Customer engagement in second-hand fashion marketplaces after the pandemic

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Abstract

Background :

Further to the environmental and ethical issues within the sector of fashion, consumers are now shifting toward more responsible and different business models as second hand selling. According to Boston Consulting Group, the second-hand clothes market is a growing sector which currently weighs around thirty and forty billion dollars, so 2% of the total sales of the fashion and luxury industry (Deslandes, 2020). Nonetheless, the recent covid crisis has acted as a booster in the movement, raising considerably the consumer’s awareness. Besides, with the generalization of remote working and the will to reduce contamination risks, fashion consumers tend to stay more at home and spend additional time online. Consequently, their reflections and purchasing behavior are forecasted to be modified as well.

Purpose :

The objective of this research is to give recommendations to the marketplaces of the sector to stimulate customer engagement after the crisis. The authors will analyze relevant patterns in the potential customer’s attitude and behavior modification. Besides, they will identify innovative opportunities for marketers to reinvent their advertising and communication plans.

Method :

The study will be established through a qualitative research using twelve semi-structured interviews. The authors will exchange with respondents representing the stakeholders who can be reached by the marketing campaigns of the online stores in France.

Conclusion :

Different particularities have been found according to the customer type. Therefore, the recommendations differ for each of them. The authors found out that current customers are highly informed about the benefits of purchasing second-hand clothes. Their main reasons invoked for using this service is the price and the uniqueness of the products. Therefore, it is recommended to the second-hand clothes marketplaces to focus on communication and in particular on newsletters, in order to sustain the customer loyalty of the already existing customer base. Consumers never buying second-hand clothes have shown an important openness for receiving information about the industry. Intensive advertising strategies seem effective but still not generating purchases because of the contamination fear, the lack of awareness of the platform’s benefits and a trust more shared with brand’s structures than independent stores. Concerning the customers purchasing second-hand garments
only in physical stores, seeing the facilities of the shops is the gateway to their trust. Nonetheless, they would be ready to shift to online stores if connections to the real world could be given, as pop-up stores or interactive deliveries for example.
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I. Introduction

1.1 Background

The fashion industry is a topic broadly studied during a bachelor’s in business administration. Whether it is about the supply chain to work on their logistics, how they outsource or through scandals like the Rana Plaza collapse or how animals are treated for the skin, fur, leather industry. The global apparel market weighed 1,5 trillion dollars in 2020 and is expected to attain 2,25 trillion dollars by 2025 (Shahandeh, 2020). According to McKinsey Global Fashion Index, twenty major companies lead the global fashion industry and account for 97% of global economic profit in the sector. Nike, Adidas, H&M, the Inditex Group are making part of this ranking and one of their common points is that they have all been involved in social or environmental scandals (Hanbury, 2018). The fashion industry is considered as the second most polluting industry, after the heavy oil industry. The main consequences of the industry are water pollution caused by the use of chemicals to dye textiles rejected in wastewater, massive water consumption in cotton fields endangering the local population. For instance, to produce 1 kilogramme of cotton, it requires 20,000 liters of water. In addition, a northern family throws away an average of 30 kilogrammes of clothes each year with approximately only 15% of it being donated or recycled, without counting the waste caused by non-sold items (Charpail, 2017). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), around 20,9 million people are currently forced to work. Forced labour is defined as a work or a service which made from a person under the threat and for which the person has not offered himself voluntarily (ILO Convention no°29). It often happens in agriculture and manufacturing related to the fashion industry. These led to the need to change and improve the ethics of the brands. Besides, customers have increased their awareness regarding the brand's environmental impact (Hasbullah et Al., 2020; McFarland, 2020).

1.2 The booming of second-hand platforms

In these conditions, the experts predict a transition from fast fashion to sustainable clothing systems (McFarland, 2020). For instance, many brands have decided to change their manufacturing processes to be more sustainable whether on an ecological or on an ethical point of view. They recognized that the economic aspect wasn’t the only way to be sustainable in the long-term. This
was generated by the understanding that if they do not change, the current materials will not be exploitable anymore. Besides, there is so much potential to unlock with fair working conditions or the brand’s reputation. This phenomenon has been reinforced throughout the emergence of new research concerning the triple bottom line (TBL). The TBL is an accounting framework that includes three dimensions: environmental, social and financial in order to value the sustainability of a company in the long-term (Slaper and Hall, 2011). On one hand, brands start to sustain programs in order to support the local population, like LVMH in Mongolia where they exploit cashmere goats for the precious wool (Sustainable Fibre Alliance Report, 2018). On the other hand, there are newly entrepreneurs that have decided to create innovative platforms to change the fashion industry and bring their own solutions to its current major issues. It can be observed that they foster alternative business models. Among them, there are especially circular systems such as the sales of second-hand clothes. For example, the second-hand website Thredup decided to team up with the brand Gap Inc. on the launch of the “Resale-as-a-service” website. Customers are invited to go to stores of the Gap Inc. group to give away old clothes that they want to sell. In exchange, they get coupons for their next purchase at Gap and the clothes are sent to Resale-as-a-service. They are listed online and ready to be sold (Driver, 2020). Moreover, of the 100 billion clothes made each year, 20% of the garments are unsold. The website proposes to Gap to sell the unsold clothes on their website with discounts in order to reduce waste. It benefits the platform Resale-as-a-service as it allows them to get new clothes to list more frequently, Gap Inc. by gaining new customers who come to their shop to give their old clothes and spending thanks to the coupons and the customers who just get rid of their old clothes and can buy new ones cheaper. According to a survey made by the Boston Consulting Group, the second-hand clothes market currently weighs approximately around thirty and 40 billion dollars across the globe which makes about 2% of the total sales of the fashion and luxury industry and is set to increase from fifteen to twenty per cent per year for the five upcoming years (Deslandes, M. 2020). This rise will be sustained thanks to the developed markets that will meet increases going up to 100% from a year on another and in 2028, the second-hand clothing market is expected to weigh more than the fast fashion market. In 2019, 25% of international shoppers bought a second-hand fashion item, compared with 24% in 2018, representing around 10 million new second-hand customers in one year. 69% of those surveyed said they would be prepared to consume more second-hand parts in the future. Thus, by 2023, 27% of the wardrobe of second-hand consumers will be made up of items that have already had a first life, compared with 21% today (Willersdorf, et al. 2020)
This practice is also reinforced by changes in the related customers’ attitude. Namely, they are less eager to own their clothes or accessories and are willing to reach a more minimalist way of life. Furthermore, subsequent to the self-isolation regulations this year, customers tend to make more purchases online, which is the privilege channel for this kind of systems (McFarland, 2020; Tu and Hu, 2018).

1.3 Problem Formulation

The biggest challenge for the implementation of systems implying second-hand fashion items nowadays, is the fear of contamination. Indeed, even if business models such as clothing rental will remain in high esteem for the customers after the pandemic, hygiene will be more than ever the main concern for the subscribers (Brydges, Heinze, Retamal and Henninger, 2020). Despite the companies’ measures, the doubt and a feeling of discomfort can remain (Rozin et al., 2008, as cited in Clube and Tennant, 2020). However, it is possible to influence the customer’s perception.

By focusing their marketing strategies on factors that highly matter for the users, companies can shift customers’ focus and overcome their concerns. According to Baek and Oh (2021), regarding fashion articles rental, there are two kinds of customers when facing the coronavirus situation. They are categorized by a level of contamination fear, either low or high. Nonetheless, for both, by increasing the emotional value related to the product, the contagion worries will be reduced. This can be done by putting a light on the product distinctiveness and the different fashion styles present on the website. Then, with a lesser extent, modifying the financial value of the product can equally be beneficial for the shift. Finally, it is still advised to check the behavior of the customer group concerned as variations could be seen. This can also be different per product (Lang, Li and Zhao, 2020).

The aim of this paper will be to evaluate possible leverages for marketers, further to the crisis. The researchers will define elements for an adapted communication post-covid and give indications about new factors to consider.
1.3 Purpose and research question

The authors would like to deepen the research concerning the marketing strategies currently employed. This will be done through the identification of the current relationship between the individuals and the second-hand fashion. Consequently, they will answer the following question: **How to reinforce customer engagement on second-hand marketplaces in a post-pandemic era?**

The study will especially focus on millennials customers, which are identified as being the most inclined to use the sustainable online platforms. Millennials represent about 30% of the world population. According to a survey, it appears that 87% of them feel the urge for companies to act more responsibly (Shaburishvili, 2019). With the emergence of social media in our daily life, brands and more especially fashion players have well understood the need to share their values. Through their accounts, they target a new generation of consumers, young adults and teens, who are more aware and sensitized to ethical brand values and ecological problems.

Within the research, the authors will target several dimensions. In the first place, they will identify why the customers nowadays tend to buy pre-owned clothes as well as the stores associated. Then, they will analyze how the different actors react to the pandemic situation (buyers/non-buyers). Finally, they will look for which business opportunities can be found, in order to attract new customers. The objective is to understand their current behavior and how fashion players can adapt their marketing campaigns, in systems implying pre-used clothing. The authors will focus on what the customers value about second-hand clothes and accessories.
1.4 Delimitations

Nonetheless, some delimitations will be faced in the making of the thesis. The geographical scope studied will focus on France. As a matter of fact, some interviews will be conducted in French. This will allow the respondents to feel more comfortable and not to have the barrier of language. Otherwise, this could be leading to a restriction in the vocabulary chosen to express their feelings. The interviews will be translated the most accurately possible. Nevertheless, some expressions only used in French will be translated the truest into English. In addition, the time period studied will be from March 2020 until now, which represents the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, some articles and data anterior to this date may be used as it will be relevant to the analysis of the findings.

1.5 Definitions

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<td><strong>Second-hand</strong></td>
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II. Research Literature

2.1 Customer engagement

During the last decades, the customer's handling by companies has shifted from a transactional view to the consideration of emotional bonds between the buyer and the product/brand. This led to new studies about the innovative concept of “customer engagement” (Pansari and Kumar, 2016). However, its naming can vary from one text to another from “customer engagement”, “customer engagement behaviors”, “customer brand engagement” to “engagement” simply (Bansal, 2016, p.15). Then, it can be considered as the result of “customer engagement marketing”, in other words, the strategy established by the firms to influence the customer's willingness to contribute to its promotion plans (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold and Carlson, 2016).

From zero elements in the search result on google before 2007, people could find more than 6 million of them around 2016 (Harmeling et al., 2016). It is around the same period that the MSI (as cited in Vivek et al., 2012) proposed to clarify the term by defining it as the conduct of customers after they bought an item/service. Nonetheless, already in 2012, marketing professors were pointing out that there is no consensus among researchers when defining the concept (Vivek et al.). Furthermore, this inconsistency remained, as the notion was viewed as unidimensional for the academics during a certain time before its multidimensionality was finally considered (Vivek et al., 2012). However, it is still possible to find studies with diverging points of view regarding the nature of these dimensions.

In the scope of a multidimensional customer engagement, researchers tend to recognize 3 aspects: the cognitive dimension (what the customers think), emotional dimension (what the customers feel) and behavioral dimension (what the customers do) (Kuvykaitė and Tarutė, 2015). Among these elements, the customer integrates the marketing strategy of the company through two types of participation, direct (e.g., repeated purchase as a behavioral response) or indirect (recommendations to other customers as a cognitive response), while the emotional aspect seems to be reinforcing and maintaining the other dimensions (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Kuvykaitė and Tarutė, 2015). Nonetheless, these dimensions can be also influenced by other factors as the customer
can be affected by contextual elements (Brodie et al., 2011).

Indeed, in the context of online brand communities, Wirtz et al. (2013) consider three kinds of drivers. They described online brand communities as a group with social bonds generated by mutual brand admiration, citing the definition of Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). The drivers are divided into three levels: “brand-related drivers”, “social drivers” and “functional drivers” (p.229-231). Through them, it is possible to observe several sub-sections. For the brand-related drivers, the authors discuss two aspects, the “brand identification” which encompasses the link between the brand identity and the customer social identity, and the “brand symbolic function” which includes what the brand symbolizes for a community. On another side, the social drivers include the “social benefits” received from the community interactions (recommendation, support…) and the “social identity” mostly based on self-esteem. Then, the functional drivers include “functional benefits” directly related to the assistance brought by the community or the “uncertainty avoidance” generated by the reviews. Furthermore, it contains the “information quality” in the communications about the brand, as well as the monetary and explicit normative incentive based on promotional actions made by the company as discounts and loyalty programs. On another side, additional drivers can be considered to reinforce the customer’s engagement. For example, the relationship quality between the brand and its customers, the enablers to create interaction between both of them and further situational drivers (e.g., seasonality) (So et al., 2019).

Even if the topic of customer engagement is pretty recent, it is important to highlight that there are already some frameworks which can help marketers to analyse further the phenomenon in a selected customer base. Indeed, Hollebeek (2011) proposes for instance to use trust, commitment, and customer satisfaction as metrics to assess the relationship quality between firm and customers, and a framework linking customer brand engagement to customer loyalty. Besides, Sashi (2012) proposes representation of customer engagement as a cycle including the contact between the brand and the customer, their interactions with the company and the brand community, the customer’s contentment, its repeated purchase, the customer's dedication, the customer’s endorsement and finally its engagement. Then Wirtz et al. (2013) propose a large overview of what customer engagement implies, more than the drivers, it includes elements the company can use for monitoring and how they impact both the customer and the company.
Regarding sustainable initiatives, engagement is at the centre of circular models (Hollebeek and Sprott, 2019). Within the second-hand clothing industry, the emotional dimension is now seen as crucial in the marketing effort (Vehmas et al., 2018). New leverages can also be identified out of the current customers expectation. According to a report of the European commission (2018), numerous customers would like to have a repair service available and more transparency on the product durability and reparation. On another side, the study also presents trust and price as being a core obstacle to customer engagement in pre-owned outfits.

2.2 Insights about the second-hand market nowadays (from business models to the current status of the market)

There are many different options that exist when a person wants to buy pre-owned clothes. He can either create an account on an online platform or go to a thrift shop. According to Wong, in a recent article about the rise of thrift shops, after their disappearance in the early 00’s, they came back in force with the 2008 crisis and the new need created by people newly unemployed with lower resources who wanted to be able to dress themselves for less. Eric Ray, the retailing and development chief of Kiloshop, a chain of thrift shops, says that the consumers are appealed by the offer composed of stylish clothes proposed at unbeatable prices. The chain already has ten sales points and is expected to add around twenty-five new additions to its already existing list (Wong, C. 2019). But the Covid-19 pandemic appeared during the first semester of 2020 and impacted numerous small-businesses across the world. In regard to legal restrictions like curfews and lockdowns, and the fear of contagion perceived by some consumers via the clothes or by going outside their places and brushing others in small shops’ aisles (Toronto Star, 2020).

Online marketplaces, such as eBay, Amazon and Airbnb, have dominated the current e-commerce economy in this digital era (Lu & Zhang, 2020). This calls special attention to an important issue that is how buyers make a choice among marketplaces when making online transactions, such as purchasing a product or service. When compared to traditional retailing, online shopping provides consumers with more control and bargaining power, as it is possible to obtain more information about available products and services via the Internet. Online shopping enables consumers to make the best
choice among many available alternatives (Huseynov & Yildirim, 2014). When it comes to second-hand marketplaces specialised in clothes, the competition is very tough. More than ten different options exist just in France, from Depop to The RealReal, Vinted, Vestiaire Collective and many more. With customers being stuck at home, they have taken advantage of this situation by enabling them to buy pre-owned articles from their electronic devices. In February 2020, 109 million people were infected by the Covid-19 and almost 2.5 million people died (Worldometeres.com). This fear of contagion becomes an emerging issue, such that it is imperative to learn how pandemic fear influences consumer spending and purchasing behavior (Khan and Huremovic, 2019). The studies around the subject define fear as “the negative consequences of a specific event that can lead to changes in consumer behavior and attitude” (Solomon (2017) as cited in Tran, 2021). In this regard, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed consumers’ behaviors towards shopping as consumers fear contagion (Laato et al., 2020). Thus, leading to an increase of the daily traffic on these platforms since the beginning of the pandemic.

Vinted is a Lithuanian-based company and is the leader on the second-hand market in Europe. The aim of the company is to give users the ability to make money out of products they already own or to be able to find bits for a fraction of their retail value (Dorbian, I. 2015). The website is available in nine countries and makes its biggest profits in France and Germany. In France, the company owns more than 80% of the market shares thanks to an incredibly high customer engagement. It is reported that almost 5 million of its monthly active users spend around 8 hours on the marketplace and list more than 13 million items each month which helps the brand reinforce its attractiveness by adding huge amounts of new listings every day (Dorbian, I. 2018). The C-to-C platform has such important market penetration in its key markets that are not visible in any other competitor market shares. A C-to-C platform is the business model that facilitates commerce between private individuals (Rivera, 2018). Sellers list their clothes on the platform, set their own price and send themselves the product to the buyer. The buyer can negotiate the price. The use of this platform is commission-free and the platform doesn’t interact with neither the buyer nor the seller in the purchasing process. The amount of their listing has been multiplied by 4 times in the last two years. Sellers upload their clothes online and can directly bargain and discuss with buyers. Once the product is sold they ship it directly to the buyer.

Other websites like The RealReal are B-to-C platforms. It refers to the immediate sales of
goods and assistance from a company to private individuals (Kenton, 2021). When a person declutters a closet, she can send her clothes to the platform. The company will be in charge of taking pictures, listing them online, and setting up the price. To this price will be added a commission to cover the fees linked to the listing of the cloth. Once the product is sold, the company will send the piece and a money transfer will be made to the seller. In this case, it is a guarantee for the buyer to make sure the product is true as an authenticity check is made and the employees will describe the flaws of the product (The RealReal). These types of information could be hidden from buyers if the product was described by the seller. It is a service for the seller as it is more convenient for them.

Platforms like Vestiaire Collective and Vide Dressing are a mix of C-to-C platforms and B-to-C platforms. The sellers list their product on the platforms. At the moment of the purchase, the customer can decide whether they want it to be authentified or directly sent to them. This service is called resale-as-a-service. “As-a-service” offers a repetitive service to its customers. It improves overhead costs and improves efficiency for customers (Lee and Rhee, 2018). Here, it prevents any dissatisfaction to customers by acquiring a counterfeit product. It also eases their purchase and comforts them in their buying decision. Providing this service to customers is a guarantee of authenticity that can’t be done by buyers as they don’t have access to the product ahead.

According to the BCG study, different profiles of those who consume this second-hand fashion can be distinguished. It identifies six types of customers, each with very distinct attitudes and behaviors. The first two profiles correspond to those who are content to buy second-hand, as people under the age of 35 looking for items with high added value, who are looking for experience and a certain authentication, and people over 35 looking for unique and exclusive products. These consumers are increasingly interested in unique fashion with an environmentally friendly profile. Among those who buy and resell at the same time are the "sophisticated impulse buyers", who give up their clothes to buy new second-hand ones quite frequently; but also, the "trendy millennials", who are very active in social interactions and also resell to acquire new pieces; and finally, the sustainability enthusiasts, who are not very active in reselling and who buy more rarely and at low prices, but who are involved in many platforms. The sixth profile corresponds to a category that only sells second-hand, without buying: a profile that is over 35 years old and is looking for practical platforms to sell its pieces (Willersdorf, et al. 2020).
2.3 Engagement in the sector of second-hand fashion

The reason that the researchers focus on the role of customer engagement is that C2C online shopping platform is a highly engaging environment for many customers. According to Cheung et al. (2014), customer engagement is defined as the level of a customer’s physical, emotional, and cognitive presence in connections with a particular online shopping platform. In these platforms, customers are fully engaged in this activity and can have the feeling of belonging to a certain community. This is what described Algesheimer (2005) in his literature about the impact of brand community engagement on behavioral intentions and it turns out that if a customer is highly engaged in an online shopping platform, he will be more willing to participate in activities on the online shopping platform as well as to spread word-of-mouth (WOM) communication about the platform. The more a user is satisfied with his personal experience on the platform the more he will be able to share it and promote it to friends, family or colleagues. This free promotion is essential to the websites, thus explaining the reason why they tend to improve the customer experience.

For “regular” second-hand websites such as Vinted, where sellers list themselves the products and ship them directly to buyers, they target an emotional feeling provided by pride and accomplishment. The sellers themselves list their articles onto their profile and prepare the parcel for it to be shipped directly to the buyers. The feeling of being able to make money out of the things they own by making them appealing to others creates a rewarding feeling, increasing their will to sell more. For the buyers now, they consider that buying for the sake of buying has lost its meaning if the act is not associated with "secondary benefits", a material and moral reward that justifies its expenditure. Buying a second-hand brand, therefore a more qualitative and original garment than the current offers, at a deflated price, shows more "discernment" and a capacity for distancing than an impulsive response to consumer stimuli. A playful dimension must be added to this type of purchase, which should not be neglected: rummaging through second-hand websites for really cheap items and finding the "super bargain" (Rapoport, 2019).

For websites focused on luxury goods, as Vestiaire Collective, it is slightly different. The platforms rely on the loyalty of the customers to a luxury brand to increase the engagement of their own customers. On these websites, the sellers are loyal customers to the brand who want to clear out their closet and list the luxury items in order to get money to buy new items from more recent
collections of the brand. It allows new customers to the brand to have access to this category of
clothes and feel the belonging to a certain category of people by owning a product of these brands
(Prentice and Correia, 2018). Some may argue that they made this purchase because of the higher
quality, nevertheless, it is proved that most of them will be pushed by the impulsivity caused by
the bargain made (Page, 2021). Buying a luxury good in store will require you a lot more time and
reflection. The whole customer experience is longer in-store, you will have more time to think
about it whereas by buying online you are just a click-away from your dream handbag.

In addition, counterfeits are a real fear on these websites, this is the reason why websites
like Vestiaire Collective, The RealReal or Vide Dressing have an authentication service in order to
reassure customers. Trust increasing the factors fostering the emotional aspect would be a strong
asset during the crisis and after. We can equally observe that the effect of this dimension is raised
as the customers are developing a strong willingness to follow trends going against consumerism
(Guzzetti, Crespi and Belvedere, 2021). This has even been identified in a study as a barrier to a
purchase for clients as it engages a great amount of money. By being sure the item will be
authenticated and real, the consumer feels more comfortable to buy and buy again later.

The research concerning the effect of the coronavirus crisis on the customer’s engagement is
still in their beginnings. Nonetheless, researchers are already proposing interesting approaches for
marketers to work on. Most of the researches found suggested that, considering the three dimensions,
the antecedents were having the strongest effect on customers' behavior regarding their purchase
habits of pre-used clothes (Medalla et al., 2021). Antecedents are elements affecting the customer’s
satisfaction and emotions before the purchase (Pansari and Kumar, 2016; Wirtz et al., 2013). Further
to this, it is possible to find some innovative framework as the mapping proposed by Hur (2020)
linking the product’s features to values while connecting it to three aspects of the customer’s
experiential perception. Created during the year 2020, this could be a relevant base for mapping the
behavior of customers in the second-hand clothing field. Besides, new dimensions could be taken into
account. For instance, Karpen and Conduit (2020) propose to include a spiritual engagement
dimension as the customers are now facing a situation mentally challenging, leading them to question
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III. Methodology and method

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Paradigm

We define research as a systematic, critical, organized action that originates in scientific questioning of a problem under investigation with the aim of finding answers and solutions or developing new theories and knowledge from the analysis of a research object. The paradigms characterize social science research, and the methodological choices derive from their selection. It reveals a global picture of an issue, based on thoughts and consensus around the appropriate approach and treatment of a problematic (Kuhn, 1970). There is a coexistence of paradigms that oppose each other and can be characterized in different ways. Two types detach themselves from the others: positivism and interpretivism. According to a positivist approach, laws exist even if they are not all discovered. It is an empiricism that demands adherence to facts and relationships between facts, the latter of which can be expressed in terms of causality or laws (Ryan, 2018). This doctrine gives priority to facts. Experience is at the heart of positivism, which does not advocate a deductive mode (autonomous theory validated or refuted by the facts), but an inductive mode (theory built from observations). A quantitative research will be preferred, which allows the researchers to remain detached from the respondents. A hypothesis is essential to be tested through the research.

On the other hand, interpretivism defends the relativistic hypothesis that one can only have a single
representation of reality. It recognizes that individuals are intricate and complex and different people experience and understand the same “objective reality” in different ways. The aim of the research is to gain in-depth insights into the lives of the respondents, to gain an empathic understanding of why they act in the way that they do. We start from the empirical and try to generate theories. Qualitative research will be preferred because it allows more connectivity with the respondents and the structure of the interview will be more flexible. The aim of our research is to start from a behavior demonstrated by the habits of consumers to go towards a theory. Therefore, using an interpretivist approach, will allow to build semi-structured interviews. In order to change the questions and the direction initially given depending on the answers given by the respondents. It will give the opportunity to be more trustworthy and have a deeper knowledge of the actions of the respondents on this topic.

3.1.2 Research Approach

This thesis will follow an interpretivist research, with a deductive approach in the creation of the interviews. A deductive reasoning commences has a funnel approach starting from general to narrow down the idea to see if they apply to specific instances (Hyde, 2000). The authors made theories from the primary research in the literature review and personal observations. They start with the theory that the recent pandemic of Covid-19 might have an influence on consumer behavior within the second-hand clothes market. A general trend has been noticed, people tend to buy in batch sizes first necessity products and due to the uncertainty of the situation, prefer to save on unnecessary expenses as for clothing. It also seems that they prefer to reduce their number of goings outs, in order to reduce the contamination risk. Nevertheless, this seems to vary between individuals. Therefore, the interview questions will be semi-structured in order to adapt to the answers of the respondents, as well as asked from broad to narrow.

3.1.3 Research Design

In order to support the proposal, the authors decided to conduct a qualitative research. Qualitative research enables to demonstrate social behaviors and to develop explanatory models and theories (Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin, 2009). They will lead interviews with twelve different
individuals which will be divided into two categories. First, they will question six people who already made a purchase or sold a product on these marketplaces. This will allow to better understand the reasons pushing them to use these ones nowadays. Then, the researchers will select six people who never bought from a second-hand fashion online platform. There will be three people only buying from physical stores (thrift stores) and three people not purchasing second-hand garments at all. They will permit the authors to identify why they never tried and if the pandemic has reinforced their convictions.

As this thesis is mainly based on customer engagement, the purpose of these interviews is to find if long term behavioral trends could be noticed after the crisis. With the literature review, the authors realized that individuals could be pushed by different reasons to use second hand online services. The global goal of the interviews is to deepen the knowledge about their thoughts and observe if in these times, the pandemic may influence their habits and their fear of contagion.

3.2 Method

This specific research is a qualitative research made in collaboration with twelve respondents. Six respondents have previously purchased second-hand clothes platforms and six have never purchased second-hand clothes online. This exploratory research will investigate the question of how to strengthen the customer engagement after Covid-19. The goal of an exploratory research is to obtain a deeper knowledge of a subject, providing data about hypotheses but no conclusive information (Jaeger & Halliday, 1998). In this type of research, the researcher starts with a general idea and uses the study as a means to identify issues that can be analyze further in the future. An important aspect here is that the researcher must be prepared to change direction as new data or ideas come to light.

3.2.1 Primary Data

As the researchers are studying consumers’ engagement in this paper, interviewing different consumers to be able to support the theories was a logical option. As mentioned in the introduction, the study is focused on the millennial generation which corresponds to people between 24 and 40
years old and based in France. In order to avoid biases and a lack of representativeness by interviewing people surrounding the authors, it has been decided to create a primary contact form in order to gather respondents. The form has been posted on a Vinted forum and on general fashion Facebook groups. The aim is to get the contact of respondents having previously purchased or not on a second-hand platform. It has been decided to have six respondents who have already purchased and six who have never purchased to be fairer. Afterwards, the contacts who respect all the criteria (age, location) will be chosen according to the random sampling method thanks to a website which makes raffle draws (My2lbox.com).

3.2.2 Sampling approach

With the criteria described previously, a purposive sampling will be conducted. This consists in choosing respondents according to the specific features composing their link with a chosen subject and is often used in research involving the observation, the analysis, and the determination of particular characteristics around a subject (Robinson, 2014). Furthermore, the selection will follow the subcategory method called the “maximum variation sampling”, as described by Etikan (2016). Indeed, data will be collected from individuals having a different contact with second-hand clothing in order to analyze the matter from different points of view and increase the comprehension of the authors regarding the functioning of the relationship between customer engagement and pre-owned clothing during the pandemic. The interviewees will be recruited through an online survey sent on the blog pages of the Vinted website (Cf. appendix) and various Facebook groups around fashion (for events or general discussions). Besides, in the first option, the users can post some announcements to promote their Vinted account but also to tackle some issues regarding fashion or even their personal life.

The post will present the purpose of the research, collect information about the individual’s profile (age, sex, customer of second-hand platforms or not, contact details) and request the confirmation of their will to participate in interviews. Then, the selection will be runned randomly among the respondents. Finally, the interviews will be done as individual conversations to avoid group biases and set favourable conditions for more detailed discussions (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2000).
3.2.3 Data Collection

Each questionnaire contains around ten questions, following the funnel methodology. The interviews will be semi-structured, this will allow more flexibility and broaden the amount of data which can be collected (Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin, 2009). Asking broad questions and defining them will create a climate of trust with the interviewed persons, so they will feel more confident, and the speech flow will be more fluid. The authors want to make the most interviews in person as they believe it will allow them to get more details, creating a good environment favourable to the sharing of the customer experience. For the ones that will be impossible to make in person, the authors will make them by video call to avoid emails. The reason for avoiding the writing process is that the interviewees will have more time to think about what they want to tell and will be able to go back on their words, therefore the information will be less spontaneous. The researchers want to capture the emotion and the gesture of the surveyed individuals as it will be helpful to describe their emotional attachment and behavior related to the topic.

A part of the interviews might be conducted in French. They will be translated and transcribed with attention for the outcome to be the closest to reality. Then, if needed, the transcripts will be checked with the interviewees to make sure it is close to what they said. Besides, they will be recorded for an easier treatment of the data and to be able to translate them correctly. In order to respect GDPR regulations, we will only keep these recordings 24 hours. In that case, for legal reasons, it will be important to ask for the interviewee to sign a written consent (Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin, 2009).

Further to the current health situation, the authors are aware that they might not be able to conduct all our interviews in person as preferred. Nonetheless, video calls also offer advantages as solving travel concerns and giving the opportunity to the respondent to choose an environment where he/she feels more at ease (Nehls, Smith and Schneider, 2015).

Finally, the analysis of the data will follow Sutton and Austin guidelines (2015), the authors will transcribe, code, and categorize the findings while trying to go beyond our observations along the process to finally determine relevant patterns.
3.2.4 Interview questions and data analysis

To design the interview questions and the framework which will be used for the data analysis, the authors combined customer behavioral studies established by several researchers in the field of circular fashion or customer engagement. During the writing of the literature review, various factors influencing the customers and relevant points to analyze were identified.

Indeed, in their study about clothing rental customers, Tu, J. and Hu, C. (2018) underlined the importance of considering the link between the customer’s intention, its perception of the purchase and its capacity and enabling conditions while performing it. For this, they especially quote the “theory of reasoned action” (TRA) and the “theory of planned behavior” (TPB) made by Ajzen (p.3). Respectively, they designate that the customer’s will to perform an action can be regarded as a direct antecedent for it (TRA) but this antecedent can be affected by additional internal/external factors (Madden, Ellen and Ajzen, 1992). This is the foundation on which the interview questions were created.

In addition, Wirtz et al. (2013) propose further antecedents which were explained earlier and presented as drivers and blockers for the customer engagement. Then, the authors decided to integrate questions allowing the analysis of the spiritual engagement dimension described by Karpen, I. and Conduit, J. (2020) as influencing it. These questions were equally inspired by the research conducted by Vehmas et al. in 2018 about consumer attitudes towards circular fashion, which highlighted the consumer’s concerns and knowledge about environmental and ethical issues, as well as their perception and thoughts about the company’s communication. Finally, the level of fear of contamination described by Baek and Oh (2021) will also be evaluated as well as the quality of the relationship between the customer and the second-hand stores.
Table 1: Elements selected for analysis within the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents</td>
<td>Elements affecting the customer’s satisfaction and emotions before purchase</td>
<td>Pansari and Kumar, 2016; Wirtz et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship quality with second-hand partner(s)</td>
<td>Based on the assessment of “trust, commitment and customer satisfaction” (p.794)</td>
<td>Hollebeek (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer’s perspective</td>
<td>Conscious customer preferences</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of contamination fear</td>
<td>Measurement of the concern towards coronavirus contamination via second-hand products</td>
<td>Baek and Oh (2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand-Related Drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased Brand's Symbolic Function</td>
<td>What the brand represents for the respondent</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Drivers &amp; subjective norms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>How the customers are perceived and perceive themselves due to the use of second-hand products</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal influence</td>
<td>How their relatives and close individuals influence the customers</td>
<td>Tu, J. and Hu, C. (2018) (p.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information quality</td>
<td>Clarity and exhaustiveness of the company's communication</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional benefits</td>
<td>Assistance in performing the purchase (as convenient logistics, and so on)</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monetary advantages</td>
<td>Budgetary advantages for the customer as prices, discounts, . . .</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness of product’s own attributes</td>
<td>Implication of the product feature in customer's decision to purchase</td>
<td>Wirtz et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform usefulness (&quot;perceived usefulness&quot;)</td>
<td>Personal conviction toward the benefits provided by the platform</td>
<td>Tu, J. and Hu, C. (2018) (p.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further to the identification of these elements, to design the questions the authors selected and gathered the most relevant factors to be observed (see table 1). This led to a first set of questions to be answered by the current second-hand fashion customers (see appendix 6). To adapt them to a semi-structure setting with broader questions, their numbers were reduced to ten (see table 2). Nonetheless, the researchers made the choice to save the initial ones aside in order to keep track that all the information needed is given by the respondents and if some points are not mentioned during the conversation, use these as additional questions. A specific section has been added for the respondents to give specific feedback on how the Covid-19 crisis affected them. Nevertheless, they will be invited all along the interview to reflect on their year and make links about changes they might notice during the conversation.

The same model has been used to create the questions concerning the non-buyers and physical buyers of pre-owned products (see table 3). In this case, the questions have been modified to have a larger scope and some elements became irrelevant and were removed (e.g. Attitude towards behavior). It will be important to establish a clearer picture of the environment in which they evolve and pursue their decisions. Indeed, the literature review did not allow to have specific information on this type of stakeholders. Then, the interview questions designed for the second-hand industry professional will be based on the information highlighted by the private individuals.
## Table 2: Final interview questions for current customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Analysis elements concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you give us insights about how you do your purchase usually and what are your preferences?</td>
<td>Actual behavior, relationship with second-hand partners &amp; attitude toward behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most important elements for you during your purchase?</td>
<td>Insights about customer’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know and think about the second-hand industry?</td>
<td>Attitude toward behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the current health situation change your vision or your purchase habits of secondhand products?</td>
<td>Self assessment of changes due to the crisis &amp; level of contamination fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the purchased brands represent symbolically for you personally? (Ex: Apple represents innovation)</td>
<td>Brand-Related Drivers: Purchased brand’s symbolic function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you and the people close to you think about individuals buying pre-used product?</td>
<td>Social Drivers &amp; subjective norms: Social Identity, Interpersonal influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you using the service provided by your usual platform(s)?</td>
<td>Functional Drivers: Information quality, Functional benefits, Monetary advantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products factors: Attractiveness of product's own attributes &amp; platform usefulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the elements facilitating or preventing you from using these services?</td>
<td>Products factors: Perceived ease of use, Compatibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer factors: Self-efficiency, Facilitating conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the ethical and environmental scandals around fashion affects you?</td>
<td>Customer factors: Spiritual engagement dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be your motivations to act against unsustainable processes?</td>
<td>Customer factors: Spiritual engagement dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any ideas of how a second-hand platform could improve its commercials in order to attract new customers after the Covid-19 crisis?</td>
<td>Complementary inspiration for the marketers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Questions for non-users of online second-hand stores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Analysis elements concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you give us insights about how you do your purchase usually and what are your preferences?</td>
<td>Actual behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most important elements for you during your purchase?</td>
<td>Insights about customer's perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why don't you use use the service provided by second-hand platforms?</td>
<td>Every antecedents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the current health situation changes your purchase habits? What about your vision of secondhand products?</td>
<td>Self assessment of changes due to the crisis &amp; level of contamination fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What do you and the people close to you think about individuals buying pre-used product? | Social Drivers & subjective norms:  
  o Social Identity  
  o Interpersonal influence |
| What would be the possible elements motivating you to use these services?  | Every drivers                                                     |
| How do the ethical and environmental scandals around fashion affects you? | Customer factors:  
  o Spiritual engagement dimension                                      |
| What would be your motivations to act against unsustainable processes?   | Customer factors:  
  o Spiritual engagement dimension                                      |
| Do you have any ideas of how a second-hand platform could improve its commercials in order to attract new customers after the Covid-19 crisis? | Complementary inspiration for the marketers                         |

**After collection of the data, the information will be observed and analyzed through four stages:**

**First stage: Getting familiar with the data**

The author will gather and discuss impressions as well as highlights, directly after each interview and a second time after the transcription.

**Second stage: Establishment of the data coding**

The transcripts are coded using the pre-selected codes defined in table 1.

**Third Stage: Categorizing the code into themes**

The codes are gathered in a more general theme identified through the discussions.

**Fourth Stage: Selection of the most relevant sorting**

The authors select the most relevant themes to analyze the data.
IV. **Results and Analysis**

4.1 **Preliminary findings**

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed customer engagement. With the uncertainty of the situation people have been focused on their basic needs and the purchase of essential products. The main concern for individuals was safety. To illustrate this, during 2020, the sales of spring collections of luxury fashion brands have dropped 70% compared to 2019 (Achille & Zipser, 2020). To be able to provide to their fellow members the attention and the care they need without taking risk regarding the virus, the customer experience had to be rethought in shops in order to respect social distancing measures and for the customers to feel safe while shopping in their stores (Diebner et al., 2020). Nevertheless, fear can have a positive impact on the customer engagement of consumers linked to emotional brands. Consumers prefer to live in fear with other individuals as it is more reassuring, but in these times where self-isolation was imposed, customers may seek affiliation with available brands, thus, increasing the emotional engagement with these brands (Dunn & Hoegg, 2014). The feeling of belonging to a community has also been multiplied in the past year. People have had time to focus on their values and the people they care for. They also had the opportunity to help people in their surroundings (Diebner et al. 2020). With the lack of demand, luxury brands have been able to reinvent their production chains in order to help the collective effort and to provide hand sanitizer to countries in need. Here the help for the community is shown as the luxury brands had to protect their end-customers in order to have an influence on the length of the lockdown and enable customers to come back quicker.

Digitalization has been an important step for customers. It allows companies to bring goods directly to customers. According to research from McKinsey, the pandemic fastens the digitalization of companies by seven years. In July 2020, 55% of the customer interactions were digitized instead of solely 18% back in June 2017 (McKinsey, 2020). With the lockdown and the fear of contamination, customers have changed their habits for online opportunities.

Customers have also decided to shorten their supply chains. With the close of borders and the backlog on orders linked to the close of factories in Asia, customers and brands have decided to be more independent of the globalization. China benefits from an added value on manufactured products
of 25% in 2018 and is considered as the factory of the world (Grandin de l’Eprevier, 2020). It has been the epicenter of the pandemic for the first trimester of 2020 and has paralyzed the global market. In the meantime, consumers have been sensitized to the difficulties faced by small businesses in their cities through media and social media. People have preferred to focus on smaller supply chains, knowing where the products are from and supporting the local economy (Sanna, 2021). It also gives them the feeling to contribute to the collective effort and to have a role in the society.

4.2 Data Analysis

After having observed the transcript, isolated and defined the information received, the interviews were analyzed individually before comparison. The results found will allow to give an image of customers current behavior, potential changes, and usable leverages.

4.2.1 Overview of the respondents

The authors have conducted nine interviews in total. The sample is essentially composed of individuals from France, including three men and six women. The participants were all representatives of the millennial generation, aged between 24 and 40 years old. Their professional activities differ, and a complete overview is given in the table below. The interviews transcripts are available below, without exposition of identification element, in order to keep the anonymity of the participant. Nonetheless, a number has been attributed to each for facilitating quoting and explanations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Customers profiles

The respondents are divided into several groups under the following nomenclature:

- **Online buyers**: Fashion consumers purchasing second-hand clothes online

Then non-online customers separated into two sub-categories:

1) **Non-buyers**: Fashion consumers who do not buy second-hand clothes at all

2) **Physical buyer**: Fashion consumers who purchase second-hand clothes but only in physical stores
More details on their customer’s type can be found below, in the table presenting their usual consumption pattern pre-covid as well as their attitude toward the clothing second-hand and fashion in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Buyer’s profile</th>
<th>Knowledge about the second-hand shops</th>
<th>Usual Shops</th>
<th>Purchase frequency</th>
<th>Purchase trigger(s)</th>
<th>Contamination fear level</th>
<th>Interest in fashion sustainability issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1 Online buyer</td>
<td>Advanced (recent)</td>
<td>Vinted</td>
<td>1-2 month</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 Online buyer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Vestlare collective, Wide dressing</td>
<td>Every 2 months</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 Online buyer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Vinted, Le Bon Coin, Wardrobe</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>Low (previously high)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4 Online buyer</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Vinted, Pataam, Once Again</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>For occasions mainly (wedding,birthdays etc...)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 Online buyer</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Vinted</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>According to the minimum needs + need for a relaxing moment</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium, only on brands level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6 Online buyer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Vinted (various physical stores)</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7 Non-buyer</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Brands store</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium, only on brands level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8 Non-buyer</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>H&amp;M, Columbia, Pinkie, online (exceptionnally)</td>
<td>4 times / year</td>
<td>Summer Sales, Black Friday</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium, only on brands level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9 Non-buyer</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Stadium, Intersport</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>According to the minimum needs</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low, only on brands level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10 Physical buyer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Product features (constant market observation)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11 Physical buyer</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Red Cross and similar</td>
<td>2-3 times / year</td>
<td>Product features (during occasional observations)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12 Physical buyer</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Emmaüs, La Ressourcerie and similar</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Product features (during occasional observations)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 Global trends among the online buyers group

It can be noticed that the participants mentioned mostly a link between the fact of having joined online platforms and the inherent convenience advantages they provide. (in terms of price, time, easiness of the research and product evaluation). Then, they all experienced a change in their practices, however the link with the covid crisis is mostly weak or non-existing. The same applies for the fear of contamination. On another side, the important communitarian side of the second-hand and the desire to act have been recalled. Furthermore, elements showing a rising awareness of the fashion industry appear among the discussions.

- **Time**

  *Facilitating condition*

  With the lockdown, several changes affected the respondents as the impossibility to go out without an attestation and a valid reason, working from home, and having children home schooled. These are multiple reasons that gave consumers more time to spend online browsing on fashion websites. Time is important in the decision-making process. Decision making involves a choice between alternatives. It is the ability to process the information available in the environment given, and to pick one of the alternatives available. There are three elements of time which impact the decision-making process. The first one relates to the time frame needed to making decisions. The second is the availability of time required for making the decision. The third is the time related to the implementation of this decision. The decision becomes successful when these three timings are properly applied in the decision-making process. The participant 2 well represents this framework by explaining how she buys “I take some time to think about these purchases. I take the time to browse regularly the recent listings, (...), As it is expensive, I also give myself some time to consider it and to get to see in a few weeks if I still want it or if it is just a compulsive envy. But most of the time, I place the order on weekends, so I have more time to think about it and in a good environment. I don’t want to be in the rush in the evening during the week”.

  When customers have less time, they tend to process less information. Time is an important data for thorough problem solving. Customers in a hurry may go for brand they already know because they don’t have time to consider the alternatives. Or they may choose the least expensive product and
risk being unsatisfied by this purchase. The more time the customer has to value his purchasing experience, the more he will be satisfied with its purchase and with the overall experience.

- **Values**

  *Spiritual engagement dimension*

  The respondents were very aware of the sustainability problematics within the clothing field. Even though they declared that it wasn’t the main reason they preferred to buy second-hand, the authors can suggest that it has an indirect impact on their behavior. Customers are now highly informed, thanks to social media, on unethical behaviors. All of the respondents who have already bought on second-hand online platforms have been able to give us precise examples of issues. The participant 1 talked about “the impact of jeans making on water with the overconsumption and the rejection of chemicals in water courses”, the participant 2 talked about social issues like “the working conditions in sweatshops”. The participant 6 also mentioned the frequent turnover in fast fashion collections “I am a bit shocked to see that the collection [in fast fashion] change so quickly and that there are so many clothes. It...I don’t understand, I think that this is not normal”. They use new channels like LinkedIn to get informed on the ethical actions the second-hand platforms lead.

  Personal values of consumers push them to think of new ways to consume. Consumers are slowly changing their consuming habits and with the rise of brand awareness around second-hand clothes, new customers will become adepts.

  On another side, some profiles tend to be progressively willing to go further and become competitors of the stores. After having tried to sell secondhand products on the platform, two of respondents decided to open their own platform. They gathered data from their use of the online shops and utilized the knowledge they could gather on social media to increase their expertise. In this case, the platform has also played the role of an enabler rising their perception of the easiness to enter in the market and manage an activity.
• **Price**

*Platform ease to use, usefulness, functionality, and monetary advantages*

For almost all the respondents, the price was an important feature and the main reason for them to buy second-hand. The price of the product is divided into three dimensions: fair price, fixed price, and relative price. On second-hand clothes platforms, the price is considered as relative and set in accordance with the quality and service provided by the seller (Albari and Safitri, 2018). Buying online gives customers the possibility to compare and to find the best alternative at the best price. It allows them to negotiate as well and to have the feeling of making better deals. They also have other priorities to invest in, being able to save money on such a basic need as clothing is important for them in this uncertain situation. The second respondent explained that she prefers high-hand designers, but she doesn’t want to spend too much on it since she is a mother and has other priorities. The price is one of the 4 Ps making part of the marketing mix. It is about giving the customer the product at the right price he is willing to pay. With uncertain times as the one faced by the respondents the past year, it has been easier for them to spend on what is considered as essential instead of fashion pieces.

• **Self-image through fashion**

*Social Identity*

Some of the respondents declared that they were only buying high-hand luxury brands on these platforms and that it was a good opportunity for them to afford these products themselves that they couldn’t buy full-price. This example shows the need for individuals to pretend they belong to a certain class even though they don’t. This need has already been studied by Karl Marx and he asserts that there are two classes, the ones who own the means of production, considered as the upper classes and the ones who don’t, the popular class. People in the upper classes want to keep up to their status and people from lower classes want to reach the upper classes. The most efficient way to attain the upper classes are from the physical appearance, thus clothing. According to Pierre Bourdieu, upper classes, in addition to obtaining wealth capitalism, they also own a cultural capitalism. It supposes that upper classes have a greater sense of style and have the means to buy more refined clothes. According to Medvedev, “The key to assessment in the early 2000s is often in the details. A higher status can be noticed by a perfectly cut and fitted garment, the use of natural and expensive fabrics,
and brand-name wear”. The participant 1 said that “fashion is important (...) it is important for me to be trendy”. The participant 3 even identifies herself to a celebrity through clothing “It is a very little bag in leather a bit like [the style of] Paris Hilton with a little phone inside”. Here we can understand that by wearing this bag she will be able to feel like she is a billionaire like Paris Hilton.

Customer engagement is linked to the will of consumers to pursue their social identity. Being able to wear high-fashion and being able to belong to an upper class can reinforce the emotional connection of customers to a second-hand platform.

- **Belonging to a community**

*Spiritual Engagement Dimension and Social Identity*

The second-hand platforms offer to the customer the possibility to exchange with others around a similar interest, to feel like they belong to the system or simply socialize. Indeed, the community around second-hand has been presented by the respondents either as a key to stop the uncertainty before a purchase through the building of a relationship with the counterparts or an environment where individuals mutually raise their awareness. Besides, from what can be seen in the interviews, the companies also intervene by keeping a continuous link with the customers on their privileged communication and informative means, the social media.

On another side, while the social value of the platforms is clearly seen within the discussions, evolution could be definitely considered. With the appearance of loneliness among the customers due to the crisis restrictions, this behavior could drift to a search for compensation through the strengthening of social exchanges around the relationship with the second-hand online platforms (Wang et al, 2021). Signs can be already identified by the generation of communities around them on unrelated communication platforms as Discord cited by the participant 3.
Customer loyalty

Relationship quality with second-hand platforms

According to Kopp, brand loyalty is the positive association consumers get with a certain product or brand. Customers that show brand loyalty are devoted to a product or service. It can be noticed through repeat purchases despite competitor's efforts to lure them away. We can notice that the respondents are using the same platforms as they fit the features they look after the most. The participant 5 said “I mostly look at Vinted”. For the second respondent, authenticity is one of the most important features as she exclusively buys luxury items. Therefore, she prefers to buy from Vestiaire Collective or Vide Dressing which proposes an authenticity verification service. The perceived risk of switching to another platform would be too high as the authenticity of the products couldn’t be verified, hence, she could buy a counterfeit product, reducing the level of satisfaction. On the other hand, the participant 1 prefers using Vinted as it is a C2C platform, and it allows her to negotiate the prices directly with the sellers. The information taken into account to determine the customer loyalty can vary from one customer to another. Nonetheless, the aim of a platform is to get as many loyal customers as possible with a high level of satisfaction as it will increase the word-of-mouth and will guarantee these companies’ high profits.
4.2.4 Updates in the pattern of non-buyers

In general, it has been noticed that the interviewees not buying in second-hand stores were globally experimenting/witnessing changes in their daily life and around them. The sources of these changes are mostly composed of their will to become more responsible in their purchase, and/or the limited supplying source choice due to the closing of shops during the quarantine. However, the questioning around their impact seems to be at a less advanced stage and their knowledge about alternatives less detailed. Globally, they tend to become more aware of the environmental and ethical impact of the traditional fashion system and are questioning the common practices as well as their vision/knowledge of the field. On another side, we can mostly see that there is a feeling of aversion, varying among the individuals, for the personal use of second-hand products. They highlighted equally a lack of information around the activities of the platforms, or even the product details.

Their desire to act is still a component of their reflection but online second-hand is not considered as a strong option. They equally present high fears about the quality, hygiene and fit of the products.

Figure 1. Diagram of the non-buyers’ antecedents, inspired from Wirtz, J (2013) see appendix 1.
• Common preconception

Fear of Contamination, Perceived Usefulness, Attitude toward behavior and Social Identity

The non-buyers expressed their fear for disease contamination and the feeling of being uncomfortable in the clothes which were preceding worn by another. As stated in the literature review, these thoughts are commonly associated with a revulsion toward second-hand products. Indeed, negative qualifying adjectives can often be associated with the former owner (like ill, dead, ...), and the individual concerned by this vision cannot differentiate the garment from the initial buyer: “I don’t like the idea of buying clothes that haven’t been previously owned [...] I am not used to that.” (P7), “[...] maybe they did something [bad] with it before [...]”(P9). Therefore, the origin of the fear becomes this unbroken link (Roux & Korchia, 2006).

Furthermore, it can be seen that the reasons why other people could use these websites are also blurry for the respondents but affecting their judgment when known. Taking for example the explanations of participants 8 and 9, it can be observed that the impressions for this group were mostly based on biased assumptions. These ones were formed out of the possible advantages of second-hand they could imagine with little information: “To me, it sounded cheap, more for people with no budget. Something pretty bad, you know.” (P9). Nonetheless, we can see that after having been reached by a customer buying second-hand clothes, the opinion of participant 6 switched: “[...] I understood that most of them buy those clothes because they like recycling, they like that it’s kind of saving the environment a little bit. [...]”. But on another side, this argument does not always work, as some non-customers believe that this is not entirely sustainable: “if I want to be totally sustainable, I wouldn’t buy online as the shipping process is very polluting...”(P7).

• Communication of the platforms

Information quality

We can see a gap between the current online buyers presenting platforms as very exhaustive in information about the garment, and the fear of non-buyers in terms of fit and defects. It is visible that entities like Vinted put means in place to reduce the worries of their customers (“[...], on Vinted I can bargain directly with the seller and have more information on the product easily” (P1)). Even
So, these options still need to be known by the non-buyers. In the case of participant 8, which was reached by Vinted’s intensive marketing campaign, knowledge had a very positive impact on her concerns which were finally reduced.

Nonetheless, one of the issues highlighted in the interviews with non-buyers, is the way of finding information about second-hand marketplaces. The majority of the respondents shows an interest in more responsible ways of consuming. However, receiving the knowledge about the opportunities related to pre-used garments, seems to require research efforts that they are not willing to give.

• Relationship with non-buyer and brands

_Spiritual Engagement Dimension_

A brand represents, for the non-buyers, a guarantee of quality and standards in the deliveries, returns and size chart. They consider these elements as main drivers. The trademark makes them feel more secure about their purchase and due to their knowledge of it, the clothing selection takes equally less time.

Therefore, the non-buyers rather place their focus on responsible brands doing second-hand ("I would be more attracted to brands themselves which are really willing to give a second life to the product." (P8). Even if this is not always translated in their most recurrent habits. Indeed, this phenomenon has been identified as the “green purchasing gap” and is generated by psychological barriers involving differences between customer’s expectations and the reality of green actions (Barbarossa & Pastore, 2015). Nonetheless, ways of inverting the trend seems to be visible, with especially an emphasis on the price, which could increase the risk of switching from fast fashion brands to second-hand platforms managed by the manufacturers instead of independent entities.
4.2.5 The main issues of physical buyers

- **The importance of physical representation and contact**

  *Perceived usefulness, Compatibility, relationship quality, information quality*

  For the physical buyers, the main issue was the sensorial connection to the product and the lack of physical customer experience related to the store itself. In the first case, they expressed their strong desire to be able to see more pictures of the product, to feel its quality, check the condition and strength of specific parts of it, as well as its fit. The mental assimilation of the garment to themselves as the owner seems to be stronger. Besides, their will to experience an emotional effect out of this interaction was highly marked.

  Then, regarding the stores, being able to access them seems mostly to be a matter of trust and entertainment. Seeing the inside and the quality of the environment reassure the buyers about the treatment given to the clothes. (“And also, really important for me, in general, the impression I get that it's rather clean […] And smell good […] It has to feel a bit fresh.” (P11). But it can also be seen as a personal treasure hunt or an event to share with friends.
The participants pointed that they could be convinced to use second-hand marketplaces if the organization were about to offer physical contact points. On one side, they proposed the establishment of alternative physical marketing means, as pop-up stores. According to participant 10, this would permit them to go to meet the customers and offer them a way to feel closer to the organization. In the same way, some of the participants mentioned their urge to go to physical stores after the restriction’s cancelation, in order to fulfill their lack of experience during the past year. On the other side, finding ways to create a sense of community or interactive connection through the supply chain has also been highlighted as a solution. (“[…] if they are going out giving parcels to people who are buying, maybe they could also pick up bags from people who want to donate […] [they could] be standing there with their cargo bike on the corner and everybody could come and throw their donations into the bicycle bags on the way.”) (P11).

- **Specific sustainability requirements**

  *Spiritual engagement*

Globally, the physical buyers were more affected by issues concerning individuals (“At the beginning, I had no doubt that the working conditions for making clothing were not the best but...I discovered the scandal about the uighurs.” (P10)) . It seemed to be a strong triggering factor whereas environmental topics seemed to be quoted more systematically, with less emotion. This targeted awareness is equally translated in their shop’s preference, where they select organizations like Emmaüs or the Red cross. These entities can also represent the true essence of second-hand for them, organizations with a value going against traditional businesses (“I don't consider it as an industry because where I buy my items, it is more associative organizations […]” P12).

- **Additional recommendations**:

Every participant declared that social media influencers were the greatest contact to reassure them about using a new service. For them, these kinds of advertising combine entertainment and information for which they look for and listen to willingly. The stores presented become a part of their reality and it is easier for them to consider it as an option. For some of them, it was the origin
of their shift toward the use of the second hand fashion marketplaces.

Then interviewees also shared other thoughts, personal to each, about possible improvements for second-hand platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Logistics</strong></td>
<td>Providing environmental ways of delivering the product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foster a local distribution network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing a sustainable and easy return process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Services</strong></td>
<td>Proposing personal shopper to reduce the browsing time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency</strong></td>
<td>Detailing what is done with the money collected (if associative organization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Precise how the clothes are collected and prepared for selling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Discussion

5.1 Managerial implications

The second-hand marketplaces combine blockers from not only the biases around used products but equally their own online nature. Trust and knowledge are at the core of the customers and non-customers reflections. In this setting, they give two roles to these platforms. On one hand, there is an educational responsibility. They become the main actors fostering the spread of information about the second-hand industry while consumers are willing to attribute lesser time to research, unless linked to amusement purposes. On the other hand, they are partners co-working with the existing customers to create an alternative community/system. They empower them to act by selling on their own, build them to become a representative as well and increase their awareness by keeping them informed.

Using these roles, the companies should opt for strong online advertising strategies. Then, it is important to control the empowerment of customers to prevent them from becoming rivals to the store. It could as well be interesting to organize events or other strategy gathering communities to respond to the feeling of loneliness spread among the fashion consumers after the crisis.

As we can notice, current customers are educated about the environmental impact of the fashion industry and what are the social and environmental benefits of these second-hand platforms. With the leaded interviews, the authors have concluded that the main reasons pushing the customers to buy second-hand were the price and the accessibility and easiness of using this service. Therefore, the advice given to these companies is to focus their communication and marketing actions on newsletters since the targeted audience is already a member of the websites and are following the latest news. A newsletter allows to highlight different categories of products and themes every day. It increases customer engagement by reinforcing the communication channels. With the analysis of the KPIS of the newsletter, the websites can also learn more about customer preferences and the themes that work best by collecting data regarding click-rate, rebound-rate, and opening-rate. They can create personalized newsletters as well.

Then, while the non-buyers’ interest for alternative business models rises, their readiness to receive information about the second-hand market increases as well. Nonetheless, the desire of fashion
consumers to go away from traditional models includes equally the common ways of advertising. To reach the customers, these marketplaces will have to get closer to them by innovative communication means, as partnerships with influencers. However, after the pandemic, a physical marketing campaign could be effective as well. The consumers are willing to go out and have a new experience. They will be willing to be in communities as well.

Nonetheless, social media’s influencers have been recognized as the most effective way to inform and reassure every participant. They want the brands to come the closest possible to them, without feeling that any complementary effort is requested from them. On another side, influencers have been identified as important trust generators by the researchers as well (Kádeková & Holienčinová, 2018).

In terms of non-virtual marketing, most of the issues presented could be faced through strategies like the use of pop-up stores cited in the interviews. Indeed, these temporary stores are a very effective solution to raise non-customers' knowledge and trust about companies and increase the purchases of the current customers, while fostering entertaining physical interactions (Zhang et al., 2019).

Finally, the customers are still looking for further effort in terms of sustainability. They would prefer the brands to be more engaged and to consider their impact at every level of their activity. Most of the customers want to minimize their involvement in the efforts done to achieve it as well. However, some others are willing to co-create innovative solutions with the brands, especially on transportation. It is important for the marketers to consider this aspect, especially with the important desire of the consumers to have new experiences after the pandemic. Indeed, this might be increased by their excitement and they could become an important manageable resource in the supply chain.

5.2 Contributions

This research contributes within the field of second-hand clothes marketplaces and investigates how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced consumers’ behaviors and how they could improve their communication. More specifically, the authors conducted 12 interviews with customers and non-customers who all have in common that they are aware of the different options to buy second-hand clothes. The research contributes to a more fundamental understanding for the second-hand clothes platforms on how customers’ behaviors have evolved and uses this data to increase the
efficiency of their communication to reach new customers. Further on, this thesis can be used by companies in order to find inspiration in how future marketing and communication campaigns can be conducted.

As perceived by the authors, there was no similar previous research specifically for the second-hand clothes market focusing on the influence of the pandemic. This paper shrinks the existing knowledge gap and provides the reader with new information regarding the chosen topic. This information contains an understanding of the relation between a second-hand clothes platform and customers/potential customers.

5.3 Limitations

The authors could have extended the geographical perimeter observed. As the websites are available in different countries and more especially to the Europe region, it would have been helpful for them as not all countries have implemented the same restrictions. Although, the authors wouldn’t have been able to analyze the behavior of respondents all-across Europe with the lack of contacts and knowledge. It would have asked a lot more time to establish and analyze the interviews as well.

The topic could have been broadened to the more general second-hand market. Nevertheless, the authors have preferred to focus on the fashion industry as they benefit from a more important knowledge input thanks to their personal background.

The paper investigates the French market, and the interviews were conducted with French respondents. Hence, the authors decided to conduct the interviews in their native language. The subjects were informed that their answers would be transcribed and translated into English and that the authors would have to interpret citations. In this action, there might occur limitations in how the translation was conducted.
5.4 Future Research

A suggestion that could be made would be to include interviewing marketing or sales managers working in second-hand clothes companies. It could be helpful to get more insights as the companies analyze the sales trends. Being able to get these data from the companies would have allowed us to notice any behavior change on a larger scale.

Then, the researchers could study more precisely the impact of temporary physical representation in the transition of physical buyers toward online second-hand shops. Some studies already deal with the subject for consumers not purchasing online in general. Nonetheless, none seems to integrate the specificities of second-hand customers as their awareness about sustainability.

Lastly, as this research focused on the French market, future research could focus on another country to see if the results are the same or not. It may also be international research involving larger websites and respondents. With a greater number of respondents, it could provide more conclusive answers.
VI. References


Guzzetti, A., Crespi, R. and Belvedere, V. (2021). “Please don't buy!”: Consumers attitude to


VII. Appendix

Appendix 2: Conceptual model (Hollebeek, L. D., 2009)
Appendix 3: Behavioral intention influential factors (Tu, J. and Hu, C., 2018).
Appendix 4:

Hello Everyone,

We are two bachelor students currently studying in our final year at the Jönköping International BBS. We are doing a research on the changes of consumer behavior on second-hand platforms in the fashion industry regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. If you are willing to answer to our questions, you can fill in the contact form below:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf_9tjPygUGS_761q3p8m9w302ZWbAK7QIpYkOQ/preview?usp=send_form

Best regards,

[Signature]

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Haut manche longue 2 ans
Cherche gigoteuse ou turbulette étoilé

[Image of clothing items]
Appendix 5: First set of questions (for current customers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Analysis elements concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you give us insights about how you do your purchase usually and what are your preferences?</td>
<td>Actual behavior, relationship with second-hand partners &amp; attitude toward behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most important elements for you during your purchase?</td>
<td>Insights about customer's perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know and think about the second-hand industry?</td>
<td>Attitude toward behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the current health situation change your vision or your purchase habits of secondhand products?</td>
<td>Self assessment of changes due to the crisis &amp; level of contamination fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the purchased brands represent symbolically for you personally? (Ex: Apple represents innovation)</td>
<td>Brand-Related Drivers: o Purchased brand's symbolic function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you and the people close to you think about individuals buying pre-used product?</td>
<td>Social Drivers &amp; subjective norms: o Social Identity o Interpersonal influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you using the service provided by your usual platform(s)?</td>
<td>Functional Drivers: o Information quality o Functional benefits o Monetary advantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Products factors: o Attractiveness of product's own attributes &amp; platform usefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the elements facilitating or preventing you from using these services?</td>
<td>Products factors: o Perceived ease of use o Compatibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer factors: o Self-efficiency o Facilitating conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the ethical and environmental scandals around fashion affects you?</td>
<td>Customer factors: o Spiritual engagement dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be your motivations to act against unsustainable processes?</td>
<td>Customer factors: o Spiritual engagement dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any ideas of how a second-hand platform could improve its commercials in order to attract new customers after the Covid-19 crisis?</td>
<td>Complementary inspiration for the marketers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>