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"SELAM BUNDLE": THRIFT SHOPPING AS MALAYSIAN SOCIAL CLASS INTEGRATION PLATFORM

The mainstream rise of "bundle" clothing consumption in Malaysia mirrors the global trend of thrift shopping. Theories about this phenomenon range from the birth of recessionistas, to environmental conservation and identity construction. In this paper, I examine the trend of "selam bundle", or diving into clothingbundles in thrift shops, where people deliberately purchase material goods to communicate their fashion tastes to the public. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field are also used to elucidate this phenomenon. I theorise that the act of thrift shopping, or "selam bundle" here is not caused entirely due to a lack of funds based on social class, as individuals from various levels of income participate in this activity. Instead, I view "selam bundle" as an act of increasing one's "street cred" or social capital, where the more unique the find, the more "street cred" one achieves. This is also an activity that is common among the hipster subculture. Observations about thrift shopping or "selam bundle" were made using a mixed-method approach, combining visits to thrift stores, watching YouTube videos of thrift bloggers, reading their blogs, obtaining newspaper interviews and feature stories about thrift shoppers and thrift shops, and obtaining data from social media, as well as data from a large-scale survey titled Platform Integrasi:Pendekatan 'Top-Down' dan 'Bottom-Up' Dalam Mendepani Cabaran Kesepaduan Sosial (Integration Platforms: 'Top-Down' and 'Bottom-Up' Approaches to Facing Challenges in Social Cohesion). As this is a shopping act that transcends the usual social categories of social class, I theorise that "selam bundle" can be seen as a potential platform of social integration, driven by the grassroots or everyday-defined approach to constructing identity.

Keywords: *thrift shopping, conspicuous consumption, social capital, everyday-defined identity, social integration platform*

Introduction: The Evolution of Thrift Shopping, from Sideshow to Main Act

"I'm gonna pop some tags
Only got twenty dollars in my pocket
I'm, I'm, I'm huntin'

Looking for a come-up
This is freaking awesome"

-Thrift Shop, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis (2012)

The second-hand clothing trade stretches all the way back to the beginnings of clothing manufacturing.[1] During the Middle Ages up to the Renaissance in Europe, the second-hand clothing trade was a means for poorer people to acquire better quality and also fashionable clothes.[2] Thrift shopping, or purchasing second-hand goods, was originally a way for people to buy basic necessities that they might not otherwise have been able to afford.[3] They were generally run by charitable organisations that wanted to help people in need and to raise funds for good causes.[4] In the United States, the Salvation Army's salvage efforts began in 1897; while Goodwill Industries followed suit in 1902.[5] However, in the past, due to strict social class demarcation in Europe, used clothes also served as clear markers of the baggage and detritus of a culture.[6] Initially, public perception of thrift shopping was largely negative and filled with moral panic, where newspapers such as the Saturday Evening Post in the United States ran short stories such as "The Blue Silk", about a second-hand dress that brought disease, embarrassment, and ill fortune to its buyer.[7] In some cases, the second-hand clothing business carried a negative and unsettling association with poverty, immigration and displacement.[8] Old clothes are also firmly associated with disease and death. However, around the turn of the 20th century, public acceptance began to increase due to necessity, a rise in recreational shopping, and the marketing efforts of salvage businesses such as Salvation Army and Goodwill.[9]

Nonetheless, thrift shopping was not considered a mainstream means of acquisition by the majority of society, not until the post-2008 economic recession period. Thrift stores were considered deviations from, and adaptations to the new capitalist rhetoric of obsolescence and choice,[10] or in other words, everchanging fashion. Fashion being a fickle playground for the upper classes, its field is defined by the unequal distribution of specific capital amongst the different couture houses.[1112] The specific capital in question in the field of high fashion could be viewed as "fashion capital", consisting entirely of familiarity with a certain milieu,[1314] denoting designer labels and conventions. In fact, buying second-hand became a rite of passage for rebellious youth[15] much in the spirit of punk's DIY ethos, where consumption was deliberately antithetical to the mainstream fashion of the day.

However, economic booms and busts happen in cyclical periods with the most recent being the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008.[16] Globalisation's economic dimension is its most current and significant dimension.[17] With the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 having put many out of jobs, a global trend called "recessionista", short for "recession fashionistas, emerged". This trend

saw the growth of many online forums and blogs exchanging advice on how to cut down one's expenses by repurposing used items, not least clothing. Hence, a new wave of second-hand clothes shopping took off, spurred by the outreach of the Internet. Many leading bloggers in this recessionista movement became micro-celebrities in their own right. They shared tips on how to successfully navigate the world of thrift shopping - where to scour for good buys (e.g. how to find designer pieces in thrift stores adjacent to rich neighbourhoods; how to clean second-hand clothes; or how to refashion oversized clothing into fitting ones by home-sewing). This bears resemblance to the Great Depression, between 1929 to 1935, where the Chinese of Taiping faced economic pressures due to the decline in purchasing power in both local and international markets.[18] Chinese labourers had to recycle cigarette butts by extracting the tobacco as they could not afford new cigarettes.[19]

This worldwide trend was spearheaded largely by American bloggers, perhaps unsurprisingly so, given the origins of Salvation Army and Goodwill in the United States. The success of fashion blogs and the phenomenon of bloggers have been enormous in recent years, as fashion blogs are one of the main sources of information about fashion trends.[20] For example, there are bloggers who regularly purchase second-hand clothing despite appearing to belong to a middle class background. They then alter these clothing, which are deliberately purchased oversized, into smaller and more figure-flattering versions. Followers of the bloggers admire them for their creativity in saving money and fashioning a new item of clothing out of one that has been supposedly outdated. Simultaneously, there are also consumers who have rediscovered fashions of the past decades, such as the 1940s. They deliberately purchase clothing from that decade, or that resemble the fashion of that decade, and dress up for photoshoots or YouTube videos as well as their blogs.

For example, blogger Blair Stocker, who writes about DIY crafting, even published a book based on her experiences with blogging: "I started my website Wise Craft in 2005 to share my story of handcrafting online. I never imagined it would inspire such a devoted and global following. Clearly, I am not alone in my passion for making unique, visually pleasing objects from existing materials. My goal is simply to make things that I like or can use and my inspiration almost always starts with something I've purchased secondhand or pulled from my closet or basement. I find that the process of creating something new from a tired or neglected item makes it feel more special, more intentional. I am not militantly "green" or obsessed with thrift. I just find that creating original pieces from gathered goods gives me a more personal connection to my surroundings and environment. It establishes a sense of value: of place, of family, of personal history."[21]

Eventually second-hand shopping, or thrifting, became more widespread around the world, including in Malaysia, in the past decade. Indeed, the second-hand trade has been described as "the Cinderella of retail and

consumption history."[22] Several events are likely to have led to this. Celebrities have also been observed to purchase second-hand, although this is relegated to second-hand designer vintage.[23] Second-hand luxury possessions are characterized by five different meaning themes for the consumer: Sustainable Choice, Real Deal, Pre-loved Treasure, Risk Investment and Unique Find.[24] In addition, in Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's 2012 hit song, Thrift Shop, the lyrics glorified thrift shopping as the premise of the trendy, where one can find gems by diving deep into a thrift store:

"I wear your grandad's clothes, I look incredible
I'm in this big ol' coat
From that thrift shop down the road (Poppin' tags!)"

-Thrift Shop, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis (2012)

Clearly, vintage has its value and this message is broadcast in this song. The recent decade has witnessed a rise in an interest in vintage items, especially in the so-called "millennial aesthetic". The hipster subculture has also expressed an interest in the restoration of vintage objects, including adaptive re-use of buildings as Instagram selfie settings, as well as more personal items such as clothing.[25]

Vintage is not a new concept, as second-hand markets and the selling and trading of clothing, objects, and discarded goods have been a constant presence throughout consumer history.[26] The vintagescape is a form of cultural practice in action and movement, considering vintage as a socially and culturally malleable frame.[27] Vintage and its associated practices can be viewed in terms of their potential for strategic activity by buyers and sellers to create a marketplace fusing an idealised past within a fast-paced consumer reality.[28] In Malaysia, the vintage movement in the thrift shop industry was sparked by the Japanese in the 1990s[29] with the appreciation of vintage continuing to be a practice among hipsters and millennials today.[30]

Second-hand goods, including clothing, has a different marketing and sale process from regular products in the consumer market.[31] It is thus considered a special type of good by economists.[32] Second-hand matters to both buyers and sellers, as the goods and spaces of second-hand exchange bring an entirely different context to transactions, different from the regular meaning of 'value'.[33] However, there are various reasons consumers still buy these goods, which include low prices compared to substitute and complementary goods[34] In the Philippines, the second-hand market is called "ukay-ukay", and is defined as a very affordable source of fashionable yet durable clothing material for those with relatively low incomes.[35] Some people would resort to buying these items as it is almost homogeneous to brand new garments in relatively high-class stores and shopping malls.[36] Buying second-hand clothing increases

consumer surplus, which is the difference between what the consumer would be willing to pay to purchase a given number of units of a commodity, and what they actually pay for them.[37] For example, a consumer might be willing to pay RM 100 for an item of clothing. However, the market price for a brand new item of clothing is RM 50. The original consumer surplus would be RM 100 - RM 50 = RM 50. However, given the second-hand market, which sells an item of the same clothing at RM 10, the consumer surplus is now RM 100 - RM 10 = RM 90. The consumer's surplus has increased up to RM 90 from RM 50, which is by 1.8 times.

In addition, in order to create an attractive image for used goods, thrift stores incorporate three elements that consumers have come to expect from their familiarity with department stores, which are ample product choice, attractive display, and a good deal.[38] When interviewed about whether they would prefer to buy clothing from second-hand retailers or in malls or boutique shops, respondents claim that their clothing preferences include quality condition, the brand of clothing, the design and style of clothes, colour and colour combinations, clothing material, the market price of clothing, whether the clothing fits the trend, marketing presentations, ambience of location, and location background.[39]

Theoretical Framework

Given the above context, I theorise that within the Malaysian consumer landscape, the act of thrift shopping is not caused entirely by economic limitation due to social class, as individuals from various levels of income participate in this activity. Instead, I view thrift shopping as an act of increasing one's "street cred" or social capital by conspicuous consumption, where the more unique the find, the more "street cred" one achieves. As this is a shopping act that transcends the usual social categories of social class, I theorise that thrift shopping, or "*selam bundle*" can be seen as a potential platform of social integration, driven by the grassroots or everyday-defined approach to constructing identity. For this purpose, I utilised Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to outline the way thrift shopping is a form of symbolic practice.

Research Questions/Objectives

This paper explores three issues:

1. Given the widespread thrift shopping trend, and its influence in Malaysia among consumers, what are the factors that led to its growth?
2. Is this phenomenon restricted to certain social classes, or does it have the potential to unite individuals beyond the boundaries of social

category?

Methods

The epistemology of this paper relies on a combination of positivist and interpretivist approaches to the philosophy of science. Thus, observations about thrift shopping or "*selam bundle"* were made using a mixed-method approach, combining visits to thrift stores, watching YouTube videos of thrift bloggers, reading their blogs, obtaining newspaper interviews and feature stories about thrift shoppers and thrift shops, and obtaining data from social media. Names or any identifying information are not disclosed to protect individuals' privacy. In order to establish a baseline for consumer behaviour, data was obtained from a study titled *Platform Integrasi: Pendekatan 'Top-Down' dan 'Bottom-Up' Dalam Mendepani Cabaran Kesepaduan Sosial (Integration Platforms: 'Top-Down' and 'Bottom-Up' Approaches to Facing Challenges in Social Cohesion),* which the author was part of. This project encompassed a large-scale survey conducted among 1002 respondents in the Klang Valley, an economic hub near Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. The survey covered areas such as music, politics, education, and consumer behaviour. This paper focuses solely on the aspect of consumer behaviour.

Findings

The Malaysian Thrift Shopping ("Selam Bundle") Context

The word "bundle" is an industry term, referring to the way clothes are packed in a gurney sack, where it might contain an assortment of jeans, shirts, shorts, or blouses with varying grades and corresponding prices.[40] This term refers to outlets that sell garments discarded by its wearers and then salvaged for resale.[41] There are four grades of "bundle" goods - head, body, tail, and trash.[42] For the head grade, designer goods may be occasionally spotted, but four pieces may sell for RM 10 within the trash grade.[43] Otherwise, average prices of clothes could range from RM 10 for a pair of jeans, and RM 5 for a shirt.[44] At one point, it was believed to only cater for consumers from lower-income brackets.[45] Originally, the target market was construction workers or labourers looking for cheap work clothes, but the bundle industry has now realised that old can also be gold, especially where it concernes vintage clothes collectors.[46]

Malaysian bundle shops are believed to have first been established in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, also known as the "Bundle Centre of Kuala Lumpur".[47] The bundle business was believed to have been pioneered by the Malays in the 1970s, and expanded by migrants such as the Indonesians, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis in the 1980s, in nearby Jalan Chow Kit.[48] Some of the well-known, still existing bundle shops in Malaysia have been operating

since the 1980s.[49] They carry branded, specialty items and vintage pieces, overrun stock, as well as evergreen cuts and styles from well-known classic denim brands.[50]

As of 2019, there has been increased variety in the types of second-hand shops in Malaysia. Currently, there are second-hand shops which range from the night-market friendly to the luxury-oriented. There are mobile vans which regularly sell second-hand goods at night markets, or *pasar malam*.[51] There have been young entrepreneurs dabbling in this business since the past decade, who have made a good living out of it, expanding from a night market stall to a used clothing company with several branches nationwide.[52] According to this entrepreneur, the used clothes come from Japan, Korea, Singapore, Canada and the USA.[53] There are also flea markets that have later on expanded into chain shops.[54] There are outlet chains that specialise in "pre-loved", or used clothes and accessories from international sportswear labels, where customers can also trade items.[55] There are region-specific thrift stores, such as those concentrating on goods from Japan or Korea.[56] Then, there are charity-oriented thrift stores, which are either directly operated by the charities themselves, or run as social enterprises by large corporations.[57] Finally, there are the luxury vintage and curated stores which deal only with designer brands for the fashion savvy crowd, located in more upscale areas.[58] Bundle clothing is also sold online. For this paper, the focus is on all of the above, barring the luxury vintage ones, as these are considered bargain shopping which is theoretically affordable to all social classes.

Among the high profile customers of Malaysian thrift stores, there are famous internet personalities such as YouTubers. One such YouTuber is an expert in makeup and fashion on a budget, and has amassed a large following among viewers who enjoy the way she records snippets of her life as a university student and young wife and mother with a son. She frequently visits thrift stores all around Malaysia, not only in Selangor where she studies or in Kelantan where she comes from. She voices over her videos with commentary on how to find good bargains, how to style the clothes which she brings back from a shopping haul, and how to accessorise with makeup. Her fashion philosophy can be summed up by one of her most recent tweets, "SAME OUTFIT BUT DIFFERENT LOOK bored of ur old clothes? learn to accessorize them! and make them alive again! hope you like this! TAG ur "friend yg ada baju satu almari tp tetap cakap baju xdelah nak pakai". *(Translation:"Tag your friend who has a closet full of clothes but still cannot find something to wear.")*

Another such personality is a fashion entrepreneur who was featured and interviewed in a local mainstream newspaper, where he discussed his strategy in looking stylish on a budget. According to him, "Wearing cheap clothes doesn't mean you're broke. Remember, you have a family to feed, and not a community to impress".[59] He also claimed to shop exclusively at bargain bins or thrift stores, noting "All of my outfits were bought at thrift shops and

bundle shops for RM 1 at Chow Kit and Sentul".[60] However, he acknowledged that tough times during his upbringing meant that he often had to be content with buying second-hand clothing, instead of new items.[61] He stated. "It's all about how you carry the clothes. I have my own views when it comes to fashion, so I don't care if my clothes look weird in the eyes of other people".[62] His post on Twitter, which garnered much attention, was retweeted with the comment by another second-hand shopping enthusiast, "When you have taste, even bundle clothes can look good".[63]

Some consumers have shared their motivations for purchasing second-hand goods, including clothing, on Malaysian internet forums.

Table 1 - Consumers' motivation for buying second-hand goods

Forum Message	Consumer's Motivation
"Saiz kaki pula besar.. bukan senang nak dapat!" *(Translation: The size of my feet is large, not easy to find my size.)*	The consumer finds it difficult to acquire certain goods elsewhere (e.g. extra large sizes).
"Biasanya barang bundle ni boleh tawar-menawar." *(Translation: Usually the price of bundle goods can be bargained for.)*	The consumer is able to bargain, or negotiate the price.
"sesetengah barangan bundle yg saya gunakan masih elok dibanding barangan baru" *(Translation: Some bundle goods which I use are still better than the brand new ones.)* "ok je baju bundle ni kalau pandai pilih lagi tahan dari beli baju baru kat [pasaraya], pasar mlm." *(Translation: Bundle goods are ok, if one is good at selecting them, they might last longer than new clothing bought from supermarkets or night markets.)* "I pernah ikut kwn gi bundle, mula2 nak teman je sekali ternampak jaket jeans cantik lagi.. sampai skrg basuh kasar pun gitu je kaler dia.. lagi berkualiti dpd jaket jeans rm120 beli kat [pasaraya]." *(Translation: I have followed my friend to bundle shops, when I eyed a nice jean jacket, until now, despite heavy washing, the colour is still maintained. This is better quality than buying a RM 120 jean jacket from the supermarket.)*	The consumer feels that certain bundle/second-hand goods are of better quality than brand new ones.
"kalau baju masih elok, bolehlah upcycle buat baju anak2 dan upcycle jadi design baru banyak jimat ni.." *(Translation: If the clothing is still in good order, one can upcycle it into children's clothing or change it to a new design and save lots of money.)*	The consumer is interested to recycle or "up-cycle" (upgrade and recycle).

From the retailer's perspective, there are many reasons for "letting go" of second-hand clothes. On a local forum, in a thread regarding second-hand clothes, several of the board messages provided different motivations.

Table 2 - Retailers' motivation for selling second-hand goods

Forum Message	Retailer's Motivation
"i ada banyak baju terpakai . baju yg tak pernah pakai pun ada . harga tak kesah sangat . yg penting i nak clearkan wardrobe i . " *(Translation: I have a lot of used clothes. Even clothes that I have never worn. I don't care about the price. The important thing is to clear my wardrobe.)* "saya ada nak jual pakaian tak pakai, ada yang tak pernah pakai, ada yang pakai sekali, dua kali." *(Translation: I wish to sell unused clothes, some have never been worn, some have been worn once or twice.)* "Slm sy nk let go wedding dress saya masih elok baru pakai sekali last monthl" *(Translation: Hi, I want to let go of my wedding dress which is still good and only worn once last month.)*	The retailer wishes to clear their wardrobe.
"Hi. Sy ad byk baju terpakai lelaki and perempuan utk dijual. Semua msh dlm condition baik & kebanyakannye berjenama. Nak letgo sbb da xpakai and ada yg xmuat. Some xpernah pakai lgsung." *(Translation: Hi. I have a lot of used men's and women's clothing for sale. They are all in good condition and most are branded. I wish to let go of them because I don't wear them anymore and they don't fit. Some have never been worn at all.)* "SALAM SY NAK JUAL BAJU SIZE 42 SY BELI MASA RAYA TP SY X BOLE PAKAI SBB KECIK PEPLUM MERAH KAIN HITAM BERMANIK CANTIK SANGAT MASIH BARU DAN ELOK " *(Translation: Greetings. I wish to sell a size 42 top, bought during Raya, but I cannot wear it because it is too small. Red peplum top with black beaded skirt, beautiful, very much brand new and in good conditon.)*	The retailer cannot fit into the clothes anymore.
"Sy nk jual baju terpakai sy, suami dan anak2. Ade byk dan masih dlm keadaan baik, sy nk pindah rumah, dan memerlukan ruang utk brg2 baru." (*Translation: I wish to sell mine, my husband's, and our children's used clothes. There are a lot of them and they are still in good condition, I am shifting house, and need more space for new things.)*	The retailer is shifting houses.

"saya duduk area jenjarom, selangor nak jual baju2 kurung terpakai saya dan keluarga (around 10+ helai) dan tshirts semuanya masih dalam keadaan baik dan kelihatan baru tanpa terjejas. saya perlukan duit lebihan untuk sambung belajar." *(Translation: I live in the Jenjarom, Selangor area, and I wish to sell mine and my family's used baju kurung (around 10 plus pieces) as well as t-shirts, they are all in good condition and look new without flaws. I need extra money to continue my studies.)*	The retailer is in need of extra income.

The motivations of "retailers" in letting go of their used clothes include a need for extra income, shifting houses, not being able to fit into the clothes anymore, or just to clear their closet. These "retailers" are of course, not formal retailers but similar to participants in the informal economy, where their economic activity is not formally recorded.[64]

The Malaysian Consumer Context in the Klang Valley

The following data was obtained from the study, *Platform Integrasi: Pendekatan 'Top-Down' dan 'Bottom-Up' Dalam Mendepani Cabaran Kesepaduan Sosial (Integration Platforms: 'Top-Down' and 'Bottom-Up' Approaches to Facing Challenges in Social Cohesion),* which surveyed 1002 respondents in the Klang Valley. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 18 to 27 years old. There were three times more female respondents than male ones. The distribution of respondents according to ethnicity closely mirrors the ethnic composition of Malaysian citizens, with the majority being Malay, followed by Indian and Chinese, the indigenous groups, and Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak. Minority groups were also included, with the composition being mostly Bugis. Although the survey was conducted in the Klang Valley, respondents recorded their original states. The majority came from Selangor itself, interestingly followed by Sabah in East Malaysia, and Pahang in Central Malaysia. Interestingly also there was only one respondent originally from Malaysia's capital city, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. The respondents were almost equally composed of public and private sector workers. Only less than one percent were reported as unemployed, retired, or a student. The majority of respondents held at least a bachelor's degree. Only less than one percent reported their education level as "none" or "Standard 6 of primary school". One third of respondents reported earning an income of below minimum wage, which is RM 1000; while another third reported earning between RM 1001 to RM 3000; and another third earned between RM 3001 to RM 5000. Less than 10 percent of respondents earned between RM 5001 to RM 8000; putting them in the middle class or M40 category. 3 percent earned between RM 8001 to RM 10 000, while around 1.5 percent of respondents reported an income of over RM 10 001, putting them in the

upper class or T20 category.[65] Of course, the definition of B40 and M40 may fluctuate over time, given the change in minimum wage and overall exchange rate. Measurements of income inequality tend to estimate the ratio of incomes obtained by the bottom x percent of the population, and the top ten percent of the population.[66] Respondents mostly lived in the urban areas, with some in the outskirts and rural areas, corresponding to the focus area of the study, which was Klang Valley.

Respondents were asked whether their monthly income was capable of supporting their daily expenses. 22 percent disagreed; while 57.7 percent agreed. Respondents were asked if their household income allows them to save for emergencies or entertainment. 29.2 percent disagreed; while 41.7 percent agreed. Respondents were asked if they had loans which they could afford to settle in monthly installments. 26 percent disagreed; while 46.5 percent agreed. Respondents were asked whether the adults in their household were employed and contributing to the household income. 23.6 percent disagreed; while 58.8 agreed. Respondents were asked if they paid attention to the fluctuation of consumer prices. 19.5 percent disagreed; while 57.8 agreed. Respondents were asked whether they often used public transport to get to work or school. 48.2 percent disagreed; while 32.5 percent agreed. Respondents were asked if their annual income allowed them to own property after a few years of employment. 48 percent disagreed; while 29.3 percent agreed. Respondents were asked if they could afford yearly travel. 47.8 percent reported being able to afford domestic annual travel; while 9.5 percent reported being able to afford international travel; and 11.6 percent claimed to be able to afford both. 31 percent reported being unable to afford any form of travel. Respondents were asked how often they travelled. 34 percent reported travelling once a year; 19.8 percent reported travelling twice a year; 15.6 percent reported travelling more than twice a year; while 30.5 percent reported none. The majority of respondents preferred to do their groceries in Giant supermarket and sundry shops (kedai runcit). In terms of electronics, the three most owned items by respondents were a smart phone, a television set, and a rice cooker. Most respondents owned a foreign car.

Overall, the general profile of respondents was that they could afford basic necessities. Of course, it has to be mentioned that the survey most likely covered respondents who were educated enough to respond and who were at liberty to do so, suggesting enough balance between work and leisure. Although the respondents were mostly youths, it is also worth mentioning that in the future, Malaysia might experience an aging population, where "elderly poverty" might occur when the aging generation finishes their savings and cannot afford housing, medicine, insurance and care services.[67] Given that bundle stores are mostly concentrated in urban areas, it is likely that bundle shoppers possess a similar profile to the respondents of the survey.

Discussion

"Selam bundle" as a field of practice

This section answers the research question outlined above, "Given the widespread thrift shopping trend, and its influence in Malaysia among consumers, what are the factors that led to its growth?"

In applying Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to the practice of buying second-hand clothes, we must first define the context for second-hand shopping, or "*selam bundle"* in Malaysia.

Within the global context, the financial crash of 2008-9 has been the most damaging economic event since the Great Depression, affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of people.[68] This had affected consumers worldwide, sparking a movement towards saving money by re-using goods. These included buying second-hand objects and clothing, and learning how to "upcycle" them into a new outfit either by DIY-style hand-sewing, or by sewing machine. These were called "recessionistas", and many embraced blogging as a platform to reach out to other like-minded people. Simultaneously, there were also long-time thrift shoppers who were already multi-generational regulars at shops like Goodwill and Salvation Army.

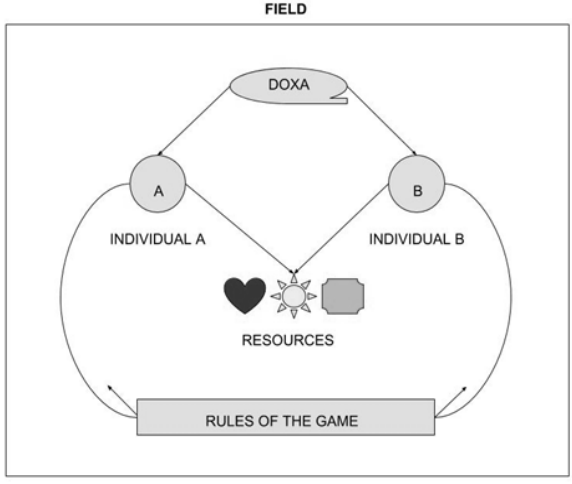
The term "Recessionista" may imply a lifestyle choice but is also borne out of necessity, and had inspired a type of fiction called "Recessionista fiction", which developed from a set of emergent tropes and plots which surfaced from the credit crunch and the legacy of chick lit that had dominated the previous decade of fiction.[69] The "recessionista" movement, however, sparked a new wave of shoppers, overlapping with celebrities who had taken to wearing vintage designer items, though this was likely priced much higher and were much rarer to obtain.[70] The appearance of fashion blogs has also influenced consumer behavior trends, as consumers admit that fashion blogs have considerably influenced their process of decision-making in purchasing fashion products, through recognizing the need, finding information and evaluating alternatives.[71] Encouraged by the spread of information through blogs and social media, Malaysian youth (and consumers in general) picked up on the trend of second-hand shopping as a desirable, environmentally sustainable lifestyle. In some cases collecting vintage provides individuals the status as a connoisseur, however, collecting second-hand goods have become a common lifestyle and a trend today.[72]

The other imminent factor is "downshifting", which constitutes an emerging and significant trend in Westernised societies, and is a phenomenon mainly expressed through a simplified lifestyle and the voluntary reduction of work or consumption.[73] This entails pursuing more flexible, work-from-home type jobs, and using or re-using "organic materials" in clothing as well as other goods. The diversity of "downshifters" also show that it is not a phenomenon

strictly limited to higher income social classes, but also found among blue-collar and lower-income households.[74] Repairing, re-using, sharing or making things oneself are forms of overcoming unecessary expenditures and waste.[75] Roux found through phenomenological interviews, that there were several reasons for consumer motives, that triggered second-hand buying.[76] Second-hand buying is primarily a modification of the practice of consumption.[77]

In addition, according to Arasinah Kamis, Suriani Mohamed, and Zaliza Hanapi, the fashion industry is one of the biggest sources of environmental pollution.[78] One way for it to reduce pollution is by recycling textiles, and this is where second-hand fashion can be reinvented and redesigned to fit the latest fashion trends.[79] Designers also have to be more creative in repurposing recycled clothing.[80] Some consumers are supporting this effort in environmental conservation by practicing and encouraging others to do the same.

Figure 1 - Bourdieu's Theory of Practice[81]



This study applies Bourdieu's concept of the "theory of practice", to describe second-hand shopping or "*selam bundle"* as a field of activity, which leads to the formation of relations between members. Bourdieu conceptualised the "field" as an arena in which a game takes place between its players.[82] It is a social space structured and organised around specific types of resources, or capital, for which "field" members compete.[83] Within the "fields" to which they belong, an individual's power, or "capital", is both a weapon to use to their advantage in the game and a stake to be won.[84] The amount and type of "capital" an individual possesses determines their relative position in the "field".[85] The "rules of the game" determine this value, and hence the "field"'s symbolic capital is the ultimate basis of power.[8687] The "rules of the game" is also known as "illusio", a concept developed by Bourdieu, defined as "the

belief that the 'game' we collectively agree to play is worth playing, that the fiction we collectively elect to accredit constitutes reality"[8889] An individual's "habitus", or internal dispositions, enable them to use "doxa" for playing the game effectively.[90] "Doxa" comprises the taken-for-granted shared knowledge of the values, practices, and associated language of the field.[91] Failure to know or abide by the "illusio" as well as the "doxa" may result in social exclusion through the lack of "capital", or as Chan terms it, "anti-capital".[92]

Bourdieu [93] coined the term cultural capital to describe the worldview, life experiences, and lifestyle preferences of select groups of people demarcated by their relations to the means of production. Cultural capital includes three forms: objectified, institutionalised, and embodied. The embodied form is the habitus, or lived dispositions; the objectified form is the consumption of commodities; and the institutionalised form includes the legitimacy accorded to forms of cultural capital by social institutions such as education.[9495]

As an example, in the diagram above, Individuals A and B are depicted as members of a "field". A and B are competing for resources, or "capital", which are fashionable clothing. These clothing could either be obtained in mainstream chain boutiques, in which clothing is uniform and may be worn by more than one person, or in bundle stores, where the individual clothing pieces are more unique, termed by cosnumers as "one-of-a-kind" (OOAK). Certain formal "rules of the game" will control how A and B achieve their goals of maximising their accumulation of these resources. For example, in real life, social institutions such as social class govern our accumulation of resources; while organisations that employ us as workers provide us with income and social status; and these in turn affect our purchasing ability with regards to clothing. Thus, while economic capital ensures purchasing power, it does not necessarily ensure fashion capital through uniqueness. However, formal goals are not always achievable, since in real life not everyone starts out with equal life opportunities. Thus, there is something called "doxa", which translates into knowledge of how to use the formal rules to one's advantage. Perhaps Individual A is born poorer, but has more social connections which can help provide them advice. For example, Individual A does not have much economic capital, but has friends who are working in the second-hand clothing industry, and has family members who are skilled at clothing alteration and repurposing. On the other hand, Individual B may be born wealthier, but has less fashion capital than Individual A. Thus, they compete to "game the rules" by positioning themselves in a strategic way to gain advantage. The "doxa" for Individual A would be their social connections, or "friends with insider knowledge". For Individual B, the "doxa" would be finding someone else like Individual A, eg. Individual C, who has more fashion capital but has less economic ability. This is where social media comes into play as the platform to connect individuals to each other.

Nonetheless, though social media may be a connection platform for like-minded individuals seeking to accumulate fashion capital, does it have the potential to unite people beyond their fashion interests? This section answers the research question, "Is this phenomenon restricted to certain social classes, or does it have the potential to unite individuals beyond the boundaries of social category?"

One can make the case for measuring more than just social class in determining social positions. Beyond economic factors, there is also the question of other sociological spheres of interaction. What of gender, ethnicity, language, etc.? This is especially important to consider in a society characterised by diversity. It is possible to conceive of a more optimistic form of social measurement, taking for example the case study of Malaysia. Malaysia is a nation-state based on diversity – ethnic, religious, linguistic, and many others. As such, it does not face the same historical underpinnings as the European nations in which landmark studies of social class-based stratification were conducted. As Malaysia is a formerly colonised country, it faces the challenges of "unity in diversity", which relates to the issue of plurality, which can be viewed as positive, conflicting, and ideal.[96] The positive trait arises from diversity that is packaged as a product; the negative trait stems from differences within social categorisations such as ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and worldview; while the ideal trait emerges from the human emotional need for unity.[9798]

"Unity, Cohesion, Reconciliation: One Country, Three Cherished Concepts" is the way Shamsul Amri Baharuddin and Anis Yusal Yusoff [99] have idiomised the concept of measuring social cohesion in Malaysia. "Unity" as mentioned here is a slogan enshrined as the last objective of the New Economic Policy (DEB) launched in 1971.[100] "Social cohesion" is a situation where there is peace, stability, prosperity, and wellbeing in a society, especially one that is multi-ethnic.[101] "Reconciliation" meanwhile, is the solution process to each contradiction which occurs through a process of "bargaining and negotiation".[102] As a series, "social cohesion" is a prerequisite level before resolving "contradictions" that obstruct us from achieving "unity". These "contradictions" can be mapped out according to nine axes of social interactions, which are: ethnicity, religion, social class, education, language, generational gap, gender, political federalism, and urban-rural space divides.[103104]

An individual's interaction with others may well fall under more than one given category above, e.g. being of one particular ethnicity equips them with a specific linguistic ability that allows them in turn to participate more rigorously in certain social activities. However, they share the same social class category as other individuals of a different ethnic and linguistic group. This may unite them where class concerns are relevant, such as shopping for

groceries at similar premises. Likewise, the issue of generation gaps such as use of technology, may cause conflict within the same ethnic group, despite similarities in way of life, language, or religion.[105][106]

Drawing from the potential advertised above, it is possible to make a list of various social occurrences which can increase social cohesion. Social integration platforms are derived from social "moments of unity", defined as various occurrences which can increase social cohesion.[107][108] Shamsul Amri Baharuddin [109] defines it as: "A social space, abstract and physical, also timeless, that becomes a convergent point for different strategic groups to agree as well as to disagree peacefully on matters of mutual interest based on the principles of bargaining, negotiation and mediation. underpinned by deep and emphatic social practices of inter-cultural communication." These could be any social phenomenon that encourages individuals to build rapport with each other. These phenomenon act as meeting points, or "integration platforms" in the economic, political, educational, and cultural dimensions. Because they are grassroots-based, they act from the "everyday-defined" "bottom-up", rather than from the "authority-defined" "top-down". These platforms function by acting as a democratised space where organic social interaction can take place. As everyone participates for a common interest, they momentarily ignore all other "contradictions" that stand in the way of achieving "social cohesion". The increased existence of such platforms can be assumed to yield positive effects for social integration in a superdiverse society. One such example is that of Malaysian manga, which has now become more than just entertainment material, and is now a platform to voice out concerns through a dramaturgical stage, as a locally adaptable medium of channeling identity-based discourse, facilitating the negotiation of identity from an "everyday-defined" perspective.[110][111]

From the analysis above, it is apparent that Individuals A and B are able to connect with one another using social media as a channel to discuss shopping in material reality. They are now able to extend this shared experience by participating in the physical activity of second-hand shopping itself in a variety of premises, such as the aforementioned night markets or *pasar malam*, used clothing company franchises, outlet chains that specialise in "pre-loved" clothing, region-specific thrift stores, and charity-oriented thrift stores or social enterprises. Bundle shopping is thus both an abstract and physical social space. Individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, who as mentioned above, are able to afford basic necessities (excluding the abject poor who deserve a separate analysis) are theoretically able to shop for second-hand clothing in bundle stores together. Thus bundle shopping enables different strategic groups to bargain (in the sense of bargain-hunting as well as in terms of social relationships), negotiate, and mediate their social realities. Wearing clothes that are second-hand and that possesses some prior history acts as a leveller of social class experiences, in the sense of embodied

cultural capital. As a result, individuals' social class becomes more difficult to differentiate, especially given the fact that Malaysians do not strictly identify with social class in the way Europeans do.[112]

Conclusion

Although it remains to be seen whether the bundle clothing business in Malaysia will continue to thrive in the wake of recent global events, its value as a potential social integration platform is obvious. Bundle shopping in its original form was meant to alleviate economic burdens on consumers; but has evolved to become a field of practice which extends beyond economic boundaries. Instead, it has paved the way as a democratiser between social classes, by ameliorating economic, social, and cultural anxieties, as bundle shopping has now emerged as a form of cultural and social capital to be flaunted. "*Selam bundle"* as a social activity has reached its potential as a "moment of unity".

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