Sustainability as a runner-up in second-hand product buying behavior

Abstract

The resale market of used items presented an annual growth of 7% in the US market in 2015, a U$ 16 billion market in the US alone (NARTS, 2016). The advancement of social media usage allowed consumers to interact more and boosted the commerce of used items amongst consumers. In Brazil, Enjoei started as an informal website amongst friends and in seven years became an e-retailer with annual revenue of U$ 68 million-selling exclusively used products. We researched the literature about the motives and barriers consumers have to engage in second-hand product (SHP) consumption and performed a mixed-method approach to collect consumers' perception on the matter: in-depth interviews with 12 consumers, and a survey to confirm some of the findings with 167 respondents. Our results shed some light on understanding this behavior: consumers choose SHP mostly due to economic reasons (price) or fashionable reasons (uniqueness of the product), but sustainability is marginally considered by consumers. Lack of interest and fear of contamination are the main barriers for consumers that do not engage in SHP. The relevance of the brand in SHP consumption and the impact of selling their used products on consumer behavior are marginal topics that need further investigation. Impacts on consumers' disposal of clothing are discussed.

Keywords

second-hand products, sustainability, uniqueness, the motivation for second hand, clothing disposal

Introduction

A traditional practice - the exchange of goods - is on the rise as the digital economy amplified the possibilities of exchanges amongst consumers by allowing them to interact and perform transactions online. These transactions have been supported by technologies that allow consumer-to-consumer commerce, which has grown due to the Internet and social media channels expansion (Chu & Liao, 2007, 2008). Websites such as Mercado Livre and eBay are consolidated players in this market but recently players with different proposals have been released. Launched in Brazil in 2010, Enjoei (term in Portuguese that means "got tired of it") is a C2C (consumer-to-consumer) electronic marketplace, "a business model where two individuals or consumers transact or conduct business with each other directly" (Cudjon, 2014, p.2) where people create their stores to sell their used items to other people, but instead of operating with separated stores for each consumer, Enjoei works as a regular retailer, with sales promotion, product advertisements and Communication identification that mimics a regular web retailer, offering consumers a buying experience similar to what they would find on a traditional web retailer. This formula presented a fast expansion in the market: in seven years, Enjoei received about U$ 15 million in investment funding, receives 16 million visits monthly, and reported revenue of U$ 68 mi in 2016 (Moretti, 2016) selling exclusively used second-hand products (SHP) online.

Market statistics also present the selling of SHP as a growing and relevant market: in 2014 and 2015 the resale market (which includes clothing and furniture resale) grew at a 7% annual rate in the US, summing up to be a U$ 16 billion market in the US only (NARTS, 2016). This includes both offline and online sales. The SHP market exists for a long time, as people need to discard their items to consume new ones, and it has been extensively studied in the literature (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Na'amneh & Al Husban, 2012; Pugh, 2013; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). This topic has also been revisited with the rise of the concept of sharing economy in the literature (Belk, 2010; Dbrowska & Gutkowska, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015) since by adopting the behavior of buying and selling used items, consumers focus on the use of products instead of the owning of these products: they buy and use them for a specific time, and then they sell it to other consumers.

The congruence of these two consumption trends together: the sharing of products by consumers that buy and sell their products to each other, and the advancement of social media tools that facilitate the communication amongst these consumers, appears to be a relevant reason to explain the observed growth of SHP market. To better understand this phenomenon, we want to investigate consumers´ behavior aiming to find the motivations that lead consumers to engage in SHP consumption and the barriers that might leave them out of this market. Guiot & Roux (2010) proposed a scale related to motivations consumers have to consume AHP, aiming to understand the psychological and material motives that orient consumers toward second-hand products and/or channels. This is relevant because there are few studies and that "clarify the complex motives that explain why people might turn to alternative shopping channels" (Guiot & Roux, 2010, p. 356) like SHP consumption.

By exploring these motivations and barriers, we will gather a better understanding of the potential of this market. To achieve this goal, we first research the literature about consumer behavior in SHP market, exploring topics like sustainability in shopping behavior, where sharing products are a good fit to maximize the use of resources into society (Hill & Lee, 2015; Kim & Kramer, 2015; Santamaria, Escobar-Tello, & Ross, 2016), the disposal of clothing (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012; Laitala, 2014), and the concept of Need for Uniqueness (NFU): the need of feeling special by buying something unique (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001), not available everywhere, only in unconventional shopping channels (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015) to grasp a perspective on what has been discussed by scholars in this topic.

We decided to use an unconventional way of presenting our findings in this study. Instead of following the literature review, methodology, discussion format, we decided to include the literature review in the discussion section, so we can compare our findings with the existing literature in a more fluid, easy to read the text. So, we first present the details of the methodology we used in this study, and later we present the discussion, comparing the results we found with the discussions about these topics in the literature. We believe this is an easier way to present our findings and point where we were able to contribute to the discussion. In the final part of this article, we present the limitations of our study and propose future studies with topics related to the ones addressed in this paper.

Methodology

To gather consumers' perspectives about their motivations and barriers for SHP consumption, we decided to use a mixed qualitative/ quantitative method. We conducted interviews with twelve consumers, half of them with the habit of buying SHP and half of them without this habit. The duration of these interviews varied from 31 to 79 minutes, and most interviewees were women, from an age range of 37 to 55. Table 1 below presents the demographics of the interviewees

Table 1: List of interviewees and respective demographics

Participant	SHP consumption	Gender	Occupation	Age
P1	Yes	Female	Management	38
P2	Yes	Male	Economist	39
P3	Yes	Female	Designer	39
P4	Yes	Female	Lawyer	37
P5	Yes	Female	Communication	41
P6	Yes	Female	Journalist	55
P7	No	Male	Executive	34
P8	No	Female	Professor	37
P9	No	Female	Professor	49
P10	No	Male	Business Man	32
P11	No	Female	Consultant	46
P12	No	Male	School Teacher	50

All interviews were transcribed and the information gathered in these interviews were grouped into five main topics for discussion in this article. For each topic, we present our findings in the interviews, connected with what we found in the literature

review. After this stage, we performed a survey to investigate how consumers perceive SHP consumption.

We were able to receive 167 respondents, 118 of those do not buy SHP, and 49 of them do. The questions used in the survey aimed to elucidate these five topics raised during the interviews. The respondents were mostly female (62%) but interestingly enough when grouped into buyers and nonbuyers of SHP the gender distribution changes from 62% female, 38% male, to 56% female, 44% male into the non SHP buyers group, and a 76% female, 24% male into the SHP buyers group. Around 60% of respondents in both groups are between 31-50 years old, and around 57% of them have an annual income from U$ 20k to U$ 67k.

General Discussion

In this section, we present the five main topics identified in the 12 in-depth interviews we conducted with people that buy and do not buy SHP. For each topic, we present the main existing findings in the literature, and discuss how the information we collect from both of our studies, in-depth interviews and survey, interact with the literature.

Ethics and Sustainability Influences on Consumption

As we chose the context of buying and selling SHP online as the background for this study, we researched Ethics and Sustainability influences on consumers. Mcneill & Moore (2015) identified that fashion consumers' attitudes toward sustainability in their fashion purchasing are determined by their general level of concern for social and environmental well-being, their preconceptions toward sustainable fashion, and their prior behavior concerning ethical consumption actions. These authors found that fashion consumers can be categorized into three distinct groups: (i) self-consumers show little concern for the environment and social issues and present a little potential for sustainable fashion consumption, (ii) social consumers are beginning to show more concern about environmental issues and social well being, but their behavior is often inconsistent with these attitudes, and (iii) sacrifice consumers exhibit high levels of concern for the environment and are adept at cognitively processing complex social issues related to ethics and social well being. According to the study from Harris, Roby & Dibb (2016), it is not easy to find consumers that buy clothes with sustainability in mind. The authors interviewed experts in sustainable clothing and found that sustainability alone cannot drive changes in consumer behavior because buying clothes is not an altruistic type of purchase, consumers' ethical concerns are too diverse, and the sustainability system in clothing is too complex for consumers to understand and follow, as it can be seen in the quote below:

> "It is very hard to buy things ethical and sustainable products because the supply is very limited and too expensive." (P1)

Consistent with these findings, in our interviews, only two would be classified as "self-consumers" and the other ten would be classified as "social consumers". These two self-consumers did not mention sustainability as a reason to buy SHP but when prompted (when we talked openly about this topic) they realized it is a way to reduce

overall consumption and expressed positive perceptions about this matter. Also, they mentioned concerns for buying clothes made out of labor work exploitation (i.e. slavery) and spontaneously mentioned they avoid shopping in brands that have been involved in cases like this, as it can be noticed in the quote below:

> "Look, I don't actively search for information about that but if I see in the newspaper that Zara was involved in a scandal due to the use of the slave workforce, I stop buying from Zara, for example." (P8)

Consistent with the findings of Mcneill & Moore (2015) this positive perception of sustainability may not be translated into action, most interviewees reported they would not pay more for a product with sustainability claims. The common thinking is that these types of products should be cheaper and not more expensive, as can be seen in the quotes below:

> "I don't pay more because something is made of recycled products. I expect to pay less" (P1)

> "I saw some products that had sustainability appeal but the price was too high which made no sense to me." (P4)

Collett & Cluver (2013) used the fast fashion consumption context to understand consumers´ perceptions about sustainability matters. They performed thirteen in-depth interviews with consumers, and found the there is a little consideration of the impact of fast fashion in the environment. Only two consumers discussed environmental impact without being prompted. When prompted, a few discussed issues beyond disposal at the end of a garment's lifecycle. Furthermore, the majority of those who perceived a negative environmental impact do not feel empowered to change their consumption behavior. Cervellon, Carey & Harms (2012) also found that eco-consciousness does not drive the decision to buy SHP. Consistent with these findings, interviewees that buy SHP clearly stated that the matter of sustainability does not come to mind when they shop for SHP but four interviewees expressed positive feelings when they were prompted about the sustainability aspect of SHP consumption. Two of the interviewees, however, even after being prompted about sustainability reinforced their perception of not being influenced by this matter, as it can be seen in the quote below.

> "But when it comes to clothing, sustainability does not drive my buying behavior. I usually tend to consider the cost in the first place." (P2)

The survey we performed is also consistent with the perception that sustainability does not drive product choice in SHP. Of the 49 respondents that buy SHP, only six of them mentioned sustainability as the main reason to buy SHP, and only 14 of them mentioned it as the second reason to buy SHP. The price and uniqueness of the product are the main reasons they buy SHP. One topic presented in the interviews is the “less buying” concern. Six of the interviewees affirmed they are willing to reduce consumption at all in their lives, which can be considered a positive link with sustainability concerns. One of the interviewees also expressed that she thinks the SHP consumption will grow to be the standard in consumption in the future:

> " I think people in the future will not understand why people used to buy everything new from the stores. This does not seem normal to me. It makes much more sense to me that a product has a life of their own and it can go from people to people, instead of belonging to only one person, and then be discarded" (P6)

Motivations for SHP consumption

Interviewees that buy SHP are unanimous when asked about their motivation to buy SHP: price. They see the option of buying SHP as a good deal, considering the quality of the product and price to be paid. They see it as a way to save money, or at least, to make better use for their money. Two participants mentioned SHP is especially appealing when buying clothes for their kids, as they need to buy them all the time and they usually wear it for a short period.

> "It is a good option to renovate clothes for my kids. There are things I do not care about buying used products for them, such as pants." (P4)

Price was also mentioned as the main reason to buy SHP in the survey we performed. Of the 49 respondents, 16 of them mentioned price as the main reason to buy SHP, and 18 of them mentioned it as the second main reason to buy SHP. Also, in table 2 below we can find in the index of agreement (from 1 to 5, where 3 is an agreement with the affirmation) that these respondents feel like they pay a good price and made a good deal when they buy SHP. However, they do not consider the only price when they buy SHP, as the index is below 3, indicating disagreement with the sentence.

Table 2 – Index of agreement with sentences related to the relationship between price and SHP consumption

Affirmation	Agreement
When I buy SHP I feel like I paid a fair price for the product	4.4
when I buy SHP I feel like I made a good deal	4.37
When I buy SHP I can buy higher quality brands that I can't afford otherwise	3.94
I only consider the price when I buy SHP	2.85

According to the literature, the uniqueness and fashionability are motivations to buy SHP. Xu, Chen, Burman, & Zhao (2014) concluded that not only low prices would attract consumers to buy SHP, but consumers would also be attracted by the thrill of finding unique products. Cervellon, Carey, & Harms (2012) studied the behavior of women that buy second-hand clothing and found that individuals indeed have a focus on price, but also a thrilling connected to bargain and treasure hunting, in other words, finding unique products. These findings are consistent with Guiot & Roux (2010) that also found that consumers with a strong need for uniqueness are more likely to make non-traditional consumer choices, such as purchasing clothing in second-hand channels as a means of demonstrating their individuality. Bardhi & Arnould (2005) noted that second-hand acquisitions offer a genuine alternative to conventional channels, sometimes inspired by criticisms of traditional channels. Guiot & Roux (2010) proposed four groups of consumers, taking into account their motivation to buy SHP: (i) critical motivations, (ii) experiential motivations linked to the nature of the offering,

(iii) experiential motivation linked to channel characteristics, and (iv) economic motivations.

We found contrast results in our empirical studies. From the interviews, we found only one interviewee who mentioned the uniqueness of the product as a motivation to buy SHP, while the other five interviewees who buy SHP stressed that price was the main reason to buy SHP, being all of them in the economic motivation group as proposed by Guiot & Roux (2010). However, in the survey we performed, uniqueness was the main motivation informed by the respondents who buy SHP: from the 49 respondents, 21 of them mentioned uniqueness as the main reason to buy SHP, and 8 of them as the second main reason, a combined total of almost 60% of respondents. But when we analyze the index of agreement with the affirmation "when I buy an SHP I feel like my piece is unique and this is important for me", the index is low (3.35 out of 5), suggesting this is indeed a matter that must be further investigated.

Barriers to the consumption of SHP

Mhango & Niehm (2005) highlight concerns consumers face when buying second-hand: worries about contamination germs, diseases, and misfortune by associating second-hand with potentially the death of the previous owner. Watson (2008) noted that consumers may consider second-hand goods to be related to poverty if they have experienced poverty in their lives. They also feel embarrassment about buying second-hand goods. Gregson and Crewe (2003) revealed consumers' concern of "contamination" when consumers buy SHP. Consistent with the literature, fear of contamination is one of the main barriers to SHP consumption. In the interviews, fear of contamination was mentioned by interviewees, especially in specific pieces like swimwear, and underwear. These categories were unanimous when we asked about types of products they would not buy as SHP. However, it varied for other categories. Interviewees also mentioned that the fear of contamination may change if the participant is familiar and likes the person who is selling the product. The survey also revealed that fear of contamination as a major barrier for SHP. 21% of the 118 respondents who do not consume SHP mentioned it as the main reason to not engage in SHP. The perception that it is not worthed the trouble was the first main reason to buy SHP for 24% of the respondents. For the 49 respondents that buy SHP, 63% mentioned a fear of contamination as the main barrier to buy SHP. Consistent with the interviews, the survey showed a 98% rejection to buy underwear as SHP, and 65% rejection to buy swimwear as SHP, amongst the 49 respondents who buy SHP. Coats (63%), bags (53%), and shirts (45%) are the most common items consumers buy as SHP. The quotes below showcase the fear of contamination, and it also shows how it varies from each individual:

> "I have a little bit of disgust to wear used cloth from someone I don't know." (P8)
> "Every object comes with a story, a story of someone else"(P11)
> "I would not buy second-hand swimsuits, intimate apparel due to hygiene, but there is nothing else I wouldn´t buy second hand." (P5)
> "If I know the person who is selling, like a friend or a relative, I would not have this disgust to buy things from them, I mean I think I would even buy a bathing suit from them because I know the origin and I suppose it was not contaminated in any way." (P4).

"I would not by shoes like sandals as SHP because it has direct contact with the skin. I could only but boots or shoes that we wear with socks." (P5)
"Shoes are more disgusting than clothes because clothes are easier to clean." (P1)
"The SHP I mostly buy online are shoes." (P6)

The access to the offer of SHP is also mentioned as a barrier for buying SHP both in the interviews as well as in the survey. Interviewees mentioned a very limited experience with SHP because they had only seen SHP in "brechos" (retail stores that sell second-hand clothes), and those who did not buy SHP did not know SHP online stores. In the survey, 10% of the respondents mentioned the lack of access to SHP as the main reason to not engage in SHP.

Clothing disposal behavior

Laitala (2014) studied consumers' disposal behavior of clothing and found that most studies concentrate on disposal channels, behavioral motivations, disposal reasons, and demographics of consumers. She concluded that, in most cases, consumers prefer to give the clothes to reuse, instead of throwing them away, and the main reason to dispose of cloth is because of lack of storage space, the appearance of the clothing (i.e. wear and tear, poor fit), and also because the item is not in fashion anymore, and/or they just got tired of it. There are five main types of disposing clothes: binning (sending to trash), donating to charity, giving away to friends, family, or other acquaintances, selling to other consumers or SHP stores, and swapping for other used items. Bianchi & Birtwistle (2012) compared the clothing disposal behavior in two countries (Australia and Chile) and found that consumers that "have a positive attitude towards recycling are more likely to dispose of their clothing by donating to charity, rather than giving away to family or friends" (Bianchi & Birtwisle, 2012, p. 339), and that giving away clothes raises consumer awareness about the environment.

The giving away for friends and family is mentioned as the main type of disposition in the interviews we performed: we noticed that the disposal of clothes is a sort of a ritual, where interviewees play a specific role. all six interviewees that did not engage in SHP have the habit of donating their clothes to friends and relatives and they presented a feeling of pride for this. They reported feeling a sense of pride when they see a friend and/or a family member using their clothes, and satisfaction for being able to help people that are close to them to have expensive clothes that they could not afford otherwise.

"Look, I feel proud when my brother or my cousin wear something I gave to them because it demonstrates that they like my style, my taste in clothes. I feel like I am leaving a legacy, that I am passing forward a part of me" (P7)
"My cousin, for example, who is a teenager, he does not have money to buy clothes very often, specially branded clothes, from luxury brands, so he loves it."(P9)

This is consistent with the survey we performed. Giving away for friends was mentioned as the main disposal method by 53% of the 167 respondents and as the second main disposal method used by 34% of respondents. Donating for charity was mentioned as the main method for 41% of respondents, and for 42% as the second main disposal method. About 90% of respondents either give away to friends or family or donate to charity.

Suggestion for Future Research

We came across two relevant topics that were mentioned in the interviews and confirmed in the survey we performed that need to be further investigated in the literature: the impact of the selling SHP in consumer behavior, and the relevance of the brand in SHP.

The possibility consumers have to sell their used items online in the electronic marketplace may lead to changes in consumer behavior, as we observed in the interviews. Interviewees that engage in SHP reported they enjoyed having the possibility of selling their products online. Three of them even mentioned this behavior as addictive, as they started to sell everything they do not want to use anymore. One even included clothes they are still wearing in their stores because they have similar products. The possibility of selling used products changed experienced participants' behavior of discarding clothes. Five interviewees reported they had changed their behavior by selecting what goes to donation and what can be sold to other consumers. Some also reported that the selling behavior of used products made them give away their products faster than before. Two of the participants mentioned they used to donate their clothes but changed to selling to consumers willing to pay as this would be a better disposal method for the product as they considered that when a consumer is willing to pay any amount for the product there is a real intention of using the product. The quotes below illustrate some of these affirmations:

> "I had a gorgeous Versace dress, I wore it once and I just couldn´t wear it anymore as it is very remarkable. I had it for several years in my wardrobe. I sold it for 100 reais because I didn´t want to keep it and I wanted someone to have it." (P6)
> "Some things I announce to sell it but I kept on using the product until it is sold." (P6)
> "After starting selling online, I noticed that my process of letting things go have become faster."(P2)

The money that they receive from the selling of products are used in their ordinary budget but when they sell a high value used product, participants reported they usually try to use them to buy something that has been in their wish list for a while. None of the experienced participants reported seeing the selling of used items as a way to make money, as a way of living. It is, at most, a way to get some of the investment in the new product back and to give a good use for the products they don't want anymore. The main reason they sell their products is to open space in their wardrobes.

Consistent with the interviews, 14% of respondents that engage in SHP mentioned selling product as the second main disposal method, and 4% of them as the main method. It ranks as number 3, after giving away to friends, and donating to charity. 70% used the money from sold items to pay their regular bills, 11% use it to buy more clothes, and 10% to leisure activities. 20% of people who have sold their clothes as SHP reported they think about the resell value of the product when they are buying new clothes. This is consistent with the findings from Chu & Liao (2007) who perceived that consumers who sell used products may consider the resell value of the product before buying a new product.

This is a topic that has little research on consumer behavior. Chu & Liao (2007, 2008) are in the small group of researchers to focus on the selling of SHP. They found that consumers resell for a wide variety of reasons, mainly periodic house cleaning and profit-making for used items, and classified consumers online resale in two categories: planned and unplanned resale. Liao & Chu (2013) argue this differentiation is relevant because it led to changes in consumers decision when buying products: if it is a planned resale, the value, and ease of selling the item influences the decision of buying: the higher the possibility of reselling, the higher the intention to buy.

One other topic that deserves further investigation in the literature is the relevance of the brand in the SHP market. We did not find relevant studies that connect the brand importance with SHP but both in our interviews, and our survey we found indications that this is a relevant matter. According to interviewees, brands play an important role in SHP as it gives them cues about the quality of the product. All six interviewees that engage in SHP reported they buy SHP from brands they perceive as good quality brands, as it gives them more confidence to buy the product. But if the product is from a super quality brand, like a luxury brand, there is a suspicion of counterfeit products that could be a barrier to buy the product. Familiarity with the brand is also relevant as participants reported that they have the previous perception of the fit of the products helps them to predict how the product would fit in their bodies. Participants also reported that price may overcome the lack of cues to the quality of the product when they do not know the brand of the SHP. They report that when the price is too low, they often take risks because there is little to lose.

> "When I buy used items, I rather buy from good brands because I suppose the quality would be better and the fit would also be good. It is the possibility of buying a good deal." (P1)
> "I care about the brand of the product but the product needs to be in good conditions" (P2)

In the survey, from the 49 respondents who buy SHP, we have an index of agreement of 3.94 (out of 5) for the affirmation "When I buy SHP I can buy higher quality brands that I can't afford otherwise" possibly showcasing SHP as a way to achieve better quality brands, and an index of 3.35 (out of 5) "The brand is a decisive factor in my SHP purchase decision", displaying the relevance of the brand in SHP. Both studies are indicators that this is a topic that needs to be further investigated by scholars.

Limitations of This Study

This is an exploratory study. Even though we used a mixed-method approach, we intended to point out topics to be explored and further discussed in the literature about SHP. The findings of this study need to be examined parsimoniously, and it must be considered more like a proposition of topics that might be developed into hypotheses to be tested in more robust and focused studies. The interviews were all conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, and regional culture may have influenced consumers´ perceptions reported in this study.

Also, we think that the SHP market is a contemporary topic and the market is on the rise, as mentioned in the figures and facts presented in the Introduction of this article, as well as in the perception of subjects in the survey we conducted. The

affirmation "My interest in buying SHP is growing" reached a 4.02 index of agreement (out of 5), possibly portraying a raised interest in SHP by consumers.

From the topics addressed in this article, we highlight three specific topics as suggestions for future research: (i) most participants reported a disgust to buy SHP due to the possibility of contamination of products but they also noted that the fact of knowing the seller could reduce, or even, overcome this barrier. This familiarity effect is interesting as it may be a way to reduce the barrier for the buying SHP behavior, (ii) participants who sold used products, reported to experience a positive perception of this behavior, and some even reported to have changed their behavior for discarding clothing after experiencing the possibility of selling. This may also be a relevant topic to be addressed as a potential influencer in consumer behavior, and (iii) to discuss the relevance that the brand plays in the SHP market is also interesting as part of interviewees and respondents reported they consider the brand as a key factor when analyzing an SHP and use the brand as a source of cues related to quality perception which may even lead to overcome barriers they might have to buy SHP.

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