

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Consumer engagement in the circular economy: Exploring clothes swapping in emerging economies from a social practice perspective

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**Abstract**

One of the sectors that are being challenged to become circular is the clothing sector. Cloth swapping is considered as an example of a circular solution that enables slowing material loops. However, consumers have failed to widely engage in this type of practice and only a few studies explore this topic using a social practice perspective. This theoretical approach bridges individual and structural approaches to social change. In this study we explore why people in an emerging economy such as Colombia engage in cloth swapping, by exploring it from a social practice perspective. Based on interview and visual data, we explored the configuration of the practice, the interaction between elements, and the reasons why it recruits practitioners. We found that people participate in cloth swapping for economic, environmental, and innovative reasons. In order to perform the practice, three types of elements are involved: material elements such as clothes and place, skills for selecting and preparing the clothes for exchange and rules regarding these materials and behaviours during the event, and images and meanings. We characterised three interconnections between these elements that have been used to enable the practice, and finally, we explored how the participants' networks, histories, and capitals; the social significance of the practice; and its connections to other practices influence recruitment. This approach allowed us to identify paradoxes between the purpose and the implementation of the practice. Future research could use this perspective to compare cases in different socio-economic context.

**KEYWORDS**

circular economy, consumer adoption, emerging economies, fashion, practice theory

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

Despite the interest shown by companies and governments in the idea of the circular economy, a system in which products, components, and materials are used multiple times through reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling before being disposed (Kirchherr,

Reike, & Hekkert, 2017), consumers seem to be less enthusiastic when adopting the offerings embedded in such business models (Kirchherr et al., 2017; Rizo et al., 2016). Nevertheless, research on this issue is still scarce, and most existing contributions have concentrated on understanding the consumer's intention, or lack thereof, to engage with circular business models (Camacho-Otero, Boks, &

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Pettersen, 2018). An alternative perspective that aims at bridging individual and structuralist approaches is provided by social practice theory (Welch & Warde, 2014), which argues that consumption patterns are the result of the different practices in which the individual engages (Warde, 2005, 2014; Welch & Warde, 2014). Despite the interest in this perspective and the contribution it makes regarding adoption, there are only a few studies exploring why people would engage or not in practices that help slow and narrow material flows using this theoretical approach (Fitzmaurice & Schor, 2018; Huber, 2017; Mylan, Holmes, & Paddock, 2016; Pettersen, 2016).

One of the sectors that are being challenged to become circular is the clothing sector. According to recent statistics, global production of garments has duplicated in the last 15 years, and the number of times an item is used before it is discarded by the user has dropped by 36% and reuse of clothes globally is below 15% (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Additionally, and according to the same source, the sector has a significant environmental footprint as well. For example, polyester, a popular material for clothing, is produced using fossil fuels, with an estimated demand of 98 billion tons a year. Other environmental impacts related to clothes are water pollution due to chemicals during the manufacturing process (Farrant, Olsen, & Wangel, 2010) and microplastics during the use phase (Brooks, Fletcher, Francis, Rigby, & Roberts, 2017). From a social perspective, the clothing sector has been challenged due to poor working conditions in the countries where garments are produced (Hossain, 2013).

In response to these challenges, designers and activists have proposed different strategies, one of which is use intensification through collaborative consumption (Ertz, Durif, & Arcand, 2016; Laitala, 2014; Park & Armstrong, 2017). One of the specific examples of collaborative consumption in fashion is clothe swapping as it could contribute to reducing demand for new products (Farrant et al., 2010; Iran & Schrader, 2017; Zamani, Sandin, & Peters, 2017). Swapping is defined as the exchange of items, for example, clothes, that happens between two or more people and that is usually not mediated by money (Albinsson & Perera, 2012; Matthews & Hodges, 2016). Most of available research on the topic of clothe swapping and consumption has been conducted in an industrial economy context, but as middle-income countries are catching up with resource consumption trends by high income countries (United Nations Environment Programme, 2017) further exploration in this context is required.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses the question of why people participate in collaborative consumption practices such as clothe swapping in middle-income countries from a social practice perspective. This question is further divided in three subquestions: what elements comprise clothe swapping when understood from a social practice perspective? How do these elements interact to constitute the practice? And what conditions favour or hinder recruitment of practitioners by the practice of clothe swapping? The paper is divided into five sections. After this introduction, we provide an overview of existing research on the topic of clothe swapping. We then move to outline social practice theory as our theoretical framework. Then we describe the method used for collecting and analysing data alongside the case studies used. Following the method, the main

findings are presented and discussed. The article ends with the conclusions and avenues for further research.

## 2 | CLOTHE SWAPPING AND CONSUMERS

Existing research on why people participate in clothe swapping has focused on exploring this question at the individual level. In an early work, Albinsson and Perera (2009) explored swapping as an example of consumer voluntary disposition behaviour and offered insights into the motives for different types of disposition. They found that individual characteristics such as values and consumption patterns influenced their motives for different modes of clothe disposition (term used by the authors), as did self-concept, self-extension to goods, role models, and family patterns. In addition, they found that perceptions of the local community also influenced consumers. Finally, the item characteristics were also important when deciding what to do next.

In a later work, Albinsson and Perera (2012) focused on the experience of swappers, the drivers, and barriers for participation. They suggested that inclusion as a value helped sharing events to attract more participation. They also found that people framed these events as enabling community building. Finally, they suggest to further research the role of infrastructures in facilitating these initiatives. Armstrong, Niinimäki, Kujala, Karell, and Lang (2015) explored the positive and negative perceptions of consumers regarding swapping. They found that ease of use, financial, and emotional aspects drove both positive and negative perceptions. They continued such exploration by comparing results between two countries, Finland and the United States, in the specific case of digital solutions (Armstrong, Niinimäki, Lang, & Kujala, 2016). They found that perceptions of digitally based circular practices were influenced by the individual's desire for change, and by financial aspects, ease of use, social, and emotional characteristics. Additionally, Matthews and Hodges (2016) investigated what benefits participants did get from engaging in such events. Informants perceived that giving in the context of swapping allowed them to clean their closets, recycle clothes, and get instant gratification. When receiving, they indicated that getting items for free was a benefit; they trusted the origin of the item and welcomed the advice gotten. More recently, Henninger, Bürklin, and Niinimäki (2019) investigated the challenges and opportunities for supply management when consumers become suppliers in the context of swap shops in three European countries. Aspects such as availability, quality, or location are considered as problematic, and environmental consciousness, fashionability, and treasure hunt are opportunities.

Swapping has been a traditional activity of indigenous communities in Colombia as explained by Tocancipá (2008), and it has helped urban communities to face economic crisis in Argentina (Gatti, 2009). According to Tocancipá (2008) for the Kokonuko people, bartering or swapping is a form of resistance against globalization and of reaffirmation of their independence. Their swaps are not only focusing on clothes but mostly food. Moreover, swaps are not only about economic exchange transactions but included cultural activities and

political statements from elders. Gatti (2009) describes how the middle class in Argentina initially used swapping to integrate environmental principles into economic activity and improve quality of life. However, and because of the economic crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s, swapping transformed into an alternative economic system to face the consequences of the financial crisis. Gatti suggests that swapping was a mechanism to satisfy the material needs of the poorest in Argentina during critical times and helped create social bonds to strengthen communities.

Table 1 presents a summary of the available literature on clothe swapping in general and swapping in Latin America in particular. As is evident, most of the research explores how consumers perceive clothe swapping, what drives them to participate, and what role they play in the system. However, such approaches are constrained to understanding the preconditions for individual behaviour rather than the context and mesolevel aspects that influence such perceptions. Research from the field of sustainable consumption has suggested that broader approaches are needed if people are to move from intention to action (Welch & Warde, 2014).

### 3 | SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

According to Schatzki (2001) practices are “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (p. 11) and can be understood as practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance. First, practices could be considered as a network of doings and sayings by many different people, grouped in three components, understandings, procedures, and engagements, which is known as practice-as-entity. In a second sense, practices can be understood as the execution of such practices, which in turn results in its reproduction, referred to as practice-as-performance. Such performance of a practice sustains and changes the linkages between the elements of the practice as entity allowing the practice to endure.

**TABLE 1** Literature review on clothes swapping

Source	Topic researched	Findings	Geographical location
Albinsson and Perera (2009)	Motives	Values, consumption patterns, item characteristics, communities, role models, self-concept, self-extension goods, and family patterns	United States
Albinsson and Perera (2012)	Barriers and drivers	Inclusion, community building, and role of infrastructure	United States
Armstrong et al. (2015)	Perceptions	Ease of use, financial benefits, and emotional benefits	Finland
Armstrong et al. (2016)	Cross cultural perceptions	Desire for change, financial benefits, ease of use, social aspects, and emotional benefits	United States and Finland
Matthews and Hodges (2016)	Benefits	Clean closets, recycling, instant gratification, free items, trusted origin, and free advice	Not explicit
Henninger et al. (2019)	Challenges and opportunities	Availability, quality or location are considered as problematic, while environmental consciousness, fashionability, and treasure hunt	UK, Germany, and Finland
Tocancipá (2008)	Driving forces, organization	Organizational process, political nature, resistance	Colombia
Gatti (2009)	Values, characteristics	Community building, needs satisfaction, empowerment, and resistance	Argentina

#### 3.1 | Social practice as entity

Shove and Pantzar (2005, pp. 44–45) built on this definition and suggested that practices as entities “presume the existence of requisite elements, including images, forms of competence and in many cases objects as well”. Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012b) defined *materials* as the physical entities that are used when performing a practice such as clothes in dressing. *Competencies and skills*, refer to the knowledge required to operate the materials, perform the practice and evaluate the outcome. In the case of dressing, competence could refer to the knowledge about the size that fits oneself, the instructions for taking care of the garment, and the appropriate dress codes in specific social settings. Finally, *meanings* indicate the images the practice evokes for people, that is, “the social and symbolic significance” people give the practice. In dressing, specific types of garments could be associated with power positions or social occasions. In addition to these elements, Gram-Hanssen (2010) suggested that rules and institutions are also part of social practices.

#### 3.2 | Social practice as performance

As performance, practices are enacted by people, or “carriers” who interpret and integrate the above-mentioned elements in different ways (Pettersen, 2016; Warde, 2005; Warde, Welch, & Paddock, 2017). In her analysis of lighting, Mylan (2015) explores how the different elements of the practice influence and are influenced by each other, describing a trajectory for the practice. From being only about bringing brightness, lighting is now also about experiences, ambiances, and safety. And as a result, new competences for creating such experiences are required from practitioners. A similar analysis was applied to laundering. Changes in ideas about cleanliness have influenced how clothes are cleaned, what materials are required, and competences. Thus, when understanding change of practices, not only the elements are important but also how they affect each other, opening new options for intervention.

Because practices are performed by practitioners, individuals, they entail interaction between people (Røpke, 2009). As both individuality and social order emerge from practices, practice theories can help understand power dynamics, especially if power “is understood at the most basic level as acting with effect” (Watson, 2016, p. 2). Not many studies have explored this aspect in the context of collaborative consumption and the sharing economy. Fitzmaurice and Schor (2018) and Schor, Fitzmaurice, Carfagna, and Attwood-Charles (2016) explored examples of the sharing economy from the perspective of distinction, using a Bourdieusian approach. They questioned these practices regarding power dynamics and found that although they are presented as democratic and horizontal initiatives that challenge traditional forms of consumption, it is possible to see how different allocations of capital, especially cultural, result in unequal relations.

### 3.3 | Recruitment and reproduction of social practices

Depending on how many people perform them, practices appear and disappear. The number of people “carrying” a practice depends on the capacity of the practice to recruit participants (Huber, 2017; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012a). The more people perform a practice, the more normalised it becomes. According to Shove et al. (2012a, p. 2), “the chances of becoming the carrier of any one practice are closely related to the social and symbolic significance of participation and to highly structured and vastly different opportunities to accumulate and amass the different types of capital required for, and typically generated by participation.” In addition, Shove et al. indicate that “[a]ccidents of birth, history and location are all important, as are social networks” (p. 3). Practices also need to be rewarding, convey meaning and fit with other social practices. Finally, also the rate of penetration of a given practice or the level of exposure to a given practice contributes to recruitment or defection.

Beyond recruitment, for a practice to survive, practitioners need to reproduce it; they need to “build a career” within the practice which happens through processes of learning and sharing (Shove et al., 2012a). By performing the practices, practitioners “advance” in their careers and change roles, from outsiders, to novices, to experts or “full practitioners,” which also reveals high levels of commitment to the practice. Exchanges between different types of carriers allow the practice to abide. Practices disappear because they fail to recruit and retain practitioners or because they need to make space for radical innovations that replace them like cycling and the car. Moral and ideological changes that require new practices to emerge as the old ones become inadmissible also drive practices to extinction. Finally, a temporal dimension is also relevant as some practices are relevant during specific moments in life and others will always be present.

## 4 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

To answer the research question, why people in middle-income economies participate in collaborative consumption practices, we chose a

qualitative approach based on semistructured interviews. We did that because our aim is to explore how people involved in clothe swapping construct it as a practice and what reasons they have to get involved in it and given the lack of previous studies (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, a case study approach was considered adequate as case studies allow for in-depth analysis for specific activities in a given period. This type of research generally generates a thick description of the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2011).

### 4.1 | Case studies

The case studies were identified and selected based on an online review of existing alternatives, personal networks, and snowballing. Initially, nine swapping initiatives were identified of which seven were contacted via email; no contact information was available for the remaining two. Of the seven initiatives contacted, three were available for the study as described in Table 2.

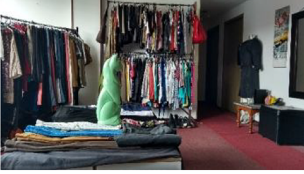

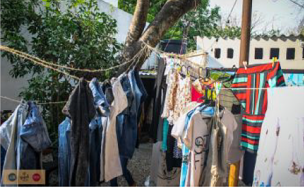
The three initiatives differ regarding location, organizers, frequency, and fees. Two happened in Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, the economic and political centre of the country characterised by high levels of urbanisation. The third initiative occurs in Yopal, a rather small but dynamic city in the Eastern savannah of the country. Regarding structure, two are organized by individuals and one is the result of a joint institutional effort of a local nongovernmental organization working on environmental and social development issues and a grassroots movement focused on promoting responsible consumption. Finally, the frequency of the activity is also different, with more frequent events happening in the capital than in the mid-sized city. Initiative A charges a fee to cover expenses, and the other two are free of charge for participants and driven by volunteers.

Initiative A has organized the event in different locations, at first the organizer only looked for coworking spaces but has also used local cafes and hotels. For each event she gets help from three to four volunteers, depending on how big the event is. Some of them receive the clothes and give a token for each item that is accepted. Items that do not pass the filter are returned or can be donated. Another person arranges the clothes as if it were in a clothing store, hangs them in the hangers, folds them, and the participants join parallel activities, such as a documentary screening or workshops. After 1 to 2 hr, people can enter the swapping space and choose what they want to take. At the exit they give one token back for each item they take. Initiative B has a different structure; their events happen on a regular basis at the organizer's house. She opens her showroom twice a week during weekdays. In this space people can donate, sell, buy, and swap clothes. Donated clothes are redirected to vulnerable communities. There is a camera installed in the room for security reasons.

Initiative C organizes events twice a year. In contrast with the previous two initiatives, in this case the swapping event is an institutional event. Two local organizations came together to organize the events as part of their local work supporting sustainability and community empowerment. Based on their experience, they developed a guide to organize this type of events. The planning stage is very detailed, with around four different committees, logistics, communications,



**TABLE 2** Swapping initiatives used as case studies

Initiative	Picture	Location	Frequency	Type of organizer	Fee	Avg. participants
A		Bogota, Colombia	Twice per week	Individual	Yes	10
B		Bogota, Colombia	Intermittent	Individual	No	40
C		Yopal, Colombia	Twice per year	Organisation	No	80

entertainment, and data collection. Each group has specific tasks and they meet periodically before the event. The events are planned to happen during dates that are commercially important, that is, when people are expected to shop like Mother's Day or Friendship Day, so consumers have an alternative to buying. On the swapping day, the event works in a similar way as Initiative A, volunteers receive and examine the clothes and give tokens in exchange, and others organize the clothes in a space that looks like a store. Although people are giving their clothes, artistic performances are happening as well as a fair with local sustainable products for sale. People can start choosing clothes 2 hr after the event started. If two people choose the same garment, they are expected to solve the conflict by playing "stone, paper, scissors." After the event, the organizers prepared a video to share in their social networks.

## 4.2 | Interviews

We conducted 14 in-depth interviews, two of these interviews were dismissed because answers were too short, and interviewees did not answer all the questions asked. The interview questions were developed following the three elements described in the theoretical section of the paper: elements of the practice, interactions between elements, and recruitment. In addition, some background information about experience and personal characteristics were asked. Table 3 summarizes the information about the interviewees. Initiative C has more participants as it was the bigger one in terms of people participating. The interviews were conducted during February 2018 via Skype and over the phone. In-depth interviews were chosen as they are an efficient form of collecting information. They allow participants to give detailed accounts of their experiences and perceptions, they let the researcher probe additional areas that arise during the

conversation and help to reduce the risk of interviewer prejudice (Seale, 2004). This decision is supported by Hitchings' (2012) argument that individual opinions still matter when studying practices and can provide valuable information regarding their role in the practice.

The research team defined a set of questions for each type of interviewee following the theoretical framework of the study. The questions were first developed in English and then translated into Spanish by the first author, who is a Spanish native speaker. The interview guide was divided into five sections: (a) background information

**TABLE 3** Distribution of informants by initiative and type of actor

Informant Code	Initiative	Role	Occupation	Gender
C010101	Initiative A	Organizer	Professional	Female
C010201	Initiative A	Participant	Digital entrepreneur	Female
C020101	Initiative B	Organizer	Professional	Female
C020201	Initiative B	Participant	Professional designer	Male
C030101	Initiative C	Organizer	Professional	Female
C030102	Initiative C	Organizer	Professional	Female
C030201	Initiative C	Participant	Community leader	Female
C030202	Initiative C	Participant	Professional	Female
C030203	Initiative C	Participant	Professional	Female
C030204	Initiative C	Participant	Professional	Female
C030301	Initiative C	Participant	Business owner	Male
C030302	Initiative C	Partner	Professional	Female

about previous experiences with swapping; (b) questions about materials involved in the practice; (c) competencies, rules, and skills; (d) meaning and imagery; and (e) reasons for recruitment or defection. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 min. They were recorded after the participants provided written consent. Interviews were transcribed in the original language.

### 4.3 | Data analysis

The data were analysed following an interpretative approach using an iterative reading of the transcribed interviews (Kinsella, 2006). Transcribed interviews were coded by the first author based on the interview questions, significant statements, and meaning units. Significant statements refer to what the participants express in relation to their experience of the swapping activity, on a personal level. These statements were then grouped under wider sets of information that called meaning units by Creswell (2014) or themes Saldaña (2009) using NVivo 11 and 12. These themes were then organized and cross-analysed following the concepts presented in section 3.

## 5 | FINDINGS

In this section, we present our findings organized by the topics presented in the theoretical framework. First, we describe the purpose of the practice from the practitioners' perspective, we then move to describing the practice of swapping as an entity, that is, the elements involved in it. We continue with a description of the practice as performance, including the perspectives of the different practitioners (organizers, participants, and partners). In the last section, we describe how the practice recruits practitioners using the insights from the theory.

### 5.1 | The purpose of clothe swapping

First, we identified the purpose behind the practitioners' engagement with the practice. Regarding organizers, three main reasons emerge: first, a concern for the environmental and social negative impacts of the textile industry and the lack of sustainable options in the local market; second, the need for innovative approaches to promote sustainable consumption in an institutional environment. Participants also had different reasons for taking part in the clothe swapping events. On the one hand, people were looking for different clothes for themselves or their families, either because they had too many clothes or because they did not have enough money to buy new clothes as expressed by an organizer: "I feel that there are two types, on one hand are the [people] that are aware that their closets, and in general them, have things that they do not use and that others may need. On the other hand, there are other people that, for example, really need to exchange because they do not have money." (C030102). On the other hand, participants did so for business reasons. For example, a designer used the swapping events to find materials for his products and an entrepreneur used it to find inventory to sell online through her online store. A third purpose was connected to a more charitable objective to find clothes for incarcerated children who were soon to be released and needed clothes:

### 5.2 | The elements of clothe swapping

When using a social practice perspective, a logical next step is to understand what the elements of the practice are. Based on the concepts offered in Section 3, in this section, we describe the materials, the meanings, and the skills and rules involved in clothe swapping. As illustrated in Appendix A, we found three types of materials that were relevant in the swap: the clothes, the place where the event happened, and the tokens used to control the exchange. Regarding clothes, participants indicated that they were mostly women's clothes, specifically dresses, shirts, pants, and jackets as illustrated in



**FIGURE 1** Initiative C Source: Natalia Roa Lopez © [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]



**FIGURE 2** Initiative A. Foto: Camila Moentres © [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Figures 1–3. Underwear, shoes, and bathing suits were not swapped because people were not allowed to bring them. The items brought should be in good shape to enter the swap. Less than ideal garments were accepted in all initiatives and were donated to local charities. Participants were informed about this before they gave up their clothes. The place had a prominent role in the event, from the perspective of the organizers. Two initiatives used public spaces from partners that were not originally used for clothes exchange. However, they rearranged these spaces to simulate a clothing store. In addition, the organizers integrated decorations that informed participants about the motivations behind their initiative. One initiative uses the organizer's private space, which is conditioned every time the event takes place.

The second element of a practice are the skills and competence required to operate the materials, perform the practice, and evaluate the outcome. In the context of initiatives analysed, we identified three aspects associated to this element. First, organizers need to be able to set up the swapping event with the support from their partners. Thus, skills for securing sponsors, partners, and volunteers are needed as well as for planning, management, marketing, and logistics. In the case of one of the initiatives, they set up committees to work on each of these issues. Organizers for the other two initiatives had to have all these competencies themselves. In addition to these organizational abilities, organizers needed to have knowledge about the environmental and social impacts of the clothing industry to illustrate the benefits of the initiative. Participants needed skills and knowledge for deciding what items to take to and from the swapping, and what in general constitutes a good swap. Such knowledge includes quality, size, and fashionability. Volunteers working at the reception of the clothes also needed skills to use the criteria to decide what clothes could be swapped and which ones should be rejected. Once the practitioners choose the clothes from the event, they should prepare them for use, for example, wash them or mend them if needed. The final aspect within this element are the rules as described by Gram-Hanssen (2010), which in these cases were created for selecting the clothes

and for behaving during the event. As mentioned above, underwear was forbidden from all initiatives. Participants were required to bring clothes in good shape. Initiative C developed rules for participants during the exchange addressing the scenario where two people wanted the same item.

The third element of a practice is the meanings and images they evoke. We found that swapping in this context evokes both negative and positive images and meanings. First, it reminded participants of old exchange practices between indigenous communities and peasants, "When someone talks about swapping it reminds me that it was mainly done by Indians, indigenous peoples sorry, to trade chicken for cassava." C020201. Second, it is also associated to the type of activities "hippies" would take part in: "Most of the people that bring such concept (swapping) [are considered] hippies, pot-heads. Logically, because this is a very conservative region." C030202. These images translate into negative and positive meanings; for example, images about indigenous and farmer societies have a positive meaning associated to community building and cooperation. Nonetheless, because past communities are also regarded as poor, this meaning transfers to the practice. The image of bohemian and hippie has a positive meaning because it is considered cool and an expression of cultural advancement. However, for people with more conservative values, it means people with low income, low social status, and cast outs as expressed in the quote above. Finally, acquiring and using second-hand clothes connect images of newness or oldness. On the one hand, some participants view swapping as a novel activity in their local context, bringing diversity. On the other hand, people see second-hand products as being dirty, contaminated by previous owners, a sign of poverty and lack of means as the result of historic conditions. As explained by one interviewee, in the early 1900, in the capital city, the second-hand market for clothes was located in the Plaza España, next to a public hospital. It was a tradition to sell the belongings of people that had passed away in this market at a discount price for poor people. This knowledge has been passed on from generations as illustrated by this quote: "Before it was thought that second-hand clothes were for





**FIGURE 3** Initiative B. Source: Facebook [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

poor people and for people that had to go to the Plaza España to buy.”  
- C020101

### 5.3 | Performing clothe swapping

A practice emerges, transforms, and perpetuates because its elements interact (Shove et al., 2012b). Based on the data collected and analysed, we identified three dual interactions between the elements that seemed to address the concerns about the activity. First, from material to meanings, we found that the place and the selection of clothes were done in order to counterbalance negative meanings. Organizers selected and furnished and decorated the places so they would evoke meanings of coolness and sophistication as opposed of poverty and low status. In a similar way, clothes from recognized brands were favoured by organizers as another way to avoid negative meanings. From meanings to materials, messages were posted in the event location conveying new meanings for clothe swapping and consumption related to community building and sustainable consumption. The second set connects skills and materials. By intervening the space creating fitting rooms, the organizers help participants to reduce the

uncertainty when selecting clothes. Additionally, by having people filtering the clothes, the organizers also helped participants in this direction. Rules were also established by organizers explicitly controlling the type of clothes acceptable in the event. The last set of interconnections links skills and meanings. Participants chose what they brought to the events based on their own perception of what would be desirable and how frequently they used their garments. Because of negative meanings associated with second-hand regarding hygiene, some participants washed the items they got from the event at home, although others reported that the garments they got did not need to be cleaned. Finally, organizers offered awareness-raising sessions such as workshops, presentations, and documentary screenings that reinforced positive meanings associated to the event in terms of community building (initiative C) and environmental impacts (initiative A and B).

As pointed out by Røpke (2009), another aspect that is important when exploring practices is the interactions between practitioners. Although some practices can be performed by one person, in the present case, different actors intervened in the swap: organizers,

**TABLE 4** Type of practitioners and purpose of participation by initiative

Type of practitioners	Initiative A	Initiative B	Initiative C
Organizer	Individual, part time, woman, and professional	Individual, part time, woman, and professional	Two local organizations, focused sustainability, and community empowerment
Partners	No partner	No partner	Community based movement supporting sustainable consumption initiatives and local businesses
Participants	Mostly women, for personal use, and designers looking of items for upcycling	Mostly women, for personal use, and entrepreneurs looking for items to resell	Mostly women, for personal use, and professionals looking for items for charity purposes
Indirect participants	Charities that got clothes donations	Charities that got clothe donations and resell business customers	Charities that got clothes donations, vulnerable children

participants, and partners. Table 4 illustrates the type of practitioners for each initiative.

These actors interacted during and after the events. A first connection links organizers and partners who must negotiate the aim of the event, the logistics, the rules, the messages, and expectations to be raised. The second connection happens between organizers and participants. Organizers decide what clothes are worthy of being exchanged. As a result, organizers have some advantage over participants regarding the clothes. In one case, as explained by an organizer, volunteers used this advantage to save the best clothes for themselves and they were organizing the items. The organizer further explained that they addressed such unethical behaviour in an internal meeting and made it explicit that it was a form of corruption and therefore, unacceptable. Third, participants also interact among themselves by negotiating who would get a garment in case two or more wanted it. Finally, and as mentioned above, there are indirect participants, the charities that get the unwanted clothes from the organizers, the customers of the entrepreneurs, and the vulnerable populations for which some participants were selecting clothes.

#### 5.4 | Recruitment and defection

As described in Section 3.2 for practices to survive, they need to recruit practitioners, who must reproduce the practice. The first aspects that influence recruitment, according to the literature, are personal histories, capital, and the practitioner's social networks. For each initiative we asked organizers what was their audience. Initiative A was targeted at environmentally and socially aware people. According to the organizer, participants from different social and economic backgrounds joined the initiative, but mostly from the capital city. In terms of geographic location, the initiative happens in a traditionally wealthy neighbourhood, near public universities, and the city centre, but it attracts people from other cities interested in sustainability. Initiative B's main audience are young women, with middle to high income. The events are organized in different areas of the capital city to "avoid the idea that [swapping] is only for low income people." Finally, initiative C occurs in a smaller city that has been the epicentre of oil production in the country. As a result, income is high as it is inequality. Therefore, the initiative has attracted two types of people, those that have too much stuff and want to get rid of it, and the people that cannot afford new clothes. In this case, women are the main audience as well, although it was reported as a family activity: "I decided to participate in the swap for my daughter, because I wanted her to know the event. Additionally, it has become an amazing cultural event. Lately, they have given it a gastronomic twist, thus I think it is very important." C030203

The ability of a social practice to recruit practitioners depends on how socially significant it is. Participants expressed different perspectives regarding how clothe swapping is perceived by their networks. In the case of initiative A, on person said that her family and friends do not approve of using second-hand clothing; thus, she is challenging her peers, which in turn can undermine her interest in reproducing the practice. For the participant interviewed about initiative B, clothe swapping reaffirms his commitment to more efficient use of

resources, making it easier to join. Finally, as illustrated in the paragraph above, the interviewee from initiative C indicted that she sees the event as an opportunity to educate her daughter and to do something different during their free time.

The level of exposure to a practice or how embedded it is in a person's everyday life is also an aspect that influences the ability of the practice to recruit practitioners. According to the organizers of the initiatives, dissemination is the most challenging aspect of it. They mostly use social media and traditional media to help people learn about the event. Word of mouth has also been a good way to connect people. However, because of the nature of the initiatives, voluntary, and free, organizers have scarce resources to increase the level of exposure. Lastly, how a practice connects with other practices also contributes to its capacity to recruit. According to participants, clothing swaps connect with practices of working (reselling and designing), donating (charity organizations) and socializing.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to provide insights into why people in emerging economies participate in collaborative consumption practices such as clothe swapping by using a social practice perspective. As shown in the findings, by using this perspective, we were able to explore the elements involved in clothe swapping. We also identified the interactions between these elements, which allowed the practice to emerge. Lastly, using a practice approach allowed us to recognise the conditions that favoured recruitment of practitioners into this practice. In contrast with previous research, where the main purpose was to isolate factors and motives driving individual consumers to participate in such events, we were able to provide a rich description of how clothe swapping comes about. We achieved this by exploring the connections between tangible aspects such as materials and people with intangible ones such as images, meanings, skills, competence, and other practices. By exploring these questions, this research provides potential areas of intervention for designers, governments, local organizations, and business, if they are interested in promoting these or similar practices.

Although none of the available studies on clothe swapping use a practice perspective, some of our findings confirm previous results from the literature. For example, Albinsson and Perera (2009, 2012) indicated that the characteristics of the items were important for participants. In our study, quality aspects were also relevant; we found that brand and newness were favoured by participants as they reduced the risk of choosing wrongly. Another aspect elaborated by the authors and by Gatti (2009) refers to how these events help building and strengthening a sense of community. In one of the cases explored here, the practitioners argued that by engaging with the practice, they strengthened their bonds with their networks.

An interesting finding that is not reported in previous research is how some of the rules established for the exchange could work against the general purpose of the initiatives. In our study, all cases indicated that only "good quality" clothes would be accepted for



exchange. Clothes that would not be accepted, those of “less quality” would be donated to charities and vulnerable communities. This implies that these groups, charities, and vulnerable communities do not deserve the good quality clothes but less quality. However, one of the purposes of these initiatives is to promote sustainability, solidarity, and community values through the swap. Nonetheless, these rules are reinforcing the image that vulnerable and poor people deserve less quality, which goes against equality and solidarity. Schor et al. (2016) explored a similar aspect in the context of sharing economy initiatives such as maker spaces, finding that cultural capital was used to make distinctions between participants. In this sense, it could be important to further explore the relationship between inequality and collaborative consumption practices. Also interesting was the finding about the other practices connected to the clothe swapping. The initial assumption is that people use these events for personal and direct benefit, that is, to find clothes for themselves or their family. However, we found that people have other purposes.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations that should be addressed in future work. First, it is limited to a specific socio-economic context, an emergent economy. It would be interesting to have similar studies in other contexts to see how the practice is implemented and how it recruits practitioners. As opposed to existing research, it does not dive deep into individual aspects that are also relevant especially when exploring first encounters with the practice. It only explored the reasons how the practice is configured and why people are attracted to it and join it, not why do they stay within it or defect. Finally, the analysis based only on interview and visual data, which proved to be rather rich as suggested by Hitchings (2012). However, nonparticipant observation can help expand insights, especially regarding people's interaction with the materials and infrastructure and other people.

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our findings indicated that participation in clothe swapping involves complex interconnections and interactions that, sometimes, have undesirable results that go against the spirit of the initiative. Moreover, it allowed us to better understand why people have a positive disposition to take part in the practice, beyond their personal internal characteristics. Organizers of clothe swapping initiatives should be aware of the images and meanings associated to the materials and infrastructures involved in the exchange, and use codes, rules, and find skills to alter them towards a desired state that favours the practice. However, and based on the findings, more reflection about the impacts of their decisions regarding the different elements could help avoid undesired outcomes and reinforce desired ones.

Our research suggests that using a practice perspective offers several advantages when addressing questions of acceptance and adoption of circular practices such as clothe swapping. On the one hand, it offers an expanded perspective of the topic, moving beyond the individual as the practice is taken as unit of analysis. As a result, it presents a description of the different elements involved in the practice and the

interactions between such elements, including people. By doing so, it acknowledges the relevance of the context and provides information about potential areas of intervention for multiple stakeholders. By exploring interactions between elements and between people, this approach allowed us to identify paradoxes that should be avoided.

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## APPENDIX A

### Materials Involved in the Clothe Swap

Type	Description	Quote
Clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainly women's clothes as most participants were women.</li> <li>Most frequently swapped items were dresses, shirts, pants and jackets.</li> <li>Underwear was forbidden by all initiatives.</li> <li>Special items such as costumes and baby clothes were also exchanged on at least one occasion in two of the initiatives.</li> <li>Interviewees reported that they mostly brought and found clothes in good shape.</li> <li>Brands were an important aspect of the clothes being swapped as people preferred known names.</li> </ul>	<p>"So, the idea is that [clothes are] high quality, thus the filter aims at that, by checking them and decide what is accepted in the swap shop and what doesn't. If it does not, they tell the person." C030101</p>
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative places like schools, hotels, cafes, co-working offices and private homes were used to organize the events.</li> <li>Organizers mentioned the importance of making the space attractive and looking like a store.</li> <li>To achieve it, they used equipment and accessories typically used in clothing stores (exhibition racks, mirrors and changing rooms).</li> <li>Organizers added visual aids to convey messages of sustainability and community.</li> <li>Two of the initiatives combined the swapping event with a trade fair for second-hand and eco-products.</li> </ul>	<p>"At the moment it is [in] my house. The project cannot subsidize a space completely. What we do is that the day that is open to the public, which are Wednesdays and Saturdays, that day the project pays as if the space was rented." C010101</p>
Tokens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two initiatives used tokens to facilitate exchange. Each token was equivalent to one item, independently of its commercial value.</li> </ul>	<p>"It's with chips, it's not like I have this, and you give me this, I organize [the swap] using chips." C020101</p>

## APPENDIX B

### Skills and Competence Needed for the Clothe Swap

Type	Description	Quote
Event organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizers needed to secure sponsors, partners, and volunteers for the event.</li> <li>The events required planning, management, promotion, marketing, and logistics skills for organizing each event.</li> <li>Additional knowledge about the environmental and social impacts of the clothing industry was also needed.</li> </ul>	<p>"What I want to do this year is to organize myself, decide where the Project is going so, I can find sponsors." C020101</p> <p>"We have to work a lot with our social networks and I usually go to universities looking for the opportunity to give conferences and similar things." C010101</p>
Selection of clothes to bring and take	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizers needed to filter clothes based on quality and fashionability.</li> </ul>	<p>"We meet with my family and I tell them: ok, there is a swapping event this day. So, we start to gather the clothes that we do not use anymore but is still in excellent condition. I usually bring dresses and my parents also bring their clothes." C030202</p>

(Continues)

Type	Description	Quote
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants needed knowledge and skills to decide what items to bring to the event.</li> <li>During the swap, participants needed to be able to assess if a given item would fit them and if it would need significant intervention to make it usable.</li> </ul>	<p>"If you look for one specific size you will have less options. But if you are looking for any size, you have more options." C010201</p>
Preparation of clothes for use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once people took the items they chose and went back home, they needed to decide what to do to them before using them (i.e., cleaning and mending)</li> </ul>	<p>"[The clothes] were clean, however I washed them before using them." C030201</p>
Rules for bringing clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizers developed rules for what type of clothes were acceptable for the swap.</li> <li>Unacceptable clothes could be donated to local charities.</li> </ul>	<p>"Their first time, [people] bring items that are not good [so] first, we do not accept them and then we explain that if they want to get something good, they need to bring something good themselves because that keeps the event happening." C020101</p>
Rules for behaving at the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the event, one initiative provided specific guidelines for participants about behaviour during the exchange (e.g., solving conflicts).</li> <li>Organizers developed guidelines for volunteers participating in the event to avoid unethical behaviours (e.g., not to take any clothes for themselves).</li> </ul>	<p>"In the case that two people want the same garment, they need to decide who gets it by playing stone, paper, scissors. Two out of three. This is one of the rules." C030101</p> <p>"It was decided, in addition, that these volunteers, who are organizers and filter items, cannot take part in the event." C030102</p>

## APPENDIX C

### Images Associated With Clothe Swapping

Images	Meanings	Quote
Indigenous and peasants' communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Positive</i>: It is a traditional form of trade that enabled community building.</li> <li><i>Negative</i>: It is an activity that poor societies performed, not advanced ones.</li> </ul>	<p>"When someone talks about swapping it reminds me that it was mainly done by indians, indigenous peoples sorry, to trade chicken for cassava." C020201</p>
Bohemian/"Hippie"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Positive</i>: These initiatives are cool, are an expression of cultural advancement</li> <li><i>Negative</i>: Poor people with no means to get new clothes use swapping events. These events are organized by drug-addicts and cast outs.</li> </ul>	<p>"Before it was thought that second-hand clothes were for poor people and for people that had to go to the Plaza España to buy." C020101</p> <p>"Most of the people that bring such concept (swapping) [are considered] hippies, pot-heads. Logically, because this is a very conservative region." C030202</p>
Newness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Positive</i>: It is perceived as an innovative activity in the local context.</li> <li><i>Negative</i>: Second-hand clothes are dirty, contaminated by the energy of previous owners. It is a sign of poverty and lack of means.</li> </ul>	<p>"The idea of participating in the initiative came about because I started to recognize the organizers through my brother's friend, and I got interested because it was something new. [...] When they started doing this, [...] they began to change people's way of thinking." C030301</p> <p>"So, sometimes [...] there are too many things that are not laid out properly and they smell funny, or that is the impression that you get, so they do not seem that cool." C010201</p>

## APPENDIX D

## Practices as Performance: Interactions Between Elements

Interaction	Description	Quote
1. Material → Meanings	Place chosen to evoke ideas of sophistication and coolness to counterbalance the negative meanings associated with second-hand clothes.	“the idea is to overcome the cultural barrier or belief that swapping is something ‘hippie’ and something primitive and instead communicate the idea that it aims at salvaging traditional economic practices. That is why I try to find places that are cool, beautiful, that have different meanings.” C020101
	Organizers favoured high-quality clothes from recognized brands, as they seem to be regarded better by participants.	“To tell the truth, when I go to check out Initiative A, I pay attention to the brand [...] it is an issue of trust. Brands provide support; people know how a specific brand looks on them.” C010201
2. Meanings → Materials	Organizers put up signs in the swapping space communicating the environmental impacts of clothes consumption.	“We always decorate the place with messages made in with recycled materials, cardboard, made by ourselves.” C030101
3. Materials → Skills	To allow participants to better assess the garments they want to take, organizers set fitting rooms.	“So, I take the items I think fit me, I go to a fitting room and try them on.” C030201
	By having people filtering participant contributions, organizers also assisted in the decision of which clothes to exchange	“I place someone at the door and give them the indications about what items are suitable. Garments that are in good shape, clean that do not stink, items that are apt for someone to take them home.” C030204
4. Skills → Materials	Some organisers established explicit and specific rules to guarantee that the clothes available in the event were suitable for exchange.	“And the rules are very clear, the clothes have to be in good shape, and that we have to wait until the end of the afternoon to do the swapping.” C020201
	Initiative C set specific guidelines for vendors participating in a parallel activity. These rules specified the type of products they could offer (local food, crafts) and banned single-use plastic products.	“One of the things that we let the people selling food, is that they need to use reusable plates and cutlery and not single-use plastic products, for example.” C030101
5. Skills → Meanings	Participants chose what they brought to the events based on their own perception of what would be desirable and how frequently they used their garments.	“[...] if it is clothes, [I choose] clothes that I do not wear any more or that my family does not use and clothes that I know other people will like and wear. Secondly, [clothes] that are in good shape.” C030202
	Because of negative meanings associated with second-hand regarding hygiene, some participants washed the items they got from the event at home, although others reported that the garments they got did not need to be cleaned.	“We have used items right away because we perceive them as super clean, they do not smell like sweat and are very well conserved.” C020201
6. Meanings → Skills	Organizers offered awareness-raising sessions such as workshops, presentations, and documentary screenings that reinforced positive meanings associated to the event in terms of community building (initiative C) and environmental impacts (initiative A and B).	“[the time between the moment people give their clothes and they get to choose the ones they take] is the moment I use to give the lectures or show documentaries, or create other type of activities [...] so people start to understand why it is important to organize this type of events.” C020101



## APPENDIX E

### Recruitment Into the Practices

Aspect/Initiative	Initiative A	Initiative B	Initiative C
Personal histories, capitals and social networks	Our target audience is people environmentally and socially aware. We have realized that these people do not belong to a specific economic class. They do not live in a specific area of the city or have a certain education level. C010101	The city is divided in social classes, so I like to go to different areas [of the city] to avoid the idea that [swapping] is only for low income people. With the clothes [swapping] I have realized that women between 25 and 40 are my target audience. But I don't know, I have not decided on a specific type of people. They are mostly women, but I have tried to bring men C020101  A friend went, she liked the dynamics, but it has been a bit difficult because she has a hard time detaching from things. C020201	I feel that there are two types, on one hand are the [people] that are aware that their closets, and in general them, have things that they do not use and that others may need. On the other hand, there are other people that, for example, really need to exchange because they do not have money. The people swapping range from three to 64 years old, mostly women C030102  I know a lot of people that has participated because we have invited them. [...] Many people are afraid. Many people say that they will go but then they don't because it is second-hand clothes. Here, let's say, there is not a swapping culture, everything must be new. In Yopal, the culture is a bit materialistic and sexist. C030202
Social (cultural and legal) significance	My friends and cousins, for example, do not think they would wear something from someone else. My boyfriend tells me the same. They do not know who that person is, even if the item is in perfect shape. They would not wear second hand clothes. C010201	When we read the website of [initiative B], it caught our attention because it mirrors what we have been doing, creating awareness so people do not discard clothes so fast, and instead they try to keep it longer, and transform it into something special. C020201	I decided to participate in the swap for my daughter, because I wanted her to know the event. Additionally, it has become an amazing cultural event. Lately, they have given it a gastronomic twist, thus I think it is very important. C030203
Level of exposure to the practice	That is one of our main challenges, dissemination. At the moment, the idea is to create a dissemination campaign for social networks. [...] some businesses are willing to start an activity with their employees. C010101	We have told people from the neighbourhood to not miss this opportunity. C020201  I think here it is important that there are people that are influences or famous and start talking about sustainability. C020101	Well, we have focused on inviting people using traditional media like radio and through fan pages, and to be honest it has been good. C030101  I think, what we think, is that there is a need for appropriation, for example, organizations need to commit to organize an event at least once a year, it would be enough. C030102
Connection to other practices	I attend the swap to Exchange the things I can't sell [in my online store]. What doesn't sell I bring it to the swap. I also help [the organizer] sell clothes online. C010201	The ones that are more interesting for me, I take them apart immediately and I rescue as much as I can to use it in a [design] project. C020201	If there are garments with some defect, they put them away and bring them to a charity. A charity or some organization that really needs those clothes or items. C030201  One had the possibility to drink something and share with people. The first time I went I didn't know anyone, so it was cool because it made me set my shyness aside and try to take away that tendency humans have to isolate themselves. C030203