn garment?

Main question: Tell me about how you go about clearing out your closet or getting rid of one or more items of clothing?

Sub-questions:
- When was the last time you cleared out / got rid of one or more items of clothing?
- What made you do it at that time?
- What items were they and what did you do with them?
- Were there other options you considered? And if so, why didn't you choose these?
- How do you usually think when you decide to get rid of an item of clothing?
- What feelings arise when you clear out clothes?
- What influences you to clear out clothes?
- Can you tell us about what has shaped your habits around clothing and waste?
- What factors would you say weigh most heavily in influencing your decisions about how to handle the garment?

Main question: How would you describe your knowledge of different ways to dispose of clothes?

Sub-questions:
- What options do you know?
- How did you get this information?
- Do you feel confident about which option to choose on different occasions?
- Are there situations where you feel unsure?

Closing questions:
- What do you think now when you look back on everything we've talked about?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Is there anyone you would recommend to do this interview next?

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