

## Original Paper

# Ethical Consumer Behavior: Does Second-Hand Consumption Influence Satisfaction with Life?

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### Abstract

*What do we really need to live a happy life? Second-hand consumption has been proposed to be a lifestyle choice which is done voluntarily (Steffen, 2017, p. 204) and could increase peoples' life satisfaction. Besides economic motives, many people consume second-hand for ethical reasons, e.g., to distance themselves from the consumption system, for ecological reasons, social reasons or have hedonic motivations (Guiot & Roux, 2010). Some consumers simply want to shop clever (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 11), started to reduce their consumption or re-use to reduce their ecological footprint (Waight, 2013).*

*This study assesses the relationship between second-hand consumption motivation and satisfaction with life in a structural equation model. 203 Germans participated in the online study and evaluated their motivation for second-hand consumption based on the scale of Guiot and Roux (2010). Satisfaction with life was measured with Diener, Emmons and Griffin's (1985) Satisfaction of life scale which has been translated into German by Janke and Glöckner-Rist (2014). The findings indicate that consumers primarily buy second-hand to hunt for treasures, to find original products, to engage socially and for ethical reasons. Economic motives were also dominant. The study shows that second-hand consumption motivation does not influence satisfaction with life.*

### Keywords

*second-hand consumption, ethical consumption, satisfaction with life, consumer behavior, reuse*

## 1. Introduction

Consumers are increasingly concerned of the consequences of their excessive lifestyle (Balderjahn, 2013, p. 202). People have become aware that the production methods of the 21st century and their consumption patterns are responsible for environmental pollution and the depreciation of resources. Thus, many people re-use items or buy second-hand to reduce their ecological footprint (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015). The Statista Global Consumer Survey (2019) shows in a representative sample that 44% of Germans have bought any used good in 2019. In addition, the turnover of goods sold in second-hand retail outlets is expected to increase from €2765 mio in 2011 to €3010 mio in 2023 (Statista, 2019). This increasing importance of second-hand goods exchange is also reflected in the academic literature. Guiot and Roux (2010) conduct a very good literature review and show that academic research on second-hand consumption has increased over the past decades.

Second-hand consumptions can be researched from two perspectives. First, by studying the acquisition perspective, e.g., how people buy products second-hand and second, by studying the disposal perspective, e.g., how people get rid of their belongings. Many life coaches and stress-relieve guides tell people to simplify their lives or to declutter their lives. A quick search in the popular online bookstores shows numerous of these books. Marie Kondo even has her own TV series on Netflix and shows people how to tidy up and get rid of belongings (Kondo, n.d.). Oral and Thurner (2019) took this perspective and studied how anti-consumption increases satisfaction of life. This study however focuses on the acquisition of second-hand goods and has the objective to assess the extent to which ethical consumption behavior like second-hand purchases influences satisfaction with life.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Satisfaction with Life

Several studies have measured subjective consumer well-being or satisfaction with life. It is a field of study which can be studied from several perspectives (Iyer & Muncy, 2016). The research gained popularity in the 1960's and thousands of studies have been published since. A common view on the theoretical construct splits well-being into three components: 1) cognitive evaluations of one's life (e.g., overall life satisfaction), 2) positive affect states (e.g., happiness) and 3) negative affective states (e.g., depression, Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002, p. 349). The researchers suggest that materialism is connected to people's value and creates tension in people which in turn lowers well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Iyer and Muncy (2016) support this idea and found in their own research that peoples' attitude towards consumption is positively related with the way they feel about their life (Iyer & Muncy, 2016).

Lee et al. (2002) explain the bottom-up spillover effect to connect consumer well-being to life satisfaction in a satisfaction hierarchy. They propose that overall satisfaction of life is related to satisfaction in several life subdomains like work, leisure, family etc. and with satisfaction with events and experiences within these subdomains.

### 2.2 Second-hand Consumption

#### 2.2.1 Characteristics and Forms of Second-Hand Consumption

Gregson and Crewe (2003, p. 3) describe second-hand consumption as an "attempt on behalf of both buyers and sellers to produce spatialized practices of exchange" where the "goods and spaces of second-hand exchange bring an entirely different context to transactions to first-cycle exchange and that this context is critical to the creation of 'value'" (p. 4). Steffen (2017, p. 204) refers to second-hand consumption as a modest consumption type which for some consumers has turned into a lifestyle. Whereas formerly there was "shame and stigma associated with second-hand consumption" (Franklin, 2011, p. 156), second-hand consumption is practiced by many people across all ages for various reasons. Na'amneh and Al Husban (2012) conclude from a case study in Jordan that whereas it was primarily consumers of low economic status, today even the rich, educated and westernized people prefer to shop second-hand. Many people start to upcycle their belongings instead of throwing them away, others are buying second-hand to re-use. Whereas re-using products is good to reduce waste, Na'amneh and Al Husban (2012) also put forward that the second-hand market could potentially harm "local clothing industries and the trade in first-hand clothing".

Second-hand goods are defined as pre-used and pre-owned (Luchs et al., 2011). Usually, these goods are less expensive than new products and have traces of wear-and-tear (Estelami & Raymundo, 2012). These goods can be bought in "car boot sales, charity shops, auctions, online auctions, seller websites, vintage

and other second-hand shops, nearly new sales to bric-a-brac stalls run by charities or non-profit community organizations such as churches and schools” (Waight, 2013, p. 199). All of these places for second-hand exchange are shaped by both, buyers and sellers (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 3).

The Statista Global Consumer Survey (2019) shows that 56% of the people in their sample of 2078 Germans, have not bought any used goods in 2019. These figures show that 44% of the people in the sample bought used goods, in particular books, movies, music, games (19%), clothes (16%), consumer electronics like TVs (10%). Very similar results were found by Bitkom Research (2017) who asked 1010 German consumers which used goods they have purchased online. The response was books (46%), DVD, CDs or records (36%), clothes (31%), furniture (20%) and cars, motorcycles or bicycles (16%).

Today, part of the second-hand goods market has been formalized by professional online re-sellers. Already years ago, second-hand shops of all forms attempted to copy traditional retail practice (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 75). Ebay, Ebay Classified Ads (“Kleinanzeigen”), Amazon and other large players like Upup or Rebuy have simplified the second-hand market for buyers and sellers. Upup is a second-hand retailer which buys second-hand clothes, checks, photographs and labels the clothes online for a professional customer experience just like in a regular online shop for new clothes (Upup, n.d.).

Consumers can now easily search for second-hand items with keywords or look for pre-defined trouser forms, lengths, colors etc. (Upup, n.d.). Electronic goods are checked, refurbished and even come with a renewed guarantee (Amazon, n.d.). Because of these changes, second-hand consumption has lost a bit of its charm for people who see it as a leisure activity to thrift through second-hand stores, wander across second-hand markets and drive by garage sales. Yet, due to these changes, some people who formally did not consider buying used because they found it dirty, complicated and time-consuming are perhaps more inclined to give second-hand consumption a try.

### 2.2.2 Motivation for Second-Hand Consumption and Hypothesis Development

The motivation for purchasing goods have been initially studied by Guiot and Roux (2010) who found that French consumers have economic and recreational motivations to purchase second-hand but they also uncover an additional dimension, which they call critical motivation. According to the researchers, economic motivation refers to the budget allocation of consumers, e.g., to the wish to pay less, the search for a fair price, to bargain hunting and the gratificative role of price. Consumers who are bargain hunting or paying less for a good which costs much more in the first cycle are therefore happy in the consumption subdomain of life satisfaction which leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1: A high economic motivation for second-hand consumption has a positive impact on satisfaction with life.*

*Critical motivation* includes consumers’ distance and avoidance behaviors and ethical concerns towards the conventional market system (Guiot & Roux, 2010). There are various variations of how consumers can reduce their consumption. Based on Cherrier, Black and Lee (2011), intentional non-consumption plays a key role in sustainability. Anti-consumption is described as a lifestyle-driven desire to live a simpler life (Lee & Ahn, 2016). This can for example be done by consuming less or by downshifting (Cherrier & Murray, 2007). According to Zavestoski (2002) a proportion of consumers perform in voluntary simplicity, which in a mild form means to “reduce clutter in their life, reduce burdensome time commitments and create a peaceful personal space to enjoy life (p. 150). Second-hand consumption is not only practiced by people to save money, but to avoid straining the eco-system (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 11). Second-hand consumption can thus be seen as a mild form of minimalism or anti-consumption. Here the focus is set on personal growth and not on social status (Lee & Ahn, 2016). It can therefore be suggested that people who have a high critical motivation, purchase second-hand for ethical reasons or

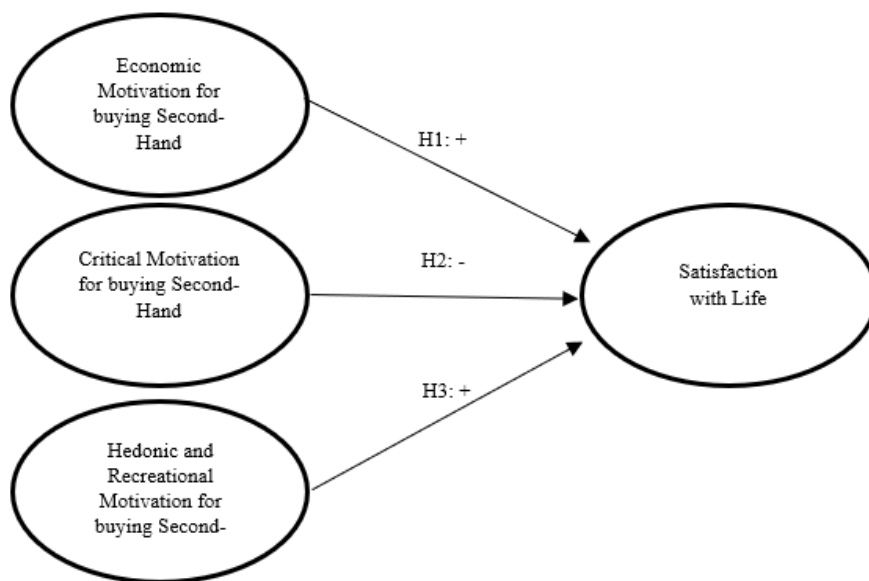
because they want to distance themselves from the consumption system. They are dissatisfied with first-cycle consumption practices. This dissatisfaction in the consumption domain decreases overall satisfaction with their life. The following hypothesis can be developed:

*H2: A high critical motivation for second-hand consumption has a negative impact on satisfaction with life.*

*Hedonic and recreational motivation* includes treasure hunting, nostalgic pleasures and finding original items and in general the social contacts in a second-hand exchange. Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) show that consumers attach meaning to second-hand luxury consumption. According to Zonneveld and Biggemann (2014) emotional attachment, e.g., ardor and nostalgia are main motivations for collecting items, some of which are also acquired in second-hand stores. The results of Steffen's (2017) study indicate that second-hand shoppers are particularly motivated by social and nostalgic reasons and that economic motivations were the weakest motivations. Finding an original item that is unique, attaching positive emotions to second-hand items and the social contacts at a second-hand exchange are likely to have a positive impact on satisfaction with life.

*H3: A high hedonic and recreational motivation for second-hand consumption has a positive impact on satisfaction with life.*

The hypotheses are depicted in the Conceptual Framework in Figure 1



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

### 3. Method

The data was collected with an online survey in Germany in November 2019. The final sample size was 203 people after eliminating 17 unsuitable surveys. The survey assessed general second-hand consumption behavior like frequency and use of second-hand purchase channels. Second-hand shopping motivation was measured with the scale of Guiot and Roux (2010). Here, 4 items (CIRC35, CIRC12, OFF24, OFF25) were not included because the original scale is very long. The items were selected for omission because they had the lowest factor loadings in the original study.

Satisfaction with life was measured with Diener, Emmons and Griffin's (1985) satisfaction of life scale which has been validated and translated into German by Janke and Glöckner-Rist (2014). The five-item scale was also used to measure the relationship between anti-consumption and consumer well-being and was found to have high internal consistency and high temporal reliability (Oral & Thurner, 2019). Lee et al. (2002) scale was also considered. They propose to measure life satisfaction with five major dimensions, e.g., acquisition, possession, consumption, maintenance, and disposition satisfaction. Yet, many of the questions did not fit to the context of second-hand consumption because the goods are not bought first cycle. It was therefore decided to use a more simple measurement scale for satisfaction with life. Diener et al. (1985) measured satisfaction with life with a rather simple 5-item scale which includes questions concerning general life satisfaction.

The data was analyzed with SPSS 26. A Structural Equation Model (SEM) using a confirmatory approach with a factor structure based on Guiot and Roux (2010) was build and tested in AMOS 26.

## 4. Result

### 4.1 Sample Characteristics

The sample was quite diverse in terms of age, income and education. Approximately half of the sample was below 30 years old and the other half older, whereas only a small proportion was above 60 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Sample Characteristics**

	N	%
<b>Age</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>100</b>
< 18	3	1,5
18 - 30	103	50,7
31- 45	36	17,7
45 - 60	52	25,6
60 +	9	4,4
<b>Gender</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>100</b>
Female	144	71,6
Male	57	28,4
<b>Income (after tax in household)</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
< €1000	27	13,5
€ 1000 - €1999	19	9,5
€ 2000 - €2999	20	10,0
€ 3000 - €3999	25	12,5
€ 4000 +	51	25,5
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>
no degree	5	2,5
student / college student	80	39,6
completed apprenticeship	29	14,4
technical college degree	14	6,9
university of applied sciences degree	18	8,9
university degree	56	27,7

The sample contained a very large proportion of females (71.6%), Household net income (after tax) is spread amongst all categories, with a quarter of the people gaining €4000 or above. Education is also quite diverse in the sample with 39.6% of the sample being students and 36.6% having completed a college degree either at a university or at a university of applied sciences. Only 5 participants have not completed a degree and the rest has done vocational training.

#### 4.2 Satisfaction with Life

Table 2 shows the mean scores (M) and standard deviation (STD) of Diener's et al. (1985) satisfaction with life scale. A confirmatory factor analysis showed that all items load on one factor. The reliability test showed an alpha score of  $\alpha=.817$ .

**Table 2. Satisfaction with Life Scale**

Satisfaction with life	M	STD	FACTOR LOADING
<b>Average Scale Score [, <math>\alpha=.817</math>]</b>	<b>3,62</b>	<b>0,72</b>	
In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	3,50	0,92	0,783
The conditions of my life are excellent.	3,93	0,88	0,673
I am satisfied with my life.	4,00	0,76	0,746
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	3,54	0,98	0,640
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	3,14	1,13	0,644

#### 4.3 Second-hand Consumption Motivation

Table 3 shows critical, economic, and hedonic/recreational motivation for second-hand consumption. Overall, treasure hunting motives were strongest (M=3.62), followed by the gratificative role of price (M=3.51), ethics and ecology (M=3.49), search for fair price (M=3.33) and originality (M=3.11). Consumers were least motivated by distancing themselves from the system (M=2.76), social contacts (M=2.40) and nostalgic pleasure (M=2.65). Average motivation scores for the three dimensions were also calculated. The mean scores were the following for critical motivation (M=3.05, STD=0.73), economic motivation (M=3.13, STD=0.59) and hedonic and recreational motivation (2.77, STD=0.74). Based on the average item scores, consumers were most motivated by economic motives (M=3.43, STD=0.59), then by critical motives (M=3.05, STD=0.73) and lastly by hedonic and recreational motives (M=2.77, STD=0.74).

**Table 3. Second-Hand Shopping Motivation**

<b>CRITICAL MOTIVATION</b>		<b>M</b>	<b>STD</b>
<b>Distance from the system (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.832</math>])</b>		<b>2,76</b>	<b>0,82</b>
PUIS13	By buying second-hand, I feel like I'm escaping the (consumption system)	2,93	0,94
PUIS11	Buying second-hand is for me a revenge on the consumption system	2,36	0,95
ANT11	Buying second-hand enables me to distance myself from the consumer society	2,99	0,93
<b>Ethics and ecology (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.691</math>])</b>		<b>3,49</b>	<b>0,87</b>
ECTH15	I enjoy buying second-hand because I don't like objects being thrown away that can still be of use	3,63	0,99
ETH11	By buying second-hand, I feel I'm helping to fight against waste	3,33	1,00
<b>ECONOMIC MOTIVATION</b>		<b>M</b>	<b>STD</b>
<b>Gratificative role of price (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.739</math>])</b>		<b>3,51</b>	<b>0,69</b>
ECO33	I can afford more things because I pay less second-hand	3,36	0,84
ECO35	One can have more things for the same amount of money if one buys second-hand	3,52	0,88
ECO36	I feel that I have lots of things for not much money by buying them second-hand	3,64	0,84
<b>Search for fair price (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.334</math>])</b>		<b>3,33</b>	<b>0,70</b>
ECO22	I don't want to pay more for a product just because it's new	3,14	1,00
ECO21	By buying second-hand, I feel I am paying a fair price for things	3,51	0,80
<b>HEDONIC/RECREATIONAL MOTIVATION</b>		<b>M</b>	<b>STD</b>
<b>Treasure hunting (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.816</math>])</b>		<b>3,62</b>	<b>0,72</b>
CIRC32	I like wandering around second-hand outlets because I always hope I'll come across a real find	3,08	1,18
CIRC31	I go to certain second-hand outlets to rummage around and try to find	2,90	1,17

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	something		
CIRC34	I'm often on the look-out for a find when I go to certain second-hand outlets	2,64	1,12
<b>Originality (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.660</math>])</b>		<b>3,11</b>	<b>0,94</b>
OFF15	I hope to come across articles that nobody else has	2,95	1,18
OFF12	I hope to come across original articles that are not found in mainstream stores	3,27	0,98
<b>Social contact (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.822</math>])</b>		<b>2,40</b>	<b>0,87</b>
CIRC13	What I like about certain second-hand outlets is the pleasure of meeting and talking to people	2,72	1,04
CIRC14	In certain second-hand outlets, I like entering into discussion with people even if I don't buy anything	2,14	1,00
CIRC11	I like going to second-hand outlets where I can have contact with people and talk to them	2,23	1,00
<b>Nostalgic pleasure (average scale score [<math>\alpha=.588</math>])</b>		<b>2,65</b>	<b>0,83</b>
OFF22	I am attracted more to old things than new ones	2,66	0,95
OFF23	I like buying second-hand objects because I find them authentic	2,65	1,01

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Overall the reliability analysis showed good Cronbach alpha values which are generally accepted for values  $\alpha > .7$  (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 159) for all 3-item constructs. Like it is typical in a confirmatory approach, the patterns of the predicted factor structure was taken from existing research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008, p. 278), in this case from Guiot and Roux (2010). The Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for two-item constructs were lower than the recommended cut-off.



**Table 4. Correlation Analysis**

		<b>SATISFACTIO ON WITH LIFE MEAN</b>	<b>CRITICAL MOTIVATI ON MEAN</b>	<b>ECONOMIC MOTIVATIO N MEAN</b>	<b>HEDONIC AND RECREATIONAL MOTIVATION MEAN</b>
<b>SATISFACTIO N WITH LIFE MEAN</b>	Pearson correlation	1	-,156*	-,024	,011
	Significance (2-sided)		,046	,757	,894
	N	201	164	165	163
<b>CRITICAL MOTIVATION MEAN</b>	Pearson correlation		1	,393**	,488**
	Significance (2-sided)			,000	,000
	N			165	163
<b>ECONOMIC MOTIVATION MEAN</b>	Pearson correlation			1	,269**
	Significance (2-sided)				,001
	N				164
<b>HEDONIC AND RECREATION AL MOTIVATION MEAN</b>	Pearson correlation				1
	Significance (2-sided)				
	N				

*Note.* \* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-sided) and \*\* at the .001 level (2-sided).

Correlations between the three motivation factors and the construct of satisfaction with life are not very strong. Field (2018, p. 347) proposes to interpret the correlation strengths for  $r$  the following way: tiny (0 to 0.1), small to medium (0.1-0.3), medium to large (0.3-0.5) and large (bigger than 0.5). The correlations with motivation and satisfaction with life therefore have tiny to small correlations (see Table 4). The only medium to large correlations that were found were between economic and critical motivations ( $r=.393$ ,  $p=0.00$ ) and hedonic and recreational motivation and critical motivation ( $r=.488$ ,  $p=0.00$ ), which are however not of interest for testing the study hypotheses.

#### 4.4 Testing the Conceptual Framework with SEM

A confirmatory approach is taken to test the conceptual model with structural equation modelling using the model structure of Guiot and Roux's (2010) original study. As shown in the previous section, the correlations were not strong. Still, the model was built, and the analysis was conducted using AMOS 26. The following fit indicators were produced by the model:  $\chi^2=409.13$ ,  $df=265$ ,  $CMIN/DF=1.544$ ,  $CFI=0.905$ ,  $NFI=0.779$ ,  $RMSEA=0.052$ . These show an acceptable fit based on the recommended cut off values ( $\chi^2/df < 2-3$ ,  $NFI > 0.95$ ,  $CFI > 0.95$ ,  $RMSEA < 0.06-0.08$ ) by Schreiber et al. (2006). Yet, the NFI and CFI values of .95 were not reached. Byrne (2001) showed less strict cut offs which were all reached ( $\chi^2/df < 5$ ,  $CFI > 0.9$ ,  $RMSEA < 0.08$ ).

Figure 2 reports the standardized estimates. The antecedents of second-hand shopping motivation (distance from system, ethics and ecology, gratificative role of price, search for fair price, treasure hunting, originality, social contact and nostalgic pleasure) were evaluated by all respondents. The model shows that the effect strengths for economic motivation ( $\beta=.28$ ), critical motivation ( $\beta=-.30$ ) and hedonic and recreational motivation ( $\beta=.07$ ) on satisfaction of life are not very strong. H1 which anticipated the positive impact of economic motivation on life satisfaction was therefore not supported. Especially critical motivation which includes ethics and ecology and distance from system has a negative influence on the satisfaction of life. There is partial support for H2, yet the effect strength is not very strong. Hypothesis 3, which indicated that a high hedonic and recreational motivation for second-hand consumption has a positive impact on satisfaction with life, was also not supported.



Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

5. Discussion and Future Research

This study does not find a relationship between second-hand shopping motivation and life-satisfaction. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) suggest that materialism is connected to people’s value and that it creates tension in people which, in turn, lowers well-being. Yet the effect strength is not strong enough to conclude that the values related to second-hand shopping motivation, e.g., ethical concerns and distance from the consumption system create enough tension to influence life satisfaction negatively. Iyer and Muncy (2016) found that peoples’ attitude towards consumption is positively related to the way they feel about their life. The weak negative relationship found between critical motivation and satisfaction with life is perhaps only a temporary affect which does not influence overall life satisfaction

in the long run. Future research could investigate temporary positive and negative affect states which are besides cognitive evaluations of one's life the other two components of overall life satisfaction (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

The study has several limitations like the small overall sample size and a snowball sampling technique which both limit the generalizability of the study (Field, 2018, pp. 187-192). Future research should replicate the study with a larger, more representative sample to verify the findings and to reduce contaminating factors (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 165). The snowball sample contained many young females, which is not representative of all second-hand buyers. Due to the small sample size, the study lacks external validity and cannot be generalized to the general German population. In addition, the small effects found in the structural model could be a result of the small sample size. A follow-up study with a larger sample is thus suggested. In addition, the internal reliability of the constructs for second-hand shopping motivation did not produce satisfying results with Cronbach alpha scores below .7 which shows that the scales' measures are not internally reliable (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 162). It seems as if the second-hand shopping motivation scale which is developed in the French context by Guiot and Roux (2010) does not hold in the German context. Evidence therefore has already been presented (Steffen, 2017).

Future research could investigate second-hand consumption from the seller perspective. Does the process of sorting out and getting rid of second-hand items make people happy? It should be researched whether decluttering consumers' lives makes them happy. Oral and Thurner (2019) provide evidence that anti-consumption improves well-being. Future research could therefore develop into this direction.

## 6. Conclusion

The study with 203 German consumers shows that there is no link between second-hand consumption motivation and satisfaction with life. People who have a critical motivation and buy second-hand for ethical reasons or to distance themselves from the consumption system are not necessarily more dissatisfied with their life. Also, there is no link established between hedonic and recreational motivations for second-hand consumption and overall life satisfaction. Buying second-hand for economic reasons also does not increase life satisfaction. It seems as if buying second-hand items simply not linked to life-satisfaction.

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