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“Should I give it away or sell it?” A strategic perspective on consumers’ redistribution of their unused objects

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Abstract

Although both scholars and practitioners have shown considerable interest in consumers’ disposition behaviors, little is known about how consumers decide between different modes of redistribution, such as selling, giving, or donating. This study aims to understand the complexity of consumers’ redistribution practices by taking consumer agency into account and, in doing so, emphasizing the strategic dimension of redistribution practices. Drawing from a set of qualitative methods, we show that redistribution of unused objects is a strategic action governed by a portfolio of resources and competences that consumers deploy, resulting in three different redistribution strategies: market-oriented, convenience-oriented, and community-oriented. We also demonstrate that each strategy comes with different market or non-market-oriented practices and highlight the role of closeness with the recipient in consumers’ decisions. Doing so, we help charities and retail managers understand what limits redistribution practices and how these practices can be encouraged.

Keywords: Disposition behavior, Redistribution practices, Unused possession disposal, Closeness, Consumer agency, Resources, Skills

1. Introduction

“I no longer use this DVD player, and I need to make room for my new audio device. What should I do with this player?” This recurrent question consumers ask when they no longer use an object and want to get rid of it raises the issue of disposition. Jacoby et al. (1977) define disposition as the practice consumers use to discard an object that has outlived its usefulness. They identify different forms of disposition, from permanent (e.g., throwing or giving away, swapping, selling) to temporary (e.g., lending, renting). As such, disposition covers a large set of practices, including redistribution (e.g., giving to charity, selling online or in flea markets), in which objects are kept identical and re-used, and scrapping, in which objects are thrown away. In recent years, redistribution practices have steadily grown from phenomena such as ecological awareness, economic crises decreasing consumers’ purchasing power, the development of consumer-to-consumer (C2C) online platforms, and consumers’ progressive detachment from ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Scaraboto, 2015). In France, where the current research took place, 590 pounds of waste per year and per person are generated, and 40 million toys¹ and 1.4 million tons of electronical equipment are thrown away². Moreover, of the 3.6 million tons of bulky and household waste generated each year, only 1 million is reused. These figures show how critical the issue of waste has become in consumers’ lives and raise the question of the diversity of practices associated with the disposition of unused objects.

Disposition as part of consumer behavior has long been acknowledged (Parsons & Maclaran, 2009), in that disposition engages consumers in the same way as acquisition (Türe, 2011). Beyond examining how consumers manage their unused objects (Hanson, 1980; Jacoby et al., 1977), prior research has explored how they dispose of an object and, more specifically, has focused on factors either favoring disposition (Cruz-Cárdenas & Arévalo-Chávez, 2018; Harrell & McConocha, 1992; Roster, 2001) or favoring hoarding behavior (e.g. Haws et al., 2012). Disposing of possessions largely consists of three consecutive steps: keeping versus discarding them, redistributing them versus throwing them away, or choosing between different modes of redistribution (selling, giving away, or swapping).

¹ <https://www.planetoscope.com/jeux/1356-.html#:~:text=1%2C27%20sont%20jet%C3%A9s%20chaque,de%20jouets%20jet%C3%A9s%20chaque%20ann%C3%A9e>.

² <https://www.planetoscope.com/dechets/1882-.html>.

Research has often examined the first two steps of the disposition process jointly (Cherrier & Ponnor, 2010; Coulter & Ligas, 2003), stressing in particular the influence of personal characteristics (e.g., Ballantine & Creery, 2010), objects' status and meanings (Simpson et al., 2019), and product categories (e.g., Fortuna & Diyamandoglu, 2017) on consumers' disposal decision-making process. Most research, however, has neglected the third step of consumers' disposition—redistribution. Exceptions are studies that focus on one mode of distribution (e.g., swapping: Belk et al., 1988) or define redistribution as a holistic phenomenon: they attempt to explain the motivations for redistributing unused objects and indirectly give some insights into why people do not throw things away (e.g., Ertz et al., 2017; Guillard & Del Bucchia, 2012b). For example, Albinsson and Perera (2009) show that individuals', communities', and objects' characteristics favor redistribution over scrapping, but the reasons consumers decide on one mode of distribution versus a concurrent one remains under-explored. In addition, the range of choices is often limited to recycling or throwing away, thus failing to fully capture the complexity of the decision consumers face when confronted with a large set of alternatives embedded in a specific context.

Research on redistribution practices can be divided by methodological perspective. On the one hand, using interpretive approaches, scholars have provided in-depth analysis of individual influences on and socio-cultural significance of redistribution practices. For example, Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) identify the barriers to and motivations for clothing donation, such as the need to create space for new items. Belk et al. (1988) suggest that swapping fosters social exchange and a sense of community among sellers. However, studies' main focus on a single practice, such as gift-giving (Cruz-Cárdenas & del Val Núñez, 2016; Guillard & Del Bucchia, 2012a), sale (Ekerdt & Addington, 2015; Juge et al., 2019), or barter (Camacho-Otero et al, 2020), ignores consumers' tradeoff between different disposal practices. On the other hand, quantitative studies shed light on consumers' decision between different redistribution practices. For example, De Ferran et al. (2020) show that consumers' motivations (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) influence their choice between selling and donating an object. Hibbert et al. (2005, p. 823) show “distinctly varied patterns of disposal for different types of goods” and identify disposers' profile from socio-demographic variables. However, these works do not explain why consumers favor a specific mode of redistribution over another or why a single consumer might use different modes of disposal (e.g., selling and giving) depending on the context.

In summary, while research has analyzed disposal decision practices (e.g., keeping or recycling vs. throwing away), examined decisions between alternative modes of disposition,

and focused on disentangling a single redistribution practice, it does not account for the complexity of consumers' redistribution practices. More specifically, research on redistribution focuses mainly on psychological mechanisms (e.g., motivation) and variables that influence consumers' decision (e.g., type of objects, relationship with possessions) while neglecting consumers' agency in the selection of these practices. This neglect is problematic from a theoretical standpoint because the strategic aspects of redistribution are overlooked, though the skills and resources consumers possess, as well as their ability to build on opportunities from the environment, may play a major role when they are deciding how to discard an object that has outlived its intended purpose. This is also problematic from a managerial and societal standpoint because organizations have little information on how to help and encourage consumers to valorize the objects they want to discard.

Our research question therefore is: what strategies do consumers use to dispose of their unused objects, and what influences these strategies? Drawing from a set of qualitative methods (introspection, interviews, and participant observation), we identify three strategies (market-oriented, convenience-oriented, and community-oriented) with different types of resources (temporal, relational, and material) and skills (commercial and technical) and with each strategy coming with different degrees of geographic and relational closeness. The possession and mobilization of resources and skills and the ability to seize opportunities within their environment drive consumers toward one of the strategies. We discuss the implications of these findings for marketing literature on disposition and redistribution's practices and also the managerial implications for charities, C2C platforms, and other actors involved in redistribution practices.

2. Disposition and redistribution in business research: an overview

In marketing and consumer literature, the question of disposition is part of a larger stream of research that focuses on the relationship between consumers and their material environment (e.g., Belk, 1988) and emphasizes the impact of disposition on consumers' identity. For example, disposing of an object can help a consumer separate from a past or undesirable self, affirm a present self, or participate in constructing a future self (Dunn et al., 2020; Trudel et al., 2016). In addition to the upstream stage of detachment from unused possessions, three successive steps in the disposition process exist. The first involves the choice to dispose of (vs. keep) an object, the second involves the choice to throw away an object or give it a second life, and the third involves the choice to use different modes of redistribution.

However, prior research has mainly focused on (1) the first step of the disposition process and (2) the factors influencing either redistribution in general or specific modes of redistribution such as donation.

2.1. Disposing of or keeping unused objects

Disposition is all the actions an owner takes toward an unused item (Jacoby et al., 1977), ranging from temporary practices, such as renting or loaning, to permanent ones, such as giving away, selling directly or through intermediaries (Raghavan, 2010), or throwing away. The question of dispossession thus demands a first decision: to keep or dispose of an object. Prior research has examined the factors that are likely to influence consumers' decision to discard or keep an object. Studies have examined either the influence of one factor on consumers' decision, such as hoarding behavior (Cherrier & Ponnor, 2010) or the object's value (Simpson et al., 2019), or the impact of several factors on the decision in the context of a specific product category, such as clothes (Cruz-Cárdenas & del Val Núñez, 2016) or cell phones (Ting et al., 2019). Literature illuminates three main factors of influence: the characteristics of and values attributed to the focal object, consumers' personality and relationship with the possession, and consumers' social and material environment.

First, the characteristics of an object, such as its age, monetary value, utility, or features, influence the decision to keep it or not (Hanson, 1980; Harrell & McConocha, 1992). For example, consumers are more likely to dispose of unused, broken, emotionally non-significant, mundane, and everyday life objects (e.g., clothing, decorative items, toys) than special possessions (Fortuna & Diyamandoglu, 2017). By contrast, they are likely to keep possessions with strong emotional meanings (e.g., heirlooms) because they are a part of their identity and constitute an extended self (Belk, 1988; Simpson et al., 2019). In other words, if the cost of keeping the possession is higher than its utilitarian, financial, or emotional value, consumers will discard it (Roster, 2001).

Second, consumers' personality and socio-demographic characteristics matter. For example, people with a hoarding tendency (Guillard & Pinson, 2012) tend to keep objects and therefore struggle when they face situations in which they have to separate from an object (Cross et al., 2018; Haws et al., 2012). Disposing of an object is also more difficult for consumers who associate their possessions with people they cherish or with meaningful events (Coulter & Ligas, 2003). For example, consumers tend to keep jewelry inherited from their ancestors because it reminds them of the deceased person or toys their children used to play

with frequently. This is the same for consumers who embrace the principles of voluntary simplicity (i.e., adopting a lifestyle that reduces consumption) and try to reduce their possessions by keeping only those with strong meanings (Ballantine & Creery, 2010). In the same vein, “purgers,” or people who are less likely to attach sentimental meaning to their material environment (Coulter & Ligas, 2003), have more freedom to dispose of things without the anxiety and stress that usually come with emotionally loaded possessions (Phillips & Segó, 2011). In addition, elderly people are more willing to dispose of their objects than young people, often to control the object’s future and dispose of it the way they want (Dunn et al., 2020; Price et al., 2000).

Third, consumers’ socio-material environment influences their decisions to keep or dispose of an object. For example, consumers who have storage options in their houses will often keep more than others (Roster, 2001). They also tend to dispose of objects when they need or want to buy new items (Cruz-Cárdenas & del Val Núñez, 2016). In addition, familial subjective norms influence disposal behaviors: for example, coming from a family in which environmental issues are central or in which selling and/or giving away objects is routinized encourages consumers to dispose of their unused objects rather than keep them (Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013; Phillips & Segó, 2011). Finally, life-cycle events such as moving, changes in professional and/or personal life, or death favor disposition behaviors, because objects may no longer reflect the consumer’s self (Young, 1991).

Overall, whether they focus on the influence of products, consumers’ characteristics, or their socio-material environment, prior studies have tended to categorize consumers into either “keepers” or “discarders.” As such, they do not differentiate between redistributing and scrapping and therefore fail to capture the variety of disposal practices consumer may use.

2.2. The redistribution of unused objects

Redistribution uncovers a large set of practices, such as selling, giving, and swapping, with many variants. For example, consumers can sell their unused objects online through a generic or brand platform, in a flea market, or in a garage sale. If research overlooks consumers’ discarding practices in the context of unused objects, the question of redistributing an object (vs. throwing it away) is often in the spotlight because of the economic and societal (Ertz et al., 2017) issues associated with redistribution practices. Growing concerns about environmental issues may lead consumers to redistribute their unused objects more often than throwing them away to reduce waste and preserve the environment and, for some, to oppose a “throwaway”

society (Ertz et al. 2017). The economic issues consumers face also may lead them to reuse objects to save money or meet financial needs (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009). Redistribution practices also include experiential and emotional aspects. For example, some consumers regard selling items as fun and an opportunity to play the shopkeeper (Ertz et al., 2017) or develop social links (Philip et al., 2019). Overall, redistribution practices align with social changes, as evidenced by the development of flea markets (Sherry, 1990), charitable giving (Bajde, 2009), and, more recently, online recycling (Guillard & Del Bucchia, 2012b).

How do consumers decide whether to redistribute or throw away their unused possessions? The ways this issue has been examined by scholars is twofold: either they consider redistribution (vs. discarding) in general (e.g., De Ferran et al., 2020; Hibbert et al., 2005; Trudel et al., 2016) or they focus on one specific mode of redistribution, such as selling (Ekerdt & Addington, 2015) or giving (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012). In both cases, what matters is determining what factors or combination of factors may influence redistribution: the tradeoff between different modes of redistribution is largely overlooked.

First, prior research has focused on the influence of consumers' relationship with possession on redistribution. When consumers consider an object part of their extended selves (Belk, 1988), they are likely to recycle it more than throw it away (Trudel et al., 2016) because they want the life of their unused object to continue, even if it is with someone else (Lovatt, 2015). In the same vein, possessions with strong emotional meanings are more likely to be transmitted to a family member, to transfer the symbolic value of the object (Price et al., 2000), or to be sold, to keep control over the object's future, at least initially (Brough & Isaac, 2012).

Second, Hibbert et al. (2005) show that the mode of distribution is contingent on the type of object (e.g., clothing given to charities, books given to relatives). Moreover, when consumers deem objects as being in poor condition (Paden & Stell, 2005), with no further financial or use value, they tend to throw them away rather than redistribute them (Roux & Guillard, 2016). By contrast, research suggests that objects with a potential economic value are redistributed (Guillard & Del Bucchia, 2012b).

Third, people who tend to keep objects (Coulter & Ligas, 2003) prefer redistributing their unused objects to throwing them away because they want to ensure their objects are still valued. Apart from protecting their objects through redistribution, consumers tend to redistribute them when it fits with their values, such as having strong environmental concerns (Ertz et al., 2017).

Fourth, prior studies demonstrate the influence of socio-demographics on redistribution modes. For example, because of their perceived lack of competence, the elderly tend to prefer

giving away than selling unused objects, whereas this is the opposite for younger people (Ekerdt & Addington, 2015). In the context of clothing donations, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2012) show that the elderly and people with strong environmental concerns tend to give more to charity than to their families, suggesting that different factors such as individual characteristics and the type of product are linked and interact together in redistribution choices.

Underlying motivations also influence the redistribution channel's choice. For example, Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) show that the need to create space for new items favors clothing donations. Then, people motivated by market transactions prefer selling their unused objects, while people with pro-social motives (e.g., making others happy, giving objects a new life) prefer donating (De Ferran et al., 2020).

Finally, situational variables such as proximity to structures of redistribution are also important: people prefer to redistribute their unused objects when they have easy access to redistribution modes (Paden & Stell, 2005), indicating that material resources are often critical. Whether a dedicated recycling (Albinsson & Perera, 2009) or charity (Paden & Stell, 2005) association, its presence in the vicinity is likely to favor redistribution over scrapping. However, knowing where to redistribute is not the only element favoring redistribution; knowing how to sell online, for example, is also important and raises the issue of consumer competence.

In summary, by describing the factors that favor either disposition in general or one specific mode of redistribution in particular, prior research fails to unpack the complex decisions consumers face when confronted to redistribution issues. In turn, this restricted focus has led to the under-exploration of the strategic nature of redistribution practices, thus leaving consumers' agency in the background. Yet, when consumers must decide how to give their unused objects a new life, their resources and competences play a central role in the decision-making process. To gain an in-depth understanding of how these elements come together with individual factors, the socio-cultural context, and the objects' nature, we draw on qualitative data collection based on multiples sources.

3. Data collection and analysis

To explore the strategies that consumers implement when faced with situations in which they must decide how to discard an object that has outlived its intended purpose, we employed a qualitative method based on introspection, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, which is appropriate given the exploratory nature of this research—to better understand the complexity of consumers' redistribution choices by identifying the factors likely to influence a

given redistribution practice. The research took place in France between July 2019 and October 2020 and is divided into two steps. We began by writing introspective stories about our own redistribution practices (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993), to capture the salient elements of our redistribution strategies and, consequently, to better define and implement the main qualitative data collection. Then, we conducted interviews and participant observation simultaneously. Informants were mostly women (18 of 22) aged between 21 and 74 years (see Table 1). We used two recruitment methods: word of mouth (WOM) based on our own network and a call for participation via Facebook posts to four “buying/selling” or “garage sale” groups in the Parisian area.

Insert Table 1 around here

The interview stage consisted of 18 in-depth interviews with consumers who were used to redistributing objects they no longer use. Interviews lasted 67 minutes on average and took place either in the informants’ homes or by phone/videoconference during the coronavirus lockdown period. We asked the informants to describe their last disposal experience and to explain how they made their choice. This narrative framing was suitable because it is non-directive, makes informants more comfortable, and therefore favors detailed descriptions. Using a narrative framing also enabled us to better capture the dynamic aspects of the disposition process and the decisions about the choice of disposal method (Czarniawska, 2004). In addition, we took 41 pictures of objects and storage settings.

We engaged in participant observation of five informants in parallel with the interviews. Each observation occurred in informants’ homes by one of the authors. The contexts of these observations included three informants sorting their clothes, one preparing to move, and one disposing of the belongings of a deceased loved one. The observations led to either an informal discussion during the sorting process or a formal interview, resulting in nine-and-a-half hours of audio recording, 47 photos, and field notes. Through a protocol analysis (Payne, 1976), informants discussed any decisions, ideas, and thoughts about what they were going to do with the objects they were planning to discard. Questions about the informants’ decision process complemented the protocol analysis and contributed to a better understanding of their disposal choices and practices regarding specific objects. During the data collection period, we also took field notes on our feelings, theoretical and methodological ideas, and details about the specific context. According to Holbrook (2005), also keeping track of researchers’ experiences during observations and interview phases with either pictures or written notes is important. The notes contribute to ensuring the validity and anchoring of our approach (Miles et al., 2013).

Our analysis builds on the grounded theory framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in which data collection and analysis are built simultaneously. Because the analysis is rooted in empirical evidence and not constructed from preconceived hypotheses, we began the data analysis with an open coding of each transcriptions. Using NVivo software, we followed the constant comparative method of Strauss and Corbin (1990), in which codes are defined a posteriori and are always compared with each other to become more abstract and conceptual. The procedure is divided in two steps: an intra-textual analysis, in which each interview is separately examined to understand the personal logics of our informants, and an inter-textual analysis, in which we identify the patterns and differences across all our interviews and observations. Our analysis also included a detailed narrative portrait of the informants (Ahuvia, 2005), such as their personal story, relationship with possessions, consumption patterns, and dynamics of redistribution practices. Our interpretation resulted from the iterative process between emerging theory and data. Data collection stopped when theoretical saturation was reached (i.e., when new data added little to the emergent analysis) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

4. Findings

Data show that the redistribution of unused objects entails the mobilization of a set of resources and skills. This results in several practices (mainly giving and selling but also exchanging), each involving one or more redistribution modes (online, offline, with or without intermediaries). We identify three main strategies (market-oriented, convenience-oriented, and community-oriented) that involve different levels of resources (temporal, social, and material) and skills (commercial and technical). Each of these strategies can be based on either a single redistribution practice (mono-redistribution; e.g., selling) or a combination of practices (multi-redistribution; e.g., selling and giving), as they build on several redistribution practices. The strategies we identify involve different levels of geographic and relational closeness. We define geographic closeness as the distance between the discarder and the recipient (Boschma & Frenken, 2009; Geldes et al., 2015); that is, redistribution occurs on a familial or local scale. Relational closeness corresponds to psychological closeness (Gahinet & Cliquet, 2018), in which feelings of attachment to and a perceived connection with another person may occur (Gino & Galinsky, 2012). To a lesser extent, we also identify opportunities and threats that steer consumers toward a specific redistribution choice.

4.1. Market-oriented strategy

Informants opting for a market-oriented strategy use their resources and skills either to sell their unused objects (when they opt for a single redistribution practice) or to primarily sell them (when they use several redistribution modes) before donating them. In both cases, the recipient is considered a customer. Informants prefer online sales, because they are not especially seeking closeness with the recipients and because selling online does not require too much effort: they already have business (e.g., ability to market their objects, to negotiate, and to display them online) and technical (e.g., ability to use apps, software, and cameras) skills gained from their professional lives or have an aptitude for business and want to participate in C2C platforms. Because they want to be efficient, they spend time on organizing their possessions' sales.

Consider, for example, Diane, a 41-year-old professor who created a personal page on Vinted (a popular C2C platform: see Fig. 1) to sell her two children's, aged of 6 and 8, outgrown clothes. Diane works for an organization in which she uses several types of software and negotiates with different stakeholders on a daily basis. After discovering she could sell her children's used clothes online, she spends her free time taking pictures, writing descriptions, reviewing her customers' ratings, scrolling through "competitors'" personal pages, and planning her deliveries. Another example is Stephanie, a 38-year-old psychologist who began selling at flea markets when she and her husband needed to collect money to furnish their home. She later discovered online sales platforms and now spends at least one hour a week on them, making her feel like an expert:

I'm pretty fast now. The children are in the bath, I prepare the food, then I line up my 3 clothes, I take pictures, I put them online, then I tidy up. And that's it, I'm moving on. And when I get home from work, I drop off the parcels and pick up mine at the same time.

Insert Figure 1 around here

Diane and Stephanie favor online selling and believe they are efficient salespeople, even capable of reaching an international "clientele": Diane reports that she has already sold clothing to Belgian customers. Beyond providing an extended market, online C2C platforms are deemed "secure, easy to use and we can be refunded if needed," as Stephanie states. Online sales also avoid the need to deliver items in person, which is an advantage for our informants. They acknowledge that they are not emotionally involved in the relationship with the recipient, though they can appreciate the quality of some social interactions. An exception is Evy, a 68-year-old retired grandmother living in a big house in the countryside. She explains that she sold

mechanical equipment belonging to her deceased husband to young mechanics who could not afford to buy new equipment and who needed it to repair and reassemble old cars:

I was happy to sell this equipment because my husband liked the object to continue its history.... It was not their job, it was more of a hobby, like my husband, so it was a pleasure to sell it to them.

In support of this, Price et al. (2000) show that the elderly tend to favor people they feel close to as recipients of their special possessions, because they share interests or personality traits. In Evy's case, however, the transfer is based on her representation of who is worthy of her deceased husband's special possession.

The market-oriented strategy comprises mono- and multi-redistribution practices. In the case of a mono-redistribution practice, consumers treat redistribution as a game, which is made easier if they have strong commercial expertise. Stephanie, who sells on Vinted at least twice a week, explains:

When I sell, I feel like a saleswoman in fact. It's a pleasure because it allows me to buy clothes for my children or to buy toys or things like that, so automatically it's a pleasure to sell the products.

Informants with a mono-redistribution practice derive pleasure from the transaction, not because it creates a social exchange with the buyers but because they like to play the shopkeeper (Juge et al., 2019): taking beautiful pictures, displaying their objects appropriately, setting prices, negotiating, and so on. Because market-oriented redistribution is a game to them, these informants sell all categories of objects, from furniture and toys to accessories and clothing. However, they tend to sell clothing most frequently because they have stocks of branded items, which indicates that material and economic resources are also important in this strategy. Branded items are indeed easy to sell. Stephanie, who sells "everything that is Lacoste, Ralph Lauren" uses this money to "buy something else [in return]."

Multi-redistribution practices also require a high level of resources and skills but differ from mono-redistribution practices in terms of emotional engagement and expertise. For informants, rationality prevails over pleasure and emotion. Often combined with commercial and technical expertise, rationality leads informants to determine which unused objects they are going to give away and which they will sell. Both Evy and Mathilde, a 25-year-old housewife with 2 young children (aged 1 and 3), sell online and give online to charities. They always try to sell every object with a financial value on C2C platforms first to obtain a return on

investment: Evy considers herself a “rational consumer” who only buys when she really needs to and is concerned about saving money:

I try to sell first, because I tell myself that it brings in a bit of money.... What makes me hesitate between selling and giving is knowing if I'm going to get a market value out of it. Quite simply, a very mercantile side, you might say. I like to earn a few pennies.

Evy shows that when an object's value is not worth the time and effort necessary to sell it, she prefers giving it away. She explains: “Afterwards, when I see that the sale is going to be complicated or that I haven't had an offer to buy for several months, I give it away.” This is particularly true for clothing pieces because they are easy to give to charity. Similarly, when selling objects is not possible, other informants give them away through redistribution modes they know well, because they want to optimize their temporal resources. If they have less expertise than “pure players,” informants who engage in multi-redistribution seize opportunities to acquire new skills and use them first to commercialize their unused objects. For example, Mathilde explains that since her husband showed her how to use online sales platforms, she has only sold objects through this redistribution mode. This is the same for pure players, who seize technological innovation, such as the proliferation of online platforms, to develop new competences to better engage in market-oriented redistribution. This suggests that the acquisition of resources and competences leads consumers to adopt a market approach to redistribution.

4.2. Convenience-oriented strategy

Whether through sales or donations, informants with little commercial and technical skills, as well as few temporal resources, tend to favor the convenience-oriented strategy. Paula, a 40-year-old Parisian mother of two young children, who only gives away objects, explains: “With two little ones we run after [all day long], I have absolutely no time to go anywhere. I don't drive, [so] it has to be a charity that actually comes to the corner.” Isabelle, a 54-year-old woman with three adult children and two grandchildren, who prefers selling, uses a Facebook “garage sale” local group: “It is easy and practical” and different from C2C platforms on which shallow and sometimes disrespectful social interactions are too frequent: “What [I] do not appreciate a lot, even not at all, ... is when people ask you for information and then don't answer you anymore. It really annoys me.” In addition to not appreciating specialized C2C platforms, informants believe they do not have the skills to take advantage of them. For example, Suzanne,

a 48-year-old after-school assistant mother of two children, defines herself as “a poor saleswoman”: “I sell at very low prices, but at least [they go] fast. My son always tells me that it is normal, because my prices are so low! But hey, I get rid of [my unused objects].” Surprisingly, this strategy, which goes along with a geographic closeness to recipients, is not synonymous with a search for relational closeness: informants prefer to maintain a relational distance between themselves and the people to whom they sell and/or give objects. In some cases, the informants who are reluctant to interact with the recipients even consider relational closeness a threat rather an opportunity; here, social exchange is an intrusion. For example, Yvonne, a 41-year-old social worker, explains that she is “quite suspicious” about meeting unknown people, while Suzanne, does not “want that people know where [she lives].”

We identify two types of convenient-oriented strategies: the first involves only giving to local charities anonymously, and the second involves mainly selling in local Facebook groups and then either giving the unsold items to the same Facebook groups or giving them to charity. Informants who only give to local charities are urban dwellers, who benefit from recycling opportunities and have few relational resources in their area. As Paula reports: “I used to give my son’s clothes to his cousin, but my brother moved to Rome so I don’t see him as often as before.” Paula lives in Paris, where there are many redistribution devices and local facilities such as charity ephemeral stands, collection boxes, and at-home collection services. She chooses to give clothes and toys to a charity that collects objects every two months in her building: “I give almost every time [they pass by], but not in huge quantities.... There is a poster in the hall of the building.” Paula also gives furniture to an association that picks up in her area on a regular basis. Similarly, Yvonne and Oriane, a 47-year-old teacher with no children, also live in big cities and give most of their unused objects directly to local charities. Both are embedded in a non-market perspective; their goal is to support people in need, while easily getting rid of objects. Paula says: “I tell myself that my children have a lot of things, they are very, very privileged.... There are still families where children really have nothing to play with or ... go through rough days, they don't even have coats, boots, etc. There are children who haven't had the chance to have holidays, or trips, or gifts.” This desire to support people in need may be explained by their early childhood experiences, in which donating was a must: Paula’s mother used to give away clothing, and her mother-in-law volunteers at a charity. Yvonne was also raised this way: “When I was a child, my parents used to put an extra plate [out] at Christmas for homeless people.” Giving is a routine these informants have acquired, and the economic value of the unused object does not matter. As Paula explains:

For sure I have some quality items, like the changing table or the baby's bed, I paid almost 1000€. So, I guess I could sell them very easily ... but I don't want to bother. It was in super good condition, it was quality, it was a good brand, Organic certified, made with high-quality materials etc. But I prefer to give to families where kids have no toys ... to underprivileged families. When I listen to what my mother-in-law and my friend who works for the association tell me, it makes me very emotional. So, I prefer to give.

In addition to a preference for giving, informants' lack of commercial skills and appetite for negotiation contribute to their decision to donate. As Paula acknowledges: "[Selling] doesn't really fit my nature, plus it seems complicated or I don't want even [to be hassled] for a small amount of money..., to have to put things online, to see people come into my house." For some consumers, there are tensions between the market and both the domestic and civic worlds (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991), thus disqualifying selling and all that goes with it as a potential mode of redistribution.

In contrast with strictly local givers, some informants engage in both selling and giving, with a preference for the former. The lack of opportunities in the environment plays a role in their decision: living in rural areas, they have no easy access to recycling centers and charities, so they sell through easy-to-spot and available local Facebook groups. Another reason for selling first (vs. giving away) relates to their relationship with possessions. According to Isabelle, who is particularly attached to objects, "As people buy, they may be more careful about what they buy, whereas if you give, there may be people who don't really want it. They will take it, but they won't reuse it. If you spend money, that's different." Selling therefore seems a way to control the future of the object (Brough & Isaac, 2012; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005); here, consumers can select a category of recipients who they deem better capable of ensuring the object's continuation. For them, selling through Facebook local groups is not only an economic decision but also a way to discard objects easily and quickly for monetary compensation. For objects not related to the self and with a low market value (especially clothing), consumers' engagement is weaker, and thus objects are given away. In this case, consumers either favor local Facebook groups or pass their unsold items to relatives involved in charities. For example, Isabelle gives clothing and other items with low monetary value (e.g., old books, plastic toys) to a colleague, who volunteers at a charity. In this case, giving is convenient.

Finally, we observed that some informants who now sell objects in local Facebook groups used to sell at flea markets with their children, but gradually gave them up for Facebook groups because it is easier, less time-consuming, and less constraining. Flea markets also lose

meaning because they used to be a family experience. Again, combined with individuals' life-cycle style dynamics, technology seems to favor market-oriented redistribution.

4.3. *Community-oriented strategies*

For some of our informants, socializing with recipients is more important than redistributing unused objects: what matters is developing an emotional and identity bond with individuals within the community, as shown in works on place attachment, in which consumers feel part of a family in a commercial environment they experience as homey (e.g., Debenedetti et al., 2014; Rosenbaum, 2006). The community-oriented strategy results in a geographic and relational closeness with the recipient: informants use local redistribution modes and favor direct social exchange with recipients at different levels of their community, whether their family, friends, neighbors, or local charities. WOM, as well as proactive actions to find the appropriate recipient, is central, as noted by Solène, a 51-year-old single mother who loves organizing parties: "I give to my network within the village ... through [WOM]. I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by people of different generations. It's all about sharing! When someone needs something, I am around." Beyond interpersonal relationships taking over the material exchange, what differentiates this strategy from the others is the emphasis on relational resources and the weak mobilization of commercial and technical skills. Cecile, a 62-year-old translator, finds C2C platforms "extremely complicated," explaining: "Some people [using them] are kind of professionals.... I am not good at it." However, relational resources serve social interaction, whether it is in the context of giving or selling: the community-oriented interaction strategy concerns people who give to their relatives but also sell on local flea markets. In contrast with the other strategies, in which the social dimension is rather weak, the community-oriented strategy focuses on the social exchange process: counter-gifting is central for the consumers, making this strategy closer to gift-giving than to donating, due the relational closeness between the giver and the recipient.

Informants focusing on donation also benefit from a familial and friendly network in the neighborhood. For example, Xavier, a 38-year-old man, comes from a large family and has five children. He used to buy secondhand products when he was younger but, since then, has engaged in an intra-family exchange: he gives almost everything he no longer uses in his home to his family, his friends, his children's nanny, or his neighbors. He still collects clothes, toys, and household appliances and repairs them if necessary. When they are no longer useful in his home, he redistributes them:

One of my daughters will turn 18 tomorrow, another one is 15. So, [clothes] go from the biggest to the smallest. And usually, they are given back: I have a niece who is 11. So, clothes go to her, and then they come back for my youngest, who is 4. Regarding the boys, one is 11 and the other is 9, so it is the same [process]. In their case, when items are no longer used, they go to the cousins.

Xavier circulates objects to his close network, whether these are clothes, toys, furniture, or household appliances, and contributes to create value (Scaraboto & Figueiredo, 2015). Like Cecile, who counts on intra-familial WOM when she gives something, Xavier engages in the exchange process because of its convivial nature. For our informants, meeting the recipient of their unused objects is important. Cecile explains: “When I gave her [the maid] the little wallet with the three swimming costumes, I explained to her why I gave it to her, and I saw that she was happy. This made me very happy.” Here, giving seems to be a way to help people and please them, but it is also a way to gratify the gift-giver and make him or her happy (Dunn & Norton, 2014).

Redistribution is different when informants give and then sell. Here, they also seek interpersonal exchange, but they differ from those who are focused on gift-giving in terms of the importance given to their role in the community. In that case, they have more temporal resources and extend the social exchange from their inner circle of family and friends to a larger circle comprising neighbors or city inhabitants: Cindy, Solène, Marie-Hélène, Gilles, and Francine all prefer giving objects directly to their relatives or neighbors through local Facebook groups or to charities, but they also like to participate in flea markets to sell items at least once a year. They enjoy the conviviality of those events and the social aspects that go with this redistribution mode, in which the recipient is not a customer but a member of the local community, thus favoring different forms of social interactions and practices. For example, Cindy’s (a 43-year-old stay-at-home mother) experience illustrates that the community-oriented strategy may push informants to swap instead of give:

I get to know people enough to know that [they] are in need, so I have already given them several things.... Sometimes, when I sort clothes, I say to myself they benefit from them. So, I call them up and I say, “I have a bag of summer and winter clothing of this particular size, would you be interested?” Then, I give them everything so that they sort out and keep what they actually want.... I once saw a post [of a woman] on a local [Facebook] group specialized in girls’ clothes sales... and, one thing leading to another, we decided to meet.... We realized that our children were doing sports in the same place, so that's how we started exchanging clothes. On this occasion, I realized that she had a

little boy too: I told her that if she wanted I could also give her boy's clothes and now, it's regular, we exchange little parcels every six months or so.

The presence of children and the commitment to diverse local groups give Cindy strong social resources and, consequently, many occasions and targets for redistributing. This is also the case for Marie-Hélène, a bookseller, and Gilles, a town councilor: their occupations give them an opportunity to meet many people, to facilitate WOM, and to contribute to redistribute their unused possessions. Informants using such a mixed community-oriented strategy are involved in their community or town: as retirees, stay-at-home parents, or local shopkeepers, they have time to devote to others. In addition, their specific position in the community makes them feel as if they have a special role within it, one that goes beyond the pleasure and emotion derived from social interaction.

The development of local Facebook groups has accentuated informants' willingness to redistribute. As Cindy states, Facebook has "increased my desire to share, give, or try to resell. It's true that ... well, now, Internet makes it easier than before. Back then ... recycling wasn't actually part of our [lives]." Here, technological tools, when they are easy to use, help support both giving and selling. Table 2 summarizes the redistribution strategies and their associated characteristics.

Insert table 2 around here

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

In line with studies that acknowledge the importance of disposition in consumer behavior (Jacoby et al. 1977), our research focuses on the last step of the disposal behavior—redistribution—and contributes to the growing literature on disposition practices by offering a broader perspective on redistribution practices. Our research, by illuminating the strategic dimension of redistribution practices, complements prior research on the influence of consumers' individual characteristics (e.g., age; Ekerdt & Addington, 2015), motivations (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009), attitudes (e.g., environmental concerns; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012), or the type of objects (Hibbert et al., 2005) on redistribution. In other words, we suggest that consumers determine which redistribution mode is appropriate to dispose of their mundane unused objects, by comparing a set of alternatives. In doing so, we also extend the scope of prior qualitative research on redistribution by considering concurrent modes of redistribution rather than a single one (e.g., swap meet; Belk et al., 1988), and by not limiting our study to a

single product category (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012) or to special possessions (Price et al., 2000): we include the large range of daily product categories that consumers usually discard.

More specifically, our strategic perspective documents how consumers select redistribution modes depending on their current resources (e.g., material, economic, temporal), skills (e.g., their ability to mobilize the resources they possess) (Grant, 1991), and opportunities provided by the socio-material environment. In other words, the combination of internal capacities and external opportunities engages them in favoring specific modes of redistribution that fit with their life projects (Arnould et al., 2006), resulting in three different redistribution strategies. First, we find that the combination of many temporal and relational resources and high business and technical skills (e.g., the ability to use the Internet, apps, and websites) results in consumers' decision to sell rather than donate their unused possessions, independently of the object category. In such cases, donating is a side action and occurs when the unused object is no longer of economic value. Then, when consumers do not possess such resources and competences, they tend to focus on local modes of redistribution, whether that is selling or donating their unused possessions. They do not look for social interactions but rather for convenient modes of redistribution that contribute to help people in need. Finally, the possession of social resources and the desire for social interaction lead to a preference for giving over selling, through channels favoring social exchange. In summary, we uncover consumers' agency in the redistribution phase of the disposal process and identify a portfolio of actions that prior research has overlooked.

Second, we propose that the resources and competences consumers do (or do not) possess are related to their closeness with recipients. Surprisingly, the notion of closeness has not received much prominence in research on disposition, except in reflections about special possessions, in which the closeness of the giver to the receiver is central (e.g., Price et al., 2000). In marketing, studies have instead mobilized closeness to examine a large set of issues, such as consumer–retailer relationships (Schultz et al., 2016), social interactions with sales personnel (Bove & Johnson, 2001), or C2C interactions (Dubois et al., 2016), and defined it as the short spatial, social, or psychological distance between the two entities (for a review, see Lenglet & Mencarelli, 2020). In particular, we show that access and relational closeness (Schultz et al., 2016) with the recipients of disposed objects play a central role. Access closeness, or the geographic (or temporal, when time is independent of the distance) proximity with the recipient, is likely to compensate for a lack of resources and/or competences: being close makes the exchange easier. Such closeness is also a way to engage in redistribution in a local and social exchange system that goes beyond the disposition of objects. Conversely, with relational

closeness, or consumers' identification with an entity, social interactions prevail in any type of redistribution mode, though such interactions are dominant when donation is central. The absence of relational closeness, which, in our study, goes along with strong business competences, also explains the differences between C2C and business-to-consumer relationships, suggesting that for some consumers, going to the market as a seller is associated with profit rather than commercial friendliness (Price & Arnould, 1999), which does not align with brands' efforts to create a dialogue with customers.

Third, though marginal in our study, we suggest that redistribution strategies are dynamic; that is, they do not rest only on stable individual and object characteristics. We find some cues indicating that developing competences or benefiting from new opportunities can cause consumers to favor selling over giving, while also giving them opportunities to enter the sharing economy and leave the traditional retail brand system behind. Some of our informants indicated, for example, that selling online made them realize that the secondhand market is flourishing and provides many opportunities to buy at cheaper prices in a more humanized retail system.

5.2. Implications for charities and retail managers

This research offers several implications for practice, in particular for charities and retail managers. In a recent study, France's agency for ecological transition (ADEME, 2014) found that redistribution is on the rise, with one of every two French people knowing exactly what it is and nine of 10 considering this mode of consumption in the future. However, some people are still resistant to redistribution practices because of hygienic reasons, quality, or after-sales issues.

From the perspective of charities, taking the strategic dimension of the redistribution of unused objects into account is important, because charities face several challenges helping people donate and favor moral over market economy logics (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). For consumers with few resources, developing easy-to-use donation platforms or donation opportunities by multiplying local access points and associated services (e.g., home collection) is crucial: sales platforms are increasingly accessible to everyone and therefore tend to transform donors into sellers. Perhaps the main challenge for charities is to encourage consumers with strong competences to further engage in the circular economy, buy less from traditional brands and retailers, and use their skills on playful platforms, on which they can link both profit and civic actions. For these consumers, charities could organize sales days on their

platforms and link the pleasure of the sale to the consumers' skills and the charity's expectations. At the end of the period, non-selling items could be given to the charity, as many consumers indicated that they do so when objects do not sell. For consumers interested in social exchange, creating online communities and favoring the transition from virtual to direct social interaction at a local level might be fruitful.

Brands are also facing a considerable challenge, especially those with strong brand equity and partaking in categories in which products are renewed regularly (e.g., children's clothing, toys). Because their products have a market value, consumers tend to use their skills to sell and/or buy them through C2C platforms rather than directly from the brands. In this context, the challenge for brands is to regain control over the redistribution of their own used products, by encouraging consumers to use them as intermediaries. This is important for both economic and reputational reasons. First, encouraging customers to resell their used items through them may have a significant impact on customer retention. For example, Jacadi (a French premium children's clothing brand) organizes the sale of secondhand products supplied by customers twice a year. The brand also sets up a secondhand online store accessible only to loyalty cardholders. Here, customers can advertise their clothes, but minimum prices are fixed by the brand; customers can also sell directly to other customers, but they must drop off their items at a store (to certify the quality of the products); finally, the brand keeps control of the proceeds of the sale by transforming them into gift cards and encourages customers to make additional purchases while offering a form of discount on new products through these gift cards. Second, by implementing actions that partake in the circular economy, brands can notify their social responsibility and therefore improve their reputation. For example, Cyrillus, a competitor of Jacadi, offers to recover clothing and linen of any brand in exchange for a €5 voucher, explaining that recovered items are used to develop its recycled clothing brand.

For managers of C2C platforms, this research also shows that the lack of commercial skills and temporal resources limits their use. Therefore, finding a way to make these platforms easier to use is critical. For example, proposing an "all-in-one" application, in which pricing is set according to the brand/type of items or by being specialized in one type of item, might help recruit new members. C2C platforms could handle the entire sales process, from taking the picture of the items to fixing the price and promoting the products; consumers would only need to send the items when they are sold.

5.3. Limitations and further research

The exploratory nature of this research brings limitations that future research could address. First, we focus on the limitations related to our qualitative approach that could be appropriately resolved by studies measuring the impact of the variables we identify for consumers' choice. From a qualitative standpoint, our research does not fully account for the dynamic aspects of redistribution, though we have some data on this aspect. Our informants indicated that their redistribution behaviors might change, for example, if they heard about new apps making the selling process easier and/or faster, which in turn would push them to acquire and develop new selling skills instead of donating their unused objects. To understand redistribution dynamics more fully, an ethnographic approach that follows consumers closely over time would help expand a strategic perspective on redistribution practices.

Second, in this study we focus on individual choices of redistribution mode and ignore the influence of our informants' networks in the decision process, even though they hinted that they do not always make the redistribution choice by themselves. For example, one informant alluded to shared roles with her partner and the different redistribution choices they made. Prior research has examined the ways consumers redistribute their unused objects from an individual viewpoint while neglecting the familial viewpoint (for an exception, see Phillips & Seago, 2011), with a specific focus on the influence of individual motivations (De Ferran et al., 2020), relationships with the object (Price et al., 2000), or nature of the object (Hibbert et al., 2005). Given these preliminary observations, interviewing couples or families over an extended period would add a longitudinal perspective by capturing the interactional and evolutionary aspects of redistribution strategies.

In conclusion, despite their growing trend, redistribution practices, as the final step of disposition, remain under-studied in terms of consumers' agency. By suggesting that consumers face a diversity of situations that can evolve over time, we show that redistribution of unused objects is a strategic action governed by a portfolio of resources and competences that consumers deploy. In doing so, we enrich the discussion on disposal practices and highlight the role of closeness with the recipient in consumers' decisions.

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Fig. 1. Diane's personal page on Vinted (November 20, 2020).

The image shows a screenshot of a Vinted profile for a user named 'debdeb2373'. The profile includes a header with '61 items', a navigation bar with 'Category All', 'Sort by', and 'Price: high to low', and a profile picture of a bicycle against a brick wall. The profile text identifies the user as a mother of two children aged 7 and 9, offering clothes from big brands or small confidential brands made in France. It states that clothes are sent washed and ironed, and prices are 20-25% of the original purchase price. Below the text is a grid of eight clothing items for sale, each with a price, size, and brand name.

debdeb2373 ...

Mother of two children aged 7 and 9, I offer for sale their clothes from big brands or small confidential brands made in France in good or very good condition (if applicable, the defects are indicated with supporting photo).
The clothes are sent washed (obviously) and ironed (to the extent of my skills).
The prices displayed correspond, in general, to 20-25% of the original purchase price.
When possible, I prefer hand delivery (in Paris).

61 items Category All Sort by Price: high to low

Item	Price	Size	Brand
White hooded jumpsuit	€25.00	24-36 months / 92-98 cm	Petit Bateau
Green patterned top	€22.00	18-24 months / 80-86 cm	Alice & Paris
Light pink top	€20.00	6-12 months / 74-80 cm	Agnes b
Red dress	€20.00	9-12 months / 74-80 cm	bonpoint
Floral patterned top			
Green top			
Grey top			
Dark patterned top			

Table 1

Profile of informants.

Informant pseudonym	Gender	Age	Job	Marital status
EvY	F	68	Pensioner	Widow, four children (aged 25, 28, 49, and 52)
Yvonne	F	41	Child welfare supervisor	Married, two children (aged 10 and 15)
Suzanne	F	48	Afterschool helper	Partner, two children (aged 13 and 18)
Stéphanie	F	38	Psychologist	Married, two children (aged 3 and 8)
Cindy	F	43	Housewife	Married, three children (aged 7, 10, 13)
Xavier	M	38	Supervisor	Partner, five children (aged 4, 8, 11, 15, 18)
Mathilde	F	25	Housewife	Partner, two children (aged 1 month and 2)
Francine	F	74	Pensioner	Married, two children (aged 40 [deceased] and 45)
Isabelle	F	54	Kindergarten assistant	Married, three children (aged 18, 24, and 29)
Philippe	M	52	Supervisor	Partner, two children (aged 11 and 16)
Alexandre	M	21	Sound technician	Single
Jeanne	F	28	Assistant professor	Single
Diane	F	40	Professor	Married, two children (aged 6 and 8)
Paula	F	42	Professor	Married, two children (aged 3 and 4)
Marie-Hélène	F	45	Bookseller	Partner
Patricia	F	27	Assistant professor	Partner
Marie	F	49	Seller	Married, two children (aged 15 and 17)
Solène	F	51	Assistant	Divorced, two children (aged 16 and 22)
Oriane	F	47	Paymaster	Partner
Brigitte	F	46	Professor	Married, three children (aged 8, 15, and 17)
Cecile	F	62	Translator	Partner
Gilles	M	63	Retired	Married, three children (aged 25, 32, and 23 [deceased])

Table 2

Informants' redistribution strategies.

Strategy	Market-oriented		Convenience-oriented			Community-oriented	
Redistribution practices	Mono: sales	Multi: sales dominant (then donation)	Mono: donation	Multi: sales dominant (then donation)	Mono: gift	Multi: gift dominant (then sales, marginally exchange)	

Objectives	Profit + game	Profit	Support people	Objects' continuity	Interaction with relatives	Interaction with neighborhood
Resources						
<i>Temporal</i>	High	High (donation: low)	Very low	Low	Average	Average
<i>Social</i>	Low	Low	Very low	Very low (donation: low)	Very high	Very high
<i>Material</i>	High	High	Average	Average	Average	Average
Skills						
<i>Commercial</i>	Very high	High	Low	Low (donation: low)	Low	Low to average
<i>Technical</i>	Very high	High	Low	Low (donation: low)	Low	Low to average
Opportunities (O) & threats (T)			O: local recycling devices	T: contacts with recipients		
Type of closeness to recipients	None	None	Geographic	Geographic	Geographic & relational	Geographic & relational
Predominant distribution modes	C2C online platforms	C2C online platforms (charities for clothing)	Charity stands, boxes, home collection	Facebook local groups, charities, boxes	Family, friends, neighbors	Community (sales: flea markets)