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ECOLE DOCTORALE DE MANAGEMENT PANTHÉON-SORBONNE n°559

Antecedents, Mechanisms, And Outcomes Of Consumers' Choices Of Renting Over Buying In The Digital Age

Antécédents, Mécanismes Et Conséquences Des Choix Des Consommateurs Pour Louer Au Lieu D'acheter À L'ère Du Numérique

Thèse de Doctorat présentée en vue de l'obtention
du grade de docteur en sciences de gestion et du Management
par

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Soutenance le 14 novembre 2022

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luxury, a multi-disciplined domain I was passionate about. It is one of the fundamental reasons why I chose France to work on my PhD thesis, as I believe that Paris is one of the major fashion capitals in the world and that France is home to several world-famous luxury brands. Professor Morand has always been gracious enough to meet me, answer my diverse questions, share his latest articles published in fashion journals, and discuss the thesis topic during the first year of my PhD. He introduced me to many professors and young scholars who work with him in the Institut Français de la Mode (IFM) and the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode. In addition, the opportunity to directly interview prominent and emerging fashion designers and fashion editors during Paris Fashion Week has been an eye-opening experience. I thank all of them profusely for their time and readiness to share their knowledge, opinions, and experiences in their careers related to fashion. Somehow, they all inspired me to choose the research topic of my PhD thesis, which is pertinent to the fashion industry in the digital age. I also extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to Professor Morand for his flexibility and agreement to evaluate this thesis and participate in my defense as a jury member.

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When reflecting on these past six years, this PhD journey has been the most enlightening, reflective, and challenging learning experience in my life. It has allowed me to enhance my self-confidence; become more persevering; think deeply, critically, and creatively; develop my entrepreneurial, leadership, and management skills; and nurture a growth mindset. Most importantly, this PhD journey has facilitated the cultivation of a more conscious and healthier lifestyle, which I believe will benefit my future career and my quest to live a happy, fulfilling, and meaningful life.

ABSTRACT EN FRANÇAIS

Cette thèse propose un cadre théorique pour comprendre les choix des consommateurs pour louer des produits au lieu de les acheter, à l'ère du numérique. Deux principales questions de recherche sont abordées dans cette thèse. La première concerne l'influence des antécédents sur la préférence des consommateurs pour la location au lieu de l'achat. Ces antécédents mesurent le degré de certaines personnalités des consommateurs, y compris le matérialisme, la recherche de variété, la frugalité et l'engagement pour une marque dans le concept de soi ('BESC'). La deuxième examine comment la location au lieu de l'achat impacte l'attachement émotionnel et la fidélité envers la marque d'un produit loué. Sur la base d'une enquête (n = 321) et d'une modélisation par équation structurelle, les résultats suggèrent que la participation à la location renforce l'attachement émotionnel du consommateur à la marque d'un article loué, mais influence négativement la fidélité du consommateur envers la marque. Selon les différents traits psychométriques, valeurs ou modes de vie des consommateurs, les consommateurs peuvent percevoir différentes valeurs dans le choix de louer plutôt que d'acheter. Les consommateurs ayant des degrés plus élevés sur la valeur de matérialisme instrumental, la tendance à la recherche de variété et un style de vie frugal sont plus susceptibles de percevoir des valeurs fonctionnelles dans leur choix, y compris des valeurs pro-environnementales, transactionnelles et de flexibilité. En revanche, les consommateurs ayant des degrés plus élevés sur la valeur de matérialisme terminal et de BESC sont susceptibles de percevoir des valeurs sociales dans leur choix. Les implications pour l'évolution de la consommation basée sur l'accès et pour les marchés de location à l'ère du numérique sont discutées.

Mots-clés : location à l'ère du numérique, consommation basée sur l'accès, l'économie du partage, la fidélité à la marque

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a theoretical framework for understanding consumers' choices for renting over buying behavior in the digital age and the consequences of renting on consumer relationships with the brand of rented items. Two main research questions are addressed in this thesis. The first one investigates the influence of the antecedents of the preference for renting rather than buying behavior by determining the roles of materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) in explaining the consumer's choice of renting over buying, specifically in the digital age. The second research question examines the consequences of renting versus buying on the consumer's relationship with the rented items by verifying how renting consumption affects emotional attachment and loyalty toward the brand of a rented item. Based on a survey study ($n = 321$) and structural equation modeling, the results suggest that participating in renting consumption enhances the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand of rented items, but negatively influences the consumer's loyalty toward the brand of a rented item. Depending on consumers' different psychometric traits, values, or lifestyles, they can perceive different values in the choice of renting over buying. Consumers with higher degrees of instrumental materialism value, variety-seeking tendency, and frugal lifestyle are more likely to perceive functional values, including transaction value, flexibility value, and pro-social (environmentally friendly) utilities, in their choices of renting over buying. By contrast, consumers with higher degrees of terminal materialistic value and BESC are more likely to perceive the social values in their renting choices over buying. The implications for the evolution of access-based consumption and renting markets and the strategic management for rental service firms are discussed.

Keywords: renting in the digital age, access-based consumption, sharing economy, brand loyalty

RESUME EN FRANÇAIS

1. Contexte et Objectifs de la Recherche

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, la recherche a montré que les relations des consommateurs avec leurs biens ont commencé à changer. La tendance à privilégier l'accès aux objets plutôt que la possession de ces objets s'est accentuée (par exemple, Rifkin, 2000, 2015 ; Lawson et al., 2016 ; Belk, 2014 ; Bardhi et Eckhart, 2012). Bardhi et Eckhart (2012) a défini ce mode de consommation comme « la consommation basée sur l'accès ». Rifkin (2000) qualifie ce mode de consommation comme « l'âge de l'accès », dans lequel l'accès remplacerait la propriété comme symbole de liberté. Bardhi et Eckhardt (2012 ; 2017) soutiennent que, par rapport à la possession, l'accès est un mode de consommation plus transitoire, permettant une flexibilité et une adaptabilité correspondant aux projets d'identités liquides d'un consommateur. Belk (2014a) indique que nous entrons peut-être dans l'économie de la post-propriété, transformant l'ancienne sagesse selon laquelle « vous êtes ce que vous possédez » en une nouvelle sagesse « vous êtes ce à quoi vous pouvez accéder ». La location (par exemple, Rent the Runway), le partage (par exemple, Couchsurfing) et la musique à la demande (par exemple, Spotify) sont des exemples de services appartenant à cette consommation basée sur l'accès qui a connu une croissance impressionnante dans le monde ces dernières années (Eckhardt et al., 2019).

Parmi les divers modes de consommation basés sur l'accès, cette thèse se concentre sur la location, plus précisément sur ce que nous appelons « la location à l'ère du numérique », en référence à un mode de location par abonnement via des plateformes numériques. La location à l'ère du numérique diffère de la location traditionnelle dans des boutiques physiques. Premièrement, la location numérique offre un abonnement périodique pour une fraction du prix de la location physique traditionnelle.

Deuxièmement, les consommateurs peuvent accéder temporairement et de manière récurrente à des centaines de sélections d'articles à partir d'une étagère virtuelle dans un environnement infonuagique. La propriété légale de ces articles loués reste au service de location (Schaefers et al., 2016). De plus, les locataires peuvent passer des commandes à la demande via une application et louer de nouveaux articles dans la bibliothèque numérique avec davantage de flexibilité.

Le succès de ce nouveau mode de consommation tient à plusieurs facteurs. Premièrement, la nouvelle location à l'ère du numérique a la capacité de créer de la valeur sociale pour les utilisateurs en permettant aux consommateurs d'interagir avec d'autres utilisateurs sur les médias sociaux, et ainsi de développer un sentiment d'appartenance à une communauté de locataires. A plus long terme, les consommateurs peuvent transformer leurs habitudes de consommation en louant davantage et en achetant moins. Deuxièmement, le développement de l'intelligence artificielle a permis à de nouvelles sociétés de location de recommander à leurs consommateurs des choix personnalisés en fonction de leurs activités de navigation en ligne. Une telle expérience d'achat personnalisée peut développer et renforcer l'attachement émotionnel et la fidélité aux marques des articles loués. Cela crée une expérience de location augmentée dans les mondes numérique et physique par rapport au mode de location traditionnel.

Ces dernières années, des startups (par exemple, YCloset en Chine, Le Closet en France, Ziniosa en Inde, Taelor aux États-Unis) ont adopté un tel modèle de location. Certaines marques pionnières ont également lancé des services de location (par exemple, The Laurent Look). Le marché mondial de la location de vêtements en ligne pourrait atteindre 1600,9 millions de dollars en 2027, contre 935 millions

de dollars en 2020, avec un TCAC de 7,5 % en 2021-2027¹ (Market Watch, décembre 2021). En tant que modèle métier circulaire critique, le modèle locatif représenterait 17 % du chiffre d'affaires d'une « hypothétique marque de luxe durable » en 2030² (Bain & Co., mars 2021).

Malgré l'intérêt croissant pour le nouveau modèle économique de la location, ce modèle est encore négligé par la plupart des grandes marques³ (Business of Fashion, mars 2021). Les marques de luxe et de mode sont davantage préoccupées par l'exclusivité et la protection de la marque⁴ (Vogue Business, juillet 2021). En ce qui concerne la recherche académique, la littérature existante en sait très peu sur les motivations des consommateurs à souscrire à un mode de consommation ou à un autre, et sur comment le choix des utilisateurs d'une consommation basée sur l'accès plutôt que sur la possession traditionnelle des produits pourrait impacter leurs relations avec les marques des biens loués.

Les objectifs de cette recherche comprennent donc deux aspects. Tout d'abord, du point de vue psychologique des individus, nous explorons les rôles des traits de personnalité, y compris le matérialisme (Richins, 2004), la recherche de variété (Olsen et al., 2016), la frugalité (Lastovicka et al., 1999) et l'engagement pour la marque en concept de soi (BESC ; Sprott et al., 2009), afin d'expliquer les préférences des utilisateurs pour la location plutôt que pour l'achat. Deuxièmement, basé sur des théories dans la discipline du marketing sur la relation entre les consommateurs et les marques, nous explorons comment le choix des utilisateurs pourrait affecter leur attachement émotionnel aux marques (Thomson et al., 2005), et par la suite influencer leur fidélité à la marque (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001 ; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978) des objets loués.

¹ <https://www.marketwatch.com/press-release/global-online-clothing-rental-market-2021-worldwide-covid-19-impact-analysis-business-opportunities-industry-size-share-key-applications-demands-growth-trends-analysis-and-forecast-to-2027-2021-12-08>

² <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxco-2030-a-vision-of-sustainable-luxury>

³ <https://www.businessoffashion.com/briefings/luxury/resale-or-rental-where-should-brands-place-their-bets/>

⁴ <https://www.voguebusiness.com/technology/dont-call-it-rental-inside-the-rebrand-for-fashion>

2. Antécédents de la consommation de la location

La littérature existante montre divers résultats sur les motivations des consommateurs à participer à la consommation basée sur l'accès (par exemple, Hennig-Thurau, Henning et Sattler 2007 ; Ozanne et Ballantine 2010 ; Lamberton et Rose 2012). Lamberton et Rose (2012) constatent que le gain financier perçu est un prédicteur efficace de la propension à utiliser les services du partage des automobiles. Au contraire, les recherches empiriques d'Oyedele et Simpson (2018) dans le contexte du partage d'automobiles, du partage de chambres et du partage d'articles ménagers ne révèlent aucun effet direct significatif de l'utilité de la transaction sur l'intention des consommateurs participant à un tel service de partage. Certaines études trouvent un lien entre les préoccupations prosociales ou pro-environnementales et la consommation basée sur l'accès (Hamari et al., 2016 ; Leismann et al., 2013 ; Piscicelli et al., 2015), alors que d'autres études ne trouvent pas de relation significative entre l'utilité prosociale perçue des consommateurs et leur activité du partage (Bardhi et Eckhardt, 2012 ; Lamberton et Rose, 2012 ; Oyedele et Simpson, 2018). La littérature existante montre également des résultats contradictoires dans la compréhension de la relation entre l'utilité sociale perçue des consommateurs et la participation à la consommation basée sur l'accès. Par exemple, les études empiriques d'Oyedele et Simpson (2018) et de Lamberton et Rose (2012) ne démontrent aucune relation significative entre la valeur sociale perçue par des consommateurs et leurs intentions d'utiliser Zipcar. En revanche, Oyedele et Simpson (2018) identifient une relation importante entre l'utilité sociale perçue par des consommateurs et leur objectif de partager des chambres.

Des études précédentes suggèrent que ces résultats divergents peuvent être dus à des contextes de recherche ou à des différences dans les méthodologies (par exemple, des entretiens qualitatifs par rapport à des études quantitatives). A notre connaissance, un facteur critique n'a pas été étudié dans les

recherches précédentes : comment les traits de personnalité des individus impactent leur relation avec leurs biens. Ce manque est critique car ce type de facteur pourrait représenter une explication essentielle de la dissonance dans la compréhension des motivations des consommateurs de services de location. Par conséquent, l'un des objectifs de recherche de cette thèse est d'étudier les rôles des traits personnels sélectionnés pour expliquer les choix des consommateurs de louer plutôt que d'acheter. Parmi les nombreuses caractéristiques qui composent la personnalité d'un consommateur, des études précédentes en ont identifié certaines comme particulièrement explicatives de l'importance accordée par les consommateurs à leurs biens et à la marque qu'ils achètent et consomment. Ces traits de personnalité sont le matérialisme, la recherche de variété, la frugalité et l'engagement pour la marque dans le concept de soi. Les justifications du choix de ces variables sont résumées ci-dessous.

Matérialisme

En tant que l'un des principaux concepts fondamentaux de la culture de consommation, les conceptualisations du matérialisme mettent en évidence la possessivité et l'importance des possessions dans la création de l'identité des consommateurs (par exemple, Belk, 1985 ; Kasser et al., 2014 ; Richins et Dawson, 1992). La littérature existante suggère que le matérialisme est corrélé négativement avec le mode de consommation 'non-proprétaire'. Par exemple, la recherche empirique quantitative de Tissier-Desbordes (2008) comparant les consommateurs en France, en Allemagne, en Italie et au Royaume-Uni montre que la culture matérialiste est négativement liée au comportement de location. La recherche qualitative de Lawson et al. (2016) suggère que la possessivité et le matérialisme pourraient avoir un effet dissuasif sur l'accès aux produits. Akbar et al. (2016) et Belk (1987) indiquent également que le matérialisme inhibe le partage. Cependant, la consommation locative manque encore de recherches quantitatives explorant comment la valeur matérialiste d'un individu (Richins et Dawson 1992) peut

affecter son choix de louer plutôt que d'acheter. Plus précisément, la recherche existante néglige les différentes dimensions du matérialisme et ne tire qu'une conclusion générale de son impact sur la consommation basée sur l'accès. Par conséquent, cette thèse vise à explorer les effets respectifs des différentes dimensions du matérialisme sur la valeur perçue par le consommateur pour la location.

Recherche de la variété

Les premières recherches sur les consommateurs ont démontré que les consommateurs les plus à la recherche de variété ont une probabilité plus faible d'acheter la même marque à la prochaine occasion (Givon 1984, Lattin et McAlister 1985, Kah, Kalwani et Morrison 1986). Sur le sujet de la consommation basée sur l'accès, la recherche existante examine principalement la recherche de variété comme l'un des motifs d'accès à au lieu de posséder un produit (par exemple, Bardhi et Eckhardt, 2012 ; Lamberton et Rose, 2012 ; Lawson et al., 2016 ; Hawlitschek et al., 2018). Des études empiriques dans différents contextes (par exemple, la location de voitures, le peer-to-peer partage) indiquent que le phénomène de consommation basée sur l'accès émerge lorsque les consommateurs peuvent choisir parmi un choix élargi de produits et de marques. Cependant, la consommation basée sur l'accès manque encore de recherches quantitatives pour explorer la recherche de variété en tant que trait de personnalité et évaluer son impact sur le choix des consommateurs de louer plutôt que d'acheter. Plus précisément, louer au lieu d'acheter offre aux consommateurs une grande quantité de choix de marques. Par conséquent, cette thèse vise à combler cette lacune de la recherche en étudiant comment le trait de la recherche de variété des consommateurs pourrait impacter sur les valeurs perçues par les consommateurs dans la consommation de location.

Frugalité

Dans les littératures sur la consommation et la psychologie sociale, très peu de recherche étudient le concept de la frugalité, car il est considéré comme l'opposé du consumérisme. Dans l'usage courant, le consumérisme fait référence à la tendance des personnes vivant dans une économie capitaliste à s'engager dans un mode de vie de matérialisme excessif qui tourne autour d'une surconsommation réflexive, inutile ou ostentatoire (Investopedia ; mise à jour le 18 mars 2021). En revanche, la frugalité est définie comme « un trait de style de vie caractérisé par le degré auquel les consommateurs sont à la fois limités dans l'acquisition et dans l'utilisation ingénieuse de biens et services économiques pour atteindre des objectifs à plus long terme » (Lastovicka et al., 1999 ; p88). Le lien entre frugalité et matérialisme n'est pas apparent. Certaines études indiquent que la frugalité volontaire est liée à des niveaux inférieurs de matérialisme (Goldsmith et al., 2014), tandis que d'autres études telles que Lastovicka (2006) suggèrent que certains consommateurs frugaux sont également matérialistes. La frugalité est souvent mentionnée comme l'une des tendances importantes de consommation au future⁵ (Ernst & Young Future Consumer Index ; avril 2020). Ainsi, cette thèse étudie comment la frugalité influence la préférence pour la location plutôt que pour l'achat. Combinée à l'analyse de l'impact du matérialisme, cette thèse vise à explorer comment ces deux variables peuvent interagir avec les différentes valeurs perçues par les consommateurs dans la consommation de la location.

Engagement de la marque dans le concept de soi (BESC)

Semblable à la différence individuelle dans la façon dont les consommateurs avec divers degrés de trait de matérialisme peuvent souligner l'importance des possessions dans la définition différente de

⁵ https://www.ey.com/en_us/consumer-products-retail/how-covid-19-could-change-consumer-behavior

leur identité, l'engagement pour la marque dans le concept de soi (BESC) (Sprott et al., 2009) suggère que les consommateurs ont divers degrés d'une tendance à définir l'identité de soi avec ses marques préférées. Dans des études empiriques par Sprott et al. (2009), les auteurs démontrent qu'il y a une relation positive entre le matérialisme et le BESC, indiquant que les consommateurs à haut BESC ont tendance à posséder davantage de biens matériels que les consommateurs à faible BESC. Ces résultats suggèrent également que les consommateurs ayant des niveaux plus élevés de BESC accordent une attention accrue aux marques de biens matériels, comme en témoigne un meilleur rappel des noms de marque des produits qu'ils possèdent. Par rapport à la possession, dans le contexte de la location, la relation de la possession engagée à long terme entre les consommateurs et les biens se transforme en une relation temporaire à court terme d'expérience de location avec les marques des articles loués. Cependant, rien n'est connu à ce jour sur comment le BESC pourrait affecter le comportement de la consommation basée sur l'accès ou l'attachement émotionnel aux marques des articles loués.

3. Conséquences de la consommation locative

Hormis quelques études précédentes explorant les antécédents des consommateurs en matière de préférences de location par rapport aux préférences d'achat, aucune littérature n'a étudié la question pour savoir comment un tel comportement de location influence les relations entre les consommateurs et les produits qu'ils louent. Supposons que les consommateurs puissent facilement et rapidement changer de marque sans être contraints par le « fardeau de la propriété » (Moeller et Wittkowski, 2010). Dans ce cas, l'analyse de la façon dont les relations entre les consommateurs et ces marques peuvent évoluer est en effet cruciale. Plus précisément, deux variables sont essentielles à expliquer le comportement des

consommateurs vis-à-vis de ces marques au futur, y compris la fidélité du consommateur à la marque et l'attachement émotionnel des consommateurs aux marques.

Fidélité envers les marques des articles loués

La fidélité à la marque est un sujet de recherche important dans les études de consommation. Cependant, la littérature existante se concentre principalement sur l'examen de la fidélité à la marque des consommateurs dans le contexte de l'achat. Seulement quelques études ont exploré les relations entre la fidélité à la marque et la consommation basée sur l'accès. Bendapudi et Berry (1997) suggèrent que la fidélité à un produit ou à une marque pourrait dissuader les consommateurs de participer à une consommation basée sur l'accès, affirmant que les consommateurs ont tendance à choisir systématiquement le produit avec lequel ils ont eu de bonnes expériences. L'analyse typologique de Lawson et al. (2016) révèle que les consommateurs fidèles à un produit ou à une marque spécifique seraient moins susceptibles d'accéder aux produits car ces consommateurs ne recherchent pas activement le changement. Ces études explorent comment la fidélité à la marque peut avoir un impact sur les intentions des consommateurs de participer à la consommation basée sur l'accès. Cependant, la question de savoir si et comment la consommation de location des consommateurs peut affecter leur fidélité envers les articles loués reste inconnue. Cette thèse vise à combler cette lacune de recherche en évaluant les impacts potentiels des valeurs perçues par les consommateurs dans la consommation de location sur leur fidélité envers les marques des articles loués.

Attachement émotionnel aux marques des objets loués

Traditionnellement, les attachements à la marque sont souvent basés sur les interactions des consommateurs avec les objets d'attachement au fil du temps (Baldwin et al., 1996). Par rapport à la

possession d'un objet, la consommation locative représente une relation temporaire avec les produits accédés dans un contexte liquide. Les consommateurs ont moins de temps pour interagir avec un objet loué. De ce point de vue, la location peut remettre en question la façon dont les consommateurs développent un attachement émotionnel aux marques. La location de la consommation à l'ère du numérique permet simultanément aux consommateurs d'accéder à de nombreux éléments qui contribuent à créer leurs projets d'identité liquide (Bardhi et Eckhardt, 2017).

Les consommateurs pourraient également être attirés par les marques en raison de nouvelles visions, ressources et identités qui offrent des opportunités d'auto-expansion (Patwardhan et Balasubramanian, 2011 ; 2013). Cependant, aucune recherche empirique n'explore comment la consommation de location pourrait affecter leur attachement émotionnel aux marques. Par conséquent, cette thèse vise à combler cette lacune de recherche en étudiant comment les valeurs perçues par les consommateurs dans la location peuvent avoir un impact sur leur attachement émotionnel envers les marques d'articles loués.

4. Méthodologie et résultats principaux

Pour étudier les impacts du matérialisme, de la recherche de variété, de la frugalité et du BESC en tant qu'antécédents sur le choix du consommateur de louer plutôt que d'acheter, ainsi que l'impact sur la fidélité à la marque et l'attachement du consommateur aux marques, nous avons réalisé les études empiriques suivantes :

(1) En novembre 2019, nous avons mené une enquête en ligne auprès d'un échantillon de 335 utilisateurs actifs de la plus grande société de location de mode en Asie. Nous avons créé un questionnaire pour mesurer chaque variable. Pour tous les antécédents et résultats du modèle, nous avons emprunté les échelles existantes de la littérature. Pour opérationnaliser la préférence des consommateurs pour la location plutôt que pour l'achat, nous avons développé notre échelle, inspirée par des recherches antérieures (Lamberton & Rose's 2012 ; Oyedele & Simpson 2018), et adaptée au contexte spécifique de la recherche actuelle. L'analyse factorielle confirmatoire démontre l'existence de deux types de valeurs perçues par les utilisateurs dans la location plutôt que dans l'achat. En utilisant les échelles de Lamberton et Rose (2012), le premier facteur représente la « valeur de fonction perçue » et le second définit la « valeur sociale perçue ».

(2) Nous avons utilisé la modélisation par équations simultanées (SEM) pour quantifier les relations entre les variables. Les résultats empiriques montrent que la valeur fonctionnelle perçue a un effet négatif significatif sur la fidélité à la marque (coefficient de trajectoire = -0.108 , $p = 0.018 < 0.05$), tandis que la valeur sociale perçue révèle un effet positif mais non significatif (coefficient de trajectoire = 0.079 , $p = 0.095 > 0.05$). Ces deux valeurs perçues montrent des effets positifs significatifs sur l'attachement émotionnel à la marque d'un bien loué. Les antécédents différents des deux valeurs perçues peuvent expliquer de tels effets opposés. Par exemple, le matérialisme instrumental, la recherche de variété et la « frugalité volontaire » montrent des effets positifs significatifs sur la valeur fonctionnelle perçue, avec des coefficients de trajectoire de 0.110 ($p = < 0.043$), 0.246 ($p = 0.01$) et 0.251 ($p = 0.01$), respectivement ; en revanche, le matérialisme terminal et le BESC montrent des effets positifs significatifs sur la valeur sociale perçue, avec des coefficients de trajectoire de 0.119 ($p = 0.043$) et 0.265 ($p = 0.01$), respectivement. L'indice d'ajustement comparatif (CFI) ($= 0.970$) et l'indice d'erreur quadratique moyenne d'approximation (RMSEA) ($= 0.076$) montrent que le modèle proposé est bien ajusté.

5. Contributions principales de la thèse

Cette thèse apporte sept contributions à la recherche sur la consommation basée sur l'accès et la consommation 'liquide' :

(1) Les résultats empiriques de cette thèse révèlent que la recherche de variété a un effet positif sur la valeur fonctionnelle perçue du locataire mais pas sur la valeur sociale. Cette découverte améliore la compréhension de la relation entre la recherche de variété et la consommation basée sur l'accès.

(2) Les résultats de cette thèse remettent en question l'hypothèse généralisée des recherches précédentes selon laquelle la consommation basée sur l'accès met l'accent sur la valeur d'expérience et moins sur la valeur d'identité des objets (par exemple, Price et al., 2000 ; Chen, 2009). Plus précisément, les résultats de cette thèse démontrent que l'engagement pour la marque dans le concept de soi (BESC) a un effet positif sur la valeur sociale perçue dans la location. Ce résultat peut s'expliquer par l'idée que les locataires qui ont un degré plus élevé de trait BESC peuvent percevoir que les interactions avec d'autres locataires améliorent la valeur symbolique de la marque des articles loués, comme la représentation d'identités liquides ou nomades.

(3) En réponse aux débats des recherches précédentes sur la question de savoir si la consommation basée sur l'accès décourage ou encourage l'émergence de la communauté de marque (e.g., Belk, 2010 ; Bardhi et Eckhardt, 2012 ; Mohlmann, 2015), cette thèse suggère que la question de savoir si et comment la communauté de marque émerge dans la consommation basée sur l'accès dépend de la façon dont les consommateurs perçoivent la valeur sociale. Cette thèse fournit des preuves empiriques originales pour comprendre comment les caractéristiques des individus peuvent impacter la valeur sociale perçue dans le choix de louer plutôt que d'acheter. Les résultats empiriques suggèrent que les

consommateurs ayant des degrés plus élevés de matérialisme terminal et d'engagement envers la marque dans les traits de concept de soi sont davantage susceptibles de percevoir des valeurs sociales dans la location plutôt que dans l'achat.

(4) Cette thèse propose des découvertes empiriques pionnières et originales pour comprendre la relation entre les locataires et les marques des biens loués. Les résultats pratiques de cette thèse soulignent les effets positifs de la participation à la consommation locative sur l'attachement émotionnel à la marque des biens loués. Cette thèse montre un effet négatif des valeurs fonctionnelles perçues par un utilisateur dans le choix de la location plutôt que de l'achat sur la fidélité de l'utilisateur envers la marque des biens loués. En revanche, l'impact de la valeur sociale perçue sur la fidélité d'un utilisateur envers la marque des biens loués n'est pas significatif.

(5) En réponse aux discussions divergentes dans la littérature existante sur la relation entre le matérialisme et la consommation basée sur l'accès, cette thèse propose de considérer deux types différents de matérialisme, à savoir le "matérialisme terminal" et le "matérialisme instrumental", afin d'évaluer comment le matérialisme affecte la consommation basée sur l'accès.

(6) Cette thèse apporte des preuves concordantes pour comprendre le trait « matérialiste frugal » décrit par Lastovicka (2006). Les résultats empiriques de cette thèse suggèrent que les matérialistes frugaux ont tendance à percevoir les valeurs fonctionnelles dans la consommation locative. Les matérialistes frugaux reconnaissent la location comme un moyen alternatif de signaler leur identité, et ils choisissent volontairement ce mode de consommation dans le cadre de leur mode de vie frugal.

(7) Cette thèse adopte une approche exploratoire permettant d'engager un dialogue entre différentes disciplines : marketing, modèles d'affaires et développement durable. Pour comprendre la

variable principale sur le choix des consommateurs de louer au lieu d'acheter, nous évaluons comment les consommateurs perçoivent les utilités économiques, pro-sociales (pro-environnementales) et sociales dans la location. L'exploration des antécédents et des conséquences des valeurs perçues par les consommateurs dans le processus de location offre une compréhension globale des comportements de la location des consommateurs à partir de diverses perspectives.

6. Structure de la thèse

La thèse est structurée en sept chapitres. Les chapitres 1 à 4 constituent les fondements théoriques. Le chapitre 1 introduit la principale variable d'intérêt à étudier dans la thèse sur le choix des consommateurs de louer plutôt que d'acheter à l'ère du numérique. Le chapitre 2 fournit des arguments sur la façon dont chaque antécédent du modèle (le matérialisme, la recherche de variété, la frugalité et l'engagement pour la marque dans le concept de soi) est conceptualisé pour comprendre les traits de personnalité, les valeurs, et les modes de vie des consommateurs. Le chapitre 3 explique comment les deux conséquences de la consommation locative examinés dans cette thèse sont conceptualisés : l'attachement émotionnel à la marque des biens loués et la fidélité de l'utilisateur envers la marque des biens loués. Le chapitre 4 présente le cadre conceptuel proposé avec des hypothèses sur les relations entre les variables choisies. Le chapitre 5 présente la démarche méthodologique d'évaluation du cadre conceptuel proposé. Le chapitre 6 décrit le processus de collecte des échantillons de données, l'analyse statistique et les résultats des tests d'hypothèse. Enfin, le chapitre 7 fournit une discussion générale basée sur les résultats de l'analyse des données, présente les contributions théoriques, les implications managériales et les limites de cette thèse, et propose un plan de recherche pour de futures études.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Research Context And Objectives

Over the past two decades, research has shown that consumers' relationships with their possessions have started to change. The tendency to favor the mere access to objects rather than the ownership of these objects has grown (e.g., Rifkin, 2000, 2015; Lawson et al., 2016; Belk, 2014; Bardhi and Eckhart, 2012). Academic research refers to this mode of consumption as "access-based consumption." Rifkin (2000) pertains to such consumption mode as "the age of access," in which access would replace ownership as a symbol of freedom. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012; 2017) argue that, compared to ownership, access is a more transient mode of consumption, enabling flexibility and adaptability suitable for liquid consumer identity projects. Belk (2014a) indicates that we may just be entering the post-ownership economy, transforming the former wisdom saying that "you are what you own" into a new wisdom "you are what you can access." Renting (e.g., Rent the Runway), sharing (e.g., Couchsurfing), and streaming (e.g., Spotify) are examples of behaviors belonging to this access-based consumption that has been experiencing impressive growth worldwide in the past years (Eckhardt et al., 2019).

Among diverse access-based consumption modes, the focus of this thesis is on renting, specifically on what we call "renting consumption in the digital age," referring to a subscription-based renting mode through digital platforms. Digitalized renting differs from the traditional mom-and-pop rental shops in many dimensions. First, digital renting offers a lower-priced monthly subscription fee to the rental service that is fractional compared to the total retail prices. Second, consumers can access temporarily and recurrently hundreds of selections of items from a

centralized “shelf in the cloud.” The legal ownership of these rented items remains with the renting service retailer (Schaefers et al., 2016). In addition, renters can place on-demand orders through the digital application and switch to new renting items in the digital library with more flexibility.

The success of this new consumption mode is due to several factors. First, new renting in the digital age has the capacity to create social value for users by allowing consumers to interact with other users on social media groups, and thus develop a sense of belonging to a renters’ community. For the longer term, with such subscribed renting option, consumers may transform their consumption habits by renting more and buying less. Moreover, the development of artificial intelligence has enabled new renting companies to recommend to their consumers customized choices based on their online browsing activities. Potentially, such a personalized shopping experience can also develop and enhance emotional attachment and loyalty to the brands of rented items. Consequently, it can create an augmented renting experience in both digital and physical worlds compared to the traditional renting mode.

In recent years, a group of startups (e.g., YCloset in China, Le Closet in France, Ziniosa in India, Taelor in the US) have adopted such a new renting model. Some pioneering brands have also launched renting services (e.g., The Laurent Look). The global online clothing rental market is expected to reach USD 1600.9 million in 2027, from USD 935 million in 2020, at a CAGR of 7.5% in 2021–2027¹ (Market Watch, December 2021). As a critical circular business model, the renting model would account for 17% of the revenue for a “hypothetical sustainable luxury brand” in 2030² (Bain & Co., March 2021).

¹ <https://www.marketwatch.com/press-release/global-online-clothing-rental-market-2021-worldwide-covid-19-impact-analysis-business-opportunities-industry-size-share-key-applications-demands-growth-trends-analysis-and-forecast-to-2027-2021-12-08>

² <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxco-2030-a-vision-of-sustainable-luxury>

Despite the growing interest in the new renting business model and renting consumption, such a model is still overlooked by most major brands³ (Business of Fashion, March 2021). Specifically, luxury and fashion brands are concerned about exclusivity and brand protection⁴ (Vogue Business, July 2021). With regard to the academic research, the existing literature knows very little about consumers' motivations to prefer one consumption mode over the other and knows close to nothing about whether and how the users' choice of access-based consumption over traditional ownership of the products may impact their relationships with the brands of rented items.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are twofold. First, from individuals' psychological perspective, we explore the roles of personality traits, including materialism (Richins, 2004), variety seeking (Olsen et al., 2016), frugality (Lastovicka et al., 1999), and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC; Sprott et al., 2009) to explain users' preferences for renting over buying. Second, based on marketing research theories on the consumer–brand relationship, we explore how the users' choice of renting over buying may affect their emotional attachment to brands (Thomson et al., 2005) and subsequently influence their brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978) toward the brands of the rented items.

2. Antecedents Of The Renting Consumption

The existing literature shows diverse results on consumers' motivations to participate in access-based consumption (e.g., Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler 2007; Ozanne and Ballantine 2010; Lamberton and Rose 2012). For example, Lamberton and Rose (2012) find that perceived financial gain is an effective predictor of the propensity to use car-sharing services. On the contrary, Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) empirical research in the car sharing, room sharing,

³ <https://www.businessoffashion.com/briefings/luxury/resale-or-rental-where-should-brands-place-their-bets/>

⁴ <https://www.voguebusiness.com/technology/dont-call-it-rental-inside-the-rebrand-for-fashion>

and household goods sharing contexts reveals no significant direct effect of transaction utility on consumers' intention to participate in such sharing service. Some studies find a link between pro-social or environmental concerns and access-based consumption (Hamari et al., 2016; Leismann et al., 2013; Piscicelli et al., 2015), whereas other studies do not find a significant relationship between pro-social and commercial sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton and Rose, 2012; Oyedele and Simpson, 2018). The existing literature also shows contradictory findings in understanding the relationship between consumers' perceived social utility and participation in access-based consumption. For example, the empirical studies of Oyedele and Simpson (2018) and Lamberton and Rose (2012) demonstrate no significant relationship between social value and intentions to use Zipcar. By contrast, an important relationship between social utility and room-sharing purposes is identified.

Previous studies suggest that these divergent results may be due to research contexts or differences in methodologies (e.g., qualitative interviews versus quantitative studies). However, to the best of our knowledge, a critical factor has not been investigated in previous research: the differences in individuals' personality traits related to consumers' relationships with their possessions. This lack is more critical as this type of factor could represent an essential explanation for such dissonance in understanding consumers' motivations to participate in access-based consumption. Hence, one of the research objectives of this thesis is to investigate the roles of the chosen personal traits in explaining consumers' choices of renting over buying. Among the numerous characteristics comprising a consumer's personality, past studies have identified some as particularly explicative of the importance given by consumers to their possessions and to the brand they buy and consume. These personality traits are materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and brand engagement in self-concept. The justifications for the choice of these variables are summarized as follows.

Materialism

As one of the main cornerstone concepts for consumerism culture, the conceptualizations of materialism highlight possessiveness and the importance of possessions in creating consumers' self-identities (e.g., Belk, 1985; Kasser et al., 2014; Richins and Dawson, 1992). Most existing literature suggests that materialism negatively correlates with the non-ownership consumption mode. For example, Tissier-Desbordes' (2008) quantitative empirical research comparing consumers in France, Germany, Italy, and the UK shows that the materialism culture is negatively related to renting behavior. Lawson et al.'s (2016) qualitative research suggests that themes of possessiveness and materialism could be deterrents to accessing products. Akbar et al. (2016) and Belk (1987) also indicate that materialism inhibits sharing. However, the renting consumption still lacks quantitative research exploring how an individual's materialism value (Richins and Dawson 1992) may affect one's choice of renting over buying. Specifically, the existing research overlooks the different dimensions of materialism but only draws a general conclusion when analyzing its impact on access-based consumption. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the respective effects of the different dimensions of materialism on the consumer's perceived value for renting rather than buying.

Variety Seeking

Early consumer research has demonstrated that consumers with higher levels of variety seeking have a lower probability of purchasing the same brand on the next occasion (Givon 1984, Lattin and McAlister 1985, Kah, Kalwani and Morrison 1986). More recently, in the research stream of access-based consumption, the existing research mainly examines variety seeking as one of the motives for accessing a product rather than a commitment to it (e.g., Bardhi and Eckhardt,

2012; Lamberton and Rose, 2012; Lawson et al., 2016; Hawlitschek et al., 2018). Empirical studies in different contexts (e.g., car renting, peer-to-peer sharing) indicate that the access-based consumption phenomenon emerges when consumers choose from an additional bandwidth of products and brands. However, the access-based consumption still lacks quantitative research to explore variety seeking as a personality trait and assess its impact on the consumers' choice of renting over buying. Specifically, fashion rental provides consumers with a large quantity of selection of brands from which to choose. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by investigating how consumers' variety-seeking trait may impact their perceived values in renting consumption.

Frugality

Both consumer research and social psychology disciplines scarcely investigate the construct of frugality, which is considered as the opposite of consumerism. In common use, consumerism refers to the tendency of people living in a capitalistic economy to engage in a lifestyle of excessive materialism that revolves around reflexive, wasteful or conspicuous overconsumption (Investopedia; updated on March 18, 2021). By contrast, frugality is defined as a “consumer lifestyle trait characterized by the degree to which consumers are both restrained in acquiring and in resourcefully using economic goods and services to achieve longer-term goals” (Lastovicka et al., 1999; p88). The link between frugality and materialism is not apparent. Some studies indicate that voluntary frugality is linked with lower levels of materialism (Goldsmith et al., 2014), whereas other studies such as Lastovicka (2006) suggest that some frugal consumers are also materialistic. Frugality is often mentioned as one of the important future consumer trends⁵

⁵ https://www.ey.com/en_us/consumer-products-retail/how-covid-19-could-change-consumer-behavior

(Ernst & Young Future Consumer Index; April 2020); thus, this thesis investigates how frugality influences the preference for renting over buying. Combined with the analysis of the impact of materialism, this thesis aims to explore how these two constructs may interact with consumers' different perceived values for renting.

Brand Engagement in Self-concept (BESC)

Similar to the individual difference in how consumers with various degrees of materialism trait may emphasize the importance of possessions in defining one's identity differently, brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) (Sprott et al., 2009) suggests that consumers have diverse degrees of a tendency to define self-identity with one's favorite brands. In their empirical studies, Sprott et al. (2009) demonstrate a positive relationship between materialism and BESC, indicating that high-BESC consumers may possess more material possessions than low-BESC consumers. Their findings also suggest that consumers with higher levels of BESC pay increased attention to the brands of material possessions, as evidenced by a better recall of the brand names of products they own. However, nothing is known to date about how BESC may affect consumers' access-based consumption or their emotional attachment to the brands of the rented items, in which the long-term committed ownership relationship between consumers and possessions changes to a temporary short-term rental experience with the brands of the rented items.

3. Consequences Of The Renting Consumption

Aside from a few past studies exploring consumers' antecedents of renting over buying preferences, no literature has investigated the issue of how such renting behavior influences the relationships between consumers and the products they rent. Suppose consumers can easily and quickly change their brands without being constrained by the "burden of ownership" (Moeller and

Wittkowski, 2010). In this case, the analysis of how their relationships with these brands may evolve is indeed crucial. Specifically, two constructs are essential for brand loyalty and consumer emotional attachment to brands. Research certainly shows that these constructs are critical to explaining future consumer behavior vis-à-vis these brands.

Loyalty Toward the Brands of Rented Items

Brand loyalty has been a significant research subject in consumer research. However, the existing literature mainly focuses on examining consumers' brand loyalty in the context of acquisition behaviors. Thus far, only a few studies have explored the relationships between brand loyalty and access-based consumption. For example, Bendapudi and Berry (1997) suggest that product or brand loyalty could deter consumers from participating in access-based consumption, arguing that consumers tend to choose the product they have had good experiences with consistently. Lawson et al.'s (2016) cluster analysis reveals that consumers who exhibit loyalty to a specific product or brand would be less likely to access products since they do not actively seek change. These studies explore how brand loyalty may impact consumers' intentions to participate in access-based consumption. However, the issue of whether and how consumers' renting consumption may affect their attitudinal and behavioral loyalty toward the rented items remains unknown. Hence, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by assessing the potential impacts of consumers' perceived value in renting consumption on their loyalty toward the brand of rented items.

Emotional Attachment to the Brands of Rented Items

Traditionally, brand attachments are often based on consumers' interactions with attachment objects over time (Baldwin et al., 1996). Compared to the ownership of an object,

renting consumption represents a temporary relationship with the accessed products in a liquid context. Consumers have significantly less time to interact with a rented object. Hence, renting may challenge how consumers develop an emotional attachment to brands from this perspective. Renting consumption in the digital age simultaneously allows consumers to access many items that help create their liquid identity projects (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017).

From this perspective, consumers could also be attracted to brands because of novel views, resources, and identities that offer opportunities for self-expansion (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; 2013). However, no empirical research explores how renting consumption could affect their emotional attachment to brands. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by investigating how consumers' perceived values in renting may impact their emotional attachment toward the brands of rented items.

4. Methodology And Main Results

To investigate the impacts of materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and BESC as antecedents on the consumer's choice of renting over buying as well as the result of renting consumption on brand loyalty and consumer attachment to brands, we performed the following empirical studies:

(1) In November 2019, we conducted an online survey using a sample of 335 consumers who are active users at the largest fashion rental company in Asia. We created a questionnaire to measure each concept. For all the antecedents and outcomes of the model, we borrowed existing scales from the literature. To operationalize consumers' preference for renting over buying, we developed our scale, inspired by previous research (Lamberton & Rose's 2012; Oyedele & Simpson 2018), and adapted to the specific context in the current research. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrates the existence of two factors of users' perceived values in renting over buying.

Using Lambertson and Rose's (2012) scales, the first factor represented "perceived function value" and the second one defined "perceived social value."

(2) We used simultaneous equation modeling (SEM) to quantify the relationships between variables. Specifically, empirical results show that perceived functional value has a significant negative effect on brand loyalty (path coefficient = $-.108$, $p = .018 < .05$), whereas perceived social value reveals a positive but not significant effect on brand loyalty (path coefficient = $.079$, $p = .095 > .05$). These two perceived values show significant positive effects on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item. Different antecedents of the two dimensions of perceived values can explain such opposite effects. For example, instrumental materialism, variety seeking, and "voluntary frugality" show significant positive effects on perceived functional value, with path coefficients of $.110$ ($p = .043$), $.246$ ($p = .01$) and $.251$ ($p = .01$), respectively; by contrast, terminal materialism and BESC show significant positive effects on perceived social value, with path coefficients of $.119$ ($p = .043$) and $.265$ ($p = .01$), respectively. Comparative fit index (CFI) ($=.970$) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) index ($=.076$) demonstrate the relatively best-fitting model.

5. Main Contributions Of The Dissertation

This thesis provides a sixfold contribution to the literature in the research stream on access-based consumption and liquid consumption:

(1) The empirical results of this thesis reveal that variety seeking has a positive effect on the renter's perceived functional value but not on the social value. Thus, this finding improves the understanding of the relationship between variety seeking and access-based consumption.

(2) The findings of this thesis challenge the generalized assumption in previous research that access-based consumption emphasizes experience value and less on the identity value of

objects (e.g., Price et al., 2000; Chen, 2009). Specifically, for example, the results of this thesis demonstrate that brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) has a positive effect on perceived social value in renting. This outcome can be explained by the idea that renters who have a higher degree of BESC trait may perceive that those interactions with other renters enhance the symbolic value of the brand of rented items, such as representing liquid or nomad identities.

(3) In response to the debates in existing research on whether access-based consumption deters or encourages the emergence of the brand community (e.g., Belk, 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Mohlmann, 2015), this thesis suggests that the issue of whether and how brand community emerges in access-based consumption can depend on how consumers with various personality traits or orientations may perceive the social value differently. This thesis provides original empirical evidence for understanding how individuals' characteristics may impact their perceived social value in the choice of renting over buying. Specifically, the empirical results suggest that consumers with higher degrees of terminal materialism and brand engagement in self-concept traits are more likely to perceive social values in renting over buying.

(4) This thesis offers pioneering and original empirical findings to understand the relationship between renters and brands of rented items. Specifically, the practical results of this thesis underscore the positive effects of participating in renting consumption on the user's emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. On the contrary, the empirical results of this thesis show an adverse effect of a user's perceived functional values in the choice of renting over buying on the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Nonetheless, the impact of perceived social value on a user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items is not significant.

(5) In response to divergent discussions in the existing literature in understanding the relationship between materialism and access-based consumption, this thesis proposes to consider

two different types of materialism, namely “terminal materialism” and “instrumental materialism,” when assessing how materialism may affect access-based consumption.

(6) This thesis provides corroborating evidence for understanding the “frugal materialist” trait described by Lastovicka (2006). Specifically, the empirical results of this thesis suggest that frugal materialists tend to perceive the functional values in renting consumption. Frugal materialists not only recognize renting as an alternative means of signaling their identities but also voluntarily choose such consumption mode as part of their frugal lifestyle.

(7) Based on a multi-disciplinary background, this thesis adopts an exploratory approach to engage the dialogues between different disciplines in marketing, business models, and sustainability. Specifically, in the main variable for understanding consumers’ choices of renting over buying, we assess how renters perceive the economic, pro-social (environmental), and social utilities in renting. The exploration of the antecedents and outcomes of consumers’ perceived values in the renting process offers a comprehensive understanding of consumers’ renting behaviors from diverse perspectives.

6. Structure Of The Dissertation

The thesis is structured into seven chapters. Chapters 1 to 4 constitute the theoretical foundations of this work. More specifically, **Chapter 1** introduces the primary variable of interest to investigate in the thesis on consumers’ choice of renting over buying in the digital age. **Chapter 2** provides arguments on how we conceptualize each antecedent of the model, namely materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and brand engagement in self-concept to understand renters’ personality traits or orientation. **Chapter 3** explains how we conceptualize the two outcomes of renting consumption examined in this thesis: emotional attachment to the brand of rented items and user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items. **Chapter 4** introduces the proposed conceptual

framework with hypotheses on the relationships between the chosen constructs. Chapters **5 to 7** cover the methodology, data analysis, and results. More specifically, **Chapter 5** presents the methodological approach for assessing the proposed conceptual framework. Chapter **6** outlines the data sample collection process, statistical analysis, and results of the hypothesis tests. Finally, **Chapter 7** provides a general discussion based on the data analysis results, reviews theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations in this thesis, and proposes a research agenda for future studies.

Chapter 1 – Consumer’s Choice of Renting Over Buying in the Digital Age

Renting is not a new phenomenon. It represents “a transaction, in which one party offers an item to another party for a fixed period in exchange for a fixed amount of money and in which there is no change of ownership” (Durgee and Colarelli O’Connor 1995, p. 90). For decades, consumers occasionally rent cars during holidays or luxury cocktail dresses or tuxedos for special nights. However, except for housing, this phenomenon was mainly viewed as a rare form of consumption of objects for one-time usage. Consumer behavior has evolved (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015; 2016). Due in part to the rise of digital platforms, consumers are increasingly renting a broader scope of objects such as designer dresses, pieces of furniture, and hi-fi equipment, on a more frequent basis (e.g., through a subscription) or for a longer-term, sometimes during months (e.g., Conjure for furniture rental). The first objective of this first chapter is to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of this new type of behavior that represents the primary central phenomenon of interest in this thesis: renting behavior in the digital age. The second objective of the chapter is to present the approach we have chosen to define and apprehend the perceived value that consumers attribute to renting versus buying. In this aim, we divide this chapter into three sections:

- The first section provides the theoretical foundations that define this phenomenon and shows how it is positioned within the literature on consumer research. We initially review the importance of ownership in the traditional market economy and individuals in consumer research. We subsequently introduce the evolution toward non-ownership modes by examining prior research on access-based consumption, sharing economy,

- and collaborative consumption. Finally, we synthesize the characteristics of the new renting method of consumption by explaining how it differs from the traditional mode of renting.
- In the second section, we demonstrate the importance that this new renting phenomenon has currently gained. First, we explain the main factors that drive the growing significance of renting in society and then review the existing literature on the potential consequences of renting on consumers and brands.
 - The third section explains the concept of the perceived functional and social values that we use in this research to apprehend the preference for renting over buying. Specifically, we define perceived functional values with the concepts of transactional utility, flexibility utility, and pro-social utility; moreover, we define perceived social value with the concept of social utility.

1. Renting Phenomenon in the Digital Age

Renting is a multidisciplinary research topic. Research can explore this subject from economic, social, legal, and environmental perspectives. However, renting lacks a commonly adopted theoretical conceptualization in the existing consumer research literature. This section presents a critical review of the existing literature on concepts related to renting, including sharing, the pseudo “sharing economy”, traditional access, market-driven access-based consumption, and collaborative consumption. It also provides a comparative analysis of these similar yet different concepts. By examining the historical background, successful startup examples of renting services in the digital age, and the ideas surrounding renting consumption (i.e., ownership), this section

aims to propose the conceptualization of the renting consumption in the digital age, which defines the scope of research in this thesis.

1.1. Importance of Ownership in Consumption

The concept of ownership serves as a cornerstone in the capitalist regime and an ultimate objective in the process of traditional consumption mode. Therefore, reviewing the concept of ownership is essential to understand the evolution of non-ownership consumption.

1.1.1. Ownership as a Cornerstone of Capitalist Societies

Traditional economy transpires in markets and involves exchanges in the ownership of personal property. Expressing a “classical” Western perspective, Rousseau (1762) suggests that civil society likely began when an individual fenced off a plot of ground and claimed, “this is mine,” as others accepted this assertion. According to Snare (1972), ownership represents the special relationship between a person and an object and that the object is denoted as “personal property” or “possession.”

In the Western world, Agnew (1986) elaborates that the term “market” first appeared in the English language in the 12th century, referring to the physical space set aside for sellers and buyers to exchange possessions. By the late 18th century, the term had become separated from any geographic reference, and it was used for describing the abstract process of selling and buying personal properties. Rifkin (2000) further states that the “capitalist economy is founded on exchanging property ownership between sellers and buyers in markets” in the modern age.

1.1.2. Ownership as an Essential Element of Security, Freedom, Self-construal, and Happiness for an Individual

Society has considered that owning property such as a house or a car brings security and freedom. The very term “automobile” connotes autonomy and mobility, and Americans have long associated the idea of freedom with autonomy and mobility (Rifkin, 2015). The French Revolution in 1789 is another example of when the property is equated with freedom. At the time, the lands’ rights of landlords, including the First Estate (clergy) and Second Estate (nobility), representing 35% to 40% of the French territory, were redistributed among the people (Michael D. Berdine, 2003).

According to Snare (1972), ownership is recognized as a means of capital accumulation and a way to provide a sense of personal independence and security. The owner can regulate or deny access to the owned object to others, use, sell, and retain any profits yielded from the object’s use, and transform its structure. The owner has been elevated to a “better type of citizen, neighbor, and even parent” (Baker 2008; Ronald 2008). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) state that “an owner has full property rights over the object.” They further indicate that sole ownership is embedded with rites to adulthood and linked with discourses of choice. Additionally, ownership enables freedom and responsibility toward the object with clear boundaries between self and others. In human history, ownership has symbolized higher financial power, status, and privilege. Ownership has been the normative ideal among modes of consumption based on cultural values about the perceived advantages of ownership over access and reinforcing government and market practices (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). By contrast, traditional renting behaviors without the transfer of ownership, such as car or apartment rentals, have often been considered wasteful, precarious, and limited to individual freedom (Cheshire, Walters, & Rosenblatt, 2010).

Furthermore, Belk (1988) suggests that consumers may identify with their possessions, which can become part of their extended self in ownership. The existing research also demonstrates that ownership can be crucial in maintaining, displaying, and transforming the self (e.g., Kleine & Allen, 1995; Richins, 1994; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In addition, Belk (1985) defines possessiveness as a general attachment to possessions, whereas materialism is the importance that an individual attaches to those possessions. Accordingly, Felix and Garza's (2012) studies also underscore that possessiveness and materialism are related, as materialists believe possession is the key source of success and happiness.

1.1.3. Ownership as an Important Element in Consumer Research

Ownership has long been considered the focal action for marketers, as captured in the definition of consumer behavior as the “acquisition, consumption and disposal of time and offerings” (Morrin and Jacoby 2015).

“For consumer behavior researchers, the centrality of ownership has been proven to be both theoretically and practically fortuitous. Ownership has been shown to offer numerous benefits (e.g., a sense of control, personal identification, risk reduction) and trigger a multitude of marketing-relevant effects (e.g., the endowment effect, incorporation into the extended self, different disposal tendencies)” (Lamberton and Goldsmith, 2020; p. 301).

However, Belk (2010; p. 727) argues that

“The explanations for the same contemporary consumer behaviors would differ from a social psychological perspective. Concepts of property, ownership, and possession are seen as individualistic matters more than cultural prerogatives (see Rudmin, Belk, and Furby 1986). While sharing choices might well be made with an eye to their social consequences,

they are seen as individual choices subject to the individual and cultural differences (e.g., Furby 1978, 1980).”

1.2. Evolution Toward Non-ownership Modes of Consumption

“Marketing transactions that do not involve a transfer of ownership are distinctively different from those that do” (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004, p. 34). Rifkin (2000) introduces “the Age of Access,” in which he predicts that “it is likely that for a growing number of enterprises and consumers, the very idea of ownership will seem limited, even old-fashioned, twenty-five years from now. Ownership simply is too slow an institution to adjust to the relative warp speed of a nanosecond culture.” Rifkin (2000) further predicts that markets would make way for networks and that access would replace ownership. He argues that property would continue to exist but be far less likely to be exchanged in markets. The exchange of property between sellers and buyers – the essential feature of the modern market system – would give away short-term access between service providers and clients operating in a network relationship (Rifkin, 2000). Additionally, Rifkin (2000) contends that commercial success in the access economy “depends less on the individual market exchange of goods and more on establishing long-term commercial relationships. An increasing number of businesses give away their products for free in the hopes of entering long-term service relationships with clients.”

Three main principles underlie non-ownership consumption and renting. First, non-ownership consumption and renting involves the notion of sharing products with others (Lang & Armstrong, 2018). Second, it is a form of collaborative consumption (Lang et al., 2020; Lang & Armstrong, 2018). Third, it is part of access-based consumption (Lang, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). These terms are often used interchangeably in the literature. However, these

notions have different features. The absence of a clear understanding of the interrelations and boundaries between these concepts may cause difficulties in further research based on divergent findings in this research domain. For this reason, this section successively presents the different notions of non-ownership consumption, namely sharing (Belk 2007, 2010), sharing economy (Belk 2014; Sundararajan 2016), collaborative consumption (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Belk 2014), and access-based economy (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). A comparison of the main characteristics of these four concepts is shown in *Table 1*.

Notions of Non-Ownership Consumption	Ownership Transferred?	Altruist or Prosocial?	For Profit?	Largely Market-based	High-Impact Capital	Crowd-based "networks"
Sharing (e.g., between family members; Couch Surfing)	No	Yes	No	Depends	No	Depends
Sharing Economy	Can include all types	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Depends
Collaborative Economy	Can include all types	No	Yes	Depends	Depends	Depends
Access-based Economy	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Depends

Table 1: Comparison Between Sharing, “Sharing Economy,” Access Economy, and Collaborative Economy

1.2.1. Sharing Versus Sharing Economy

The origin of the term “sharing” is the old English “scearu,” which means division or to break into parts (Bokka, 2017). However, a single commonly agreed definition of the term “sharing economy” is lacking despite its popularity in mass media or public spheres, such as on the website of UK Trading or United Nations.

Sharing: No Ownership Transferred, Altruism, and Non-profit Purpose

Belk (2007) defines “sharing” as the “act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and the act of receiving or taking something from others for our use.” Belk (2010)

further describes “sharing” as a process that neither involves a transfer of ownership nor joint ownership, and an activity encompassing altruistic and pro-social human behaviors but not for profit purposes. For example, as Belk (2010) describes, in interfamilial sharing, possession or ownership is joint, with no separate terms to distinguish partners. In such sharing context, common possessions are free for family members to use. Common possessions generate no debts, and they entail responsibilities that are shared, such as caretaking and non-overuse of the object.

Moreover, Benkler (2004) defines sharing as “nonreciprocal pro-social behavior.” Regarding the relationship between sharing and anti-consumption, Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) also indicate that sharing may be one possible alternative market structure to be adopted by anti-consumption consumers. Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) analyzed why consumers avoid consumption and whether a group of consumers who reduce consumption by choosing to share rather than own is motivated by anti-consumption reasons. The authors used quantitative data from 397 toy library members to explore why members choose to participate in this form of sharing. In their study, Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) identified four groups: socialites, market avoiders, quiet anti-consumers, and passive members: “Socialites enjoy the social benefits of active participation in their library. Market Avoiders also perceive social and community benefits, are interested in sharing, and are the least materialistic groups. Quiet Anti-Consumers feel a sense of belonging to their toy library and hold strong anti-consumption, frugality, and sharing values. Passive Members are not socially involved, nor did they hold strong anti-consumption values.”

Sharing Economy: Pseudo Sharing

Considering that the sharing economy has heralded a global transformation (Wallenstein and Shelat 2017), it has gained considerable interest from scholars within and beyond the

marketing domain. The sharing economy involves online platforms that help organizations or individuals who own idle resources to transfer the right to use such resources to others with charge; consequently, transferors gain rewards, whereas sharers create value by sharing idle resources from others (Lin, Wang & Wu, 2017). Meanwhile, “crowd-based capitalism” is characterized as primarily market-based networks with high-impact capital (Arun Sundararajan, 2016). People can share access to assets, resources, time, and skills (Wosskow, 2014). Therefore, the sharing economy not only includes market-mediated transactions of tangible properties (e.g., dresses, houses) without the transfer of ownership, but it can also represent the access to and monetization of intangible assets (e.g., time and skills) within networks.

From the perspective of consumers’ motivations to participate in the sharing economy, the term “sharing economy” is problematic. The reason is that the sharing economy is deemed to involve neither altruistic nor pro-social human behaviors, but it exists mainly for financial purposes. This depiction can be illustrated by some of the most prominent examples such as Uber and Airbnb, which create millions of profit-driven micro-entrepreneurs. According to Belk (2014), many of these clear sharing cases are better characterized as “pseudo-sharing-commodity exchanges wrapped in a sharing vocabulary.” He criticizes that the potential exploitation of consumer co-creators presents themselves in the guise of sharing. Instead, pseudo-sharing is distinguished by profit motives, the absence of feelings of community, and expectations of reciprocity (Belk, 2014a). Moati (2016) holds similar criticisms of the term sharing economy. For example, Moati (2016) criticizes Airbnb for its idea, which is far from responsibility and sharing or sustainable development but is considered to be for-profit and evokes fake sharing. Consequently, different from the traditional mode of non-market-mediated sharing, the pseudo

sharing economy in the contemporary market economy is not always altruistic or pro-social, but it mainly involves receiving compensation in exchange for “sharing” the idle resources.

1.2.2. Collaborative Consumption

“Collaborative consumption” or “collaborative economy” is defined in several ways. Speath (1978) refers to acts of collaborative consumption as “those events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in joint activities with one or more others.” Bostman and Rogers (2010) describe collaborative consumption as an economic system of decentralized networks and marketplaces, which unlocks the value of underused assets by matching needs and haves, including “traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping.” As illustrated by Bostman and Rogers, some examples of collaborative consumption are bike sharing (e.g., London’s Barclays Cycle Hire), peer-to-peer matching service (e.g., Airbnb, Couchsurfing), garden sharing (e.g., Landshare), and shared workspaces (e.g., Hub Culture). Therefore, we argue that these definitions of collaborative consumption are too imprecise because they only highlight the cooperative and interactive nature of the transaction process among consumers. However, such reports can include non-ownership consumption (e.g., renting) and traditional transactions based on transferring the ownership of properties (e.g., trading), both market-mediated or not, both pro-social and for-profit purposes.

Belk (2014) also contends that those definitions are too broad and insufficiently focused on acquiring and distributing the resource and mixing marketplace exchange, gift-giving, and sharing. Belk (2014) instead suggests that collaborative consumption is a process in which “people [coordinate] the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation, encompassing bartering, trading, and swapping, which involve giving and receiving non-monetary

compensation, but excluding sharing activities like those of Couch Surfing (ancient version) because there is no compensation involved, or gift-giving which involves a permanent transfer of ownership.” From this perspective, Belk (2014) delineates the frontier in defining collaborative consumption based on whether the transaction is market-mediated, that is, one that entails receiving the compensation. Belk also suggests that collaborative consumption is the subset of Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) notion of access-based consumption, which they pertain to as market-mediated access. However, we argue that Belk’s definition of collaborative consumption is ambiguous on whether it involves the transfer of ownership: although bartering is included, gift-giving is exempted from the concept of collaborative consumption. Drawn from the previous literature, the market-mediated feature of collaborative consumption is highlighted in this thesis. It contains transactions involving the transfer and non-transfer ownership of tangible and intangible assets. Therefore, from this perspective, the collaborative economy is an expansive definition, and it can be used interchangeably with the notion of “pseudo sharing economy” in some cases.

1.2.3. Access-based Economy

Rifkin (2000) first documented the phenomenon of access, which primarily encompasses technology-based platforms in the business-to-business sector. Rifkin argues that we live in an “age of access,” in which property regimes have changed to access regimes, characterized by the limited short-term use of assets controlled by networks of suppliers. The access economy has since attracted an extensive interest in the marketing domain. Access-based consumption is defined as a process comprising “transactions that can be market mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place” (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; p881). Such market-mediated transactions provide

customers with temporarily limited access to goods in return for an access fee, while the legal ownership remains with the service provider (Schaefers, 2016). In particular, such transactions can occur via the access to personal property among customers and through “commercial sharing programs,” which are marketer-managed systems that allow customers to enjoy product benefits without ownership (Lamberton and Rose, 2012). Consequently, considering that access-based consumption and some “pseudo sharing economy” share the exact characteristics of being market-mediated without the transfer of ownership, these two notions can sometimes be used interchangeably.

In addition, this more recent market-mediated access-based consumption differs from traditional non-market mediated access (e.g., library) by being enabled through digital technology, being more self-service-oriented, and therefore, being more collaborative (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). On the contrary, non-market mediated access is based on social exchange rather than monetary exchange via the market (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2016). For example, the book library as an organization mediates the accessing of books through a non-profit social exchange, but not via the market. Consequently, compared to sharing, access is similar to sharing in that both modes of consumption do not involve a transfer of ownership. However, access and sharing differ in the perceived or shared sense of ownership. No joint or perceived ownership occurs; instead, the consumer simply gains access to use an object. Additionally, access differs from sharing in that access is not necessarily altruistic or pro-social, but it can be underlined by economic exchange and reciprocity.

In sum, these concepts share standard features, while simultaneously differing from each other with specific characteristics. As shown in *Table 1*, all these four concepts could involve interactions among people without transferring the ownership of products. However, the sharing

economy and collaborative economy notions could also refer to market transactions with ownership transferred. In terms of the social relations involved in these consumption modes, only “sharing” highlights the altruistic or pro-social nature of the relationship between sharers and users. On the contrary, other three concepts represent market-mediated transactions with for-profit purposes.

1.3. Conceptualization of Renting in the Digital Age

As previously stated, renting is not a new consumption behavior. However, many dimensions of renting have recently evolved, making it a latest phenomenon that we refer to as “new renting in the digital age.” According to Rifkin (2000), “almost everything needed to run the physical business itself is borrowed in the contemporary commercial world. Where the market used to boast sellers and buyers, now the talk is more of suppliers and users.” Rifkin’s predictions have been proven by pioneering startups that provide renting services to their customers in the past two decades, empowered by advanced logistics, internet, and analytics. In this section, we explain how new renting differs from traditional renting.

1.3.1. Evolution of digital platforms and augmented renting service

In recent years, technological development has engendered the rise of digital collaborative platforms (e.g., WeWork, Airbnb, Uber, Rent the Runway), facilitating the connections between many different economic actors, as well as the business-to-business, business-to-consumers, or even consumers-to-consumers links. Some of these platforms are used as renting solutions. Through these renting platforms, consumers can rent from other users on the platform their cars (e.g., Zipcar) and houses (e.g., Airbnb) for occasional usage, or subscribe to the monthly

membership of renting service to gain access to furniture (e.g., Mobley in the US) and fashion clothing and accessories (e.g., Le Tote and Rent the Runway in the US, YCloset in China, and Le Closet in France) for more frequent daily usage or a more extended period of temporary use (e.g., Circos for maternity clothes in Europe and Bundlee for baby clothes in the UK).

Some traditional retailing brands also launch the renting or subscription service to their consumers. For example, BTW Volvo launched a subscription model DriveNow, including insurance for its XC40 and other vehicles. Daimler Benz (Mercedes) offers its car-sharing program, Car2Go. Volkswagen's Quicar and Peugeot's Mu provide similar services for their consumers. Such new renting services augment the traditional renting experience with their digital platforms accessible on mobile phones and challenge traditional retailing business models; they simultaneously provide potential opportunities for brands to improve their understanding of consumer needs.

Taking the fashion industry, for example, traditional fashion rental experience may occur in a local clothing rental store with a limited choice of outfits. When a customer looks for a dress for a special occasion such as a wedding, she enters the store; an experienced tailor then takes the customer's measurements, asks a few questions about what the consumer is looking for, and disappears into a back room to search for a potential fitted dress. After a while, the tailor returns from the inventory with a handful of outfits from which the customer can choose. In addition, from the social perspective, this customer has a minimal chance to meet or connect with other customers. Such rental clothing business is traditionally built in the local brick-and-mortar small stores with a limited stockage. It does not create a venue for customers to meet and connect.

On the contrary, contemporary rental service companies not only expand the traditional rental business model into new product categories, but they can also reach a large base of

consumers via digital platforms and a data-driven supply chain. For example, a pioneering e-commerce fashion rental platform YCloset expands the renting service into daily used designer apparel beyond the traditional rental option that is limited to products for occasion apparel. YCloset can also offer an efficient renting service to tens of millions of users. In addition, the renting company provides augmented and customized renting services such as chatting with stylists online, placing the order on mobile, shipping the used items, and socializing with other users in the social media group.

1.3.2. New features of renting in the digital age

Traditional renting represents “a transaction, in which one party offers an item to another party for a fixed period in exchange for a fixed amount of money. There is no change of ownership” (Durgee and Colarelli O’Connor 1995, p. 90). Although the previous literature highlights the importance of studying the renting mode in understanding collaborative consumption (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Sundararajan, 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), it still lacks clear insights into the characteristics of renting consumption in the digital age. Hence, we delineate the two main features of renting in the digital age, which distinguishes itself from the traditional form of renting.

The first feature is the augmented and seamless shopping experience both in the physical and digital worlds (Rifkin, 2000). Specifically, consumers can put the on-demand order of the select products to rent on the digital mobile applications. Compared to limited choices from a small inventory in traditional renting boutiques, consumers have access to many items to rent via these digital mobile applications. Take the fashion rental platform Rent the Runway, for example; consumers can choose from thousands of designer apparel listed on the digital platform. Furthermore, artificial intelligence could improve the consumers’ experience. For instance, the

rental application can recommend to customers their preferred styles based on the browsing history on the platform. In addition, consumers can reach customer service easily without time and geography restraints. Once consumers place the orders online, they can receive the rented items via express delivery. After using the rented items, consumers can return them quickly with a pre-attached return label provided by the renting company.

The second feature is that the new business model reflects the product–service system (PSS; Tukker & Tischner, 2006) and service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). PSS is a specific type of value proposition that a business (network) offers to (or co-produces with) its clients. One definition of PSS is a mix of tangible products and intangible services designed and combined, such that they are jointly capable of fulfilling final customer needs (Tukker & Tischner, 2006). From this perspective, renting is also one type of PSS with a usage-oriented strategy (Ben Slimane & Chaney, 2015). It reflects the functional economy based on the principle that companies must help customers to accomplish an activity in optimal conditions. As a result, exchanging information has become more critical in the new renting model.

Similarly, but from another perspective, Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue that firms should focus on more than simply creating goods, that is, by becoming customer-centric and having a relational focus. In this case, operant (non-physical) resources consequently become even more critical than operand (physical) resources. From this standpoint, the role of the rental company is transformed into a rental service provider that highlights the use-value of the product and the rental experience rather than the retailer that sells or rents the products themselves. Accordingly, the consumers' roles also become more sophisticated than the mere buyers or renters. In particular, consumers may switch roles to become users of the products, commenters, or even stylists.

For example, if consumers subscribe to become members on the rental platform that launches a subscription-based service (SBS), they could join the social media group to connect with other users. In this manner, their roles can also become stylists who provide feedback on other users' choices, influencers who share their feedback based on their user experience of the rented item, or pseudo donators who share discounts information or coupons with other users. Consider YCloset as an example; subscribed renters can connect in a WeChat group organized by the rental company. Some ask other users to help decide on the specific apparel to rent for a special occasion. Others share coupons with other users (the company provides coupons to users to share with others when the users place orders on the platform). Therefore, the renting model also reflects the sharing-dominant logic (Aspara and Wittkowski, 2019). By sharing with other users the relevant information about the rented products, such as renting experience or discount activities, consumers also co-create the values of renting experience during the renting consumption process.

1.3.3. Position of “new renting” compared to other concepts on the non-ownership economy

As illustrated in Sections 1.3.2 and 1.2.3 respectively, we can conclude that the main features of “new renting” reflect the characteristics of access-based consumption. First, both notions represent the transactions exclusively without transferring the ownership. From this perspective, “new renting” can be part of but differentiated from “pseudo sharing economy” and “collaborative economy” because the latter can also refer to market transactions with ownership transferred.

Second, both concepts highlight the market-mediated nature, signifying that the transactions are for-profit purposes. From this perspective, “new renting” is different from the

traditional sharing mode because the latter mode exclusively represents social interactions with an altruistic or pro-social nature.

Third, “new renting” and access-based consumption create self-service options and collaborative consumption experiences driven by digital technology. Hence, these new features make “new renting” different from traditional non-market mediated access (e.g., library) and the traditional mode of renting in small boutique stores.

Regarding accessed product categories, “new renting” involves physical products (e.g., fashion apparel) and digital products (e.g., music). However, access-based consumption can also include monetizing intellectual assets and skills (e.g., Upwork). Hence, “new renting” represents one form of access-based consumption from this perspective.

Figure 1-1 illustrates the boundaries between “renting in the digital age” and other related concepts as reviewed in Section 1.2, including the traditional economy, the new economy, the conventional access economy, the new access economy, sharing, sharing economy, and collaborative consumption.

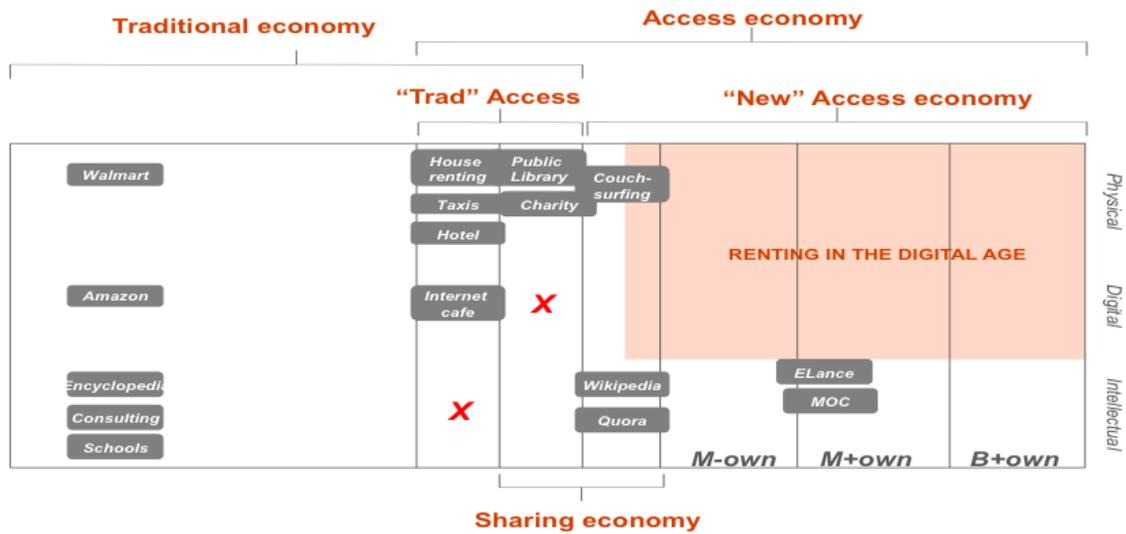


Figure 1-1: Examples Related to the Renting Economy in the Digital Age

As explained in Section 1.3.2, one of the unique features of renting consumption in the digital age is the seamless online and offline renting experience. Therefore, such new renting experience reflects a time when the age of analytics and intelligent machines has already occurred. Aside from the industrial revolution, the evolution or transformation of consumers' ideology may also potentially influence the emergence of the renting consumption phenomenon. Specifically, one of the reasons for such behavioral choice of renting over buying may be that consumers change their perceptions on the definition of freedom (Rifkin, 2015). For example, owning and driving automobile cars once symbolized freedom; however, in the era of the network, people prefer various options for access and value experiences more than owning one type of car (Rifkin, 2000).

Contrary to the traditional view on "you are what you own" (Belk, 1988), such a new renting phenomenon in the digital age likewise reflects alternative ways that consumers adopt to express their identity without ownership (Belk, 2013). Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) empirical

studies show that consumers seem to care more about the experience of accessing a service than the ownership of a product. This result can be explained by the idea that in a liquid relationship, objects are valued for their immateriality, which is expressed in the preference for objects that are light, portable, and convenient in terms of mobility (e.g., battery-operated electronic products); more importantly, because of the access that these objects (e.g., electronic books, music, greeting cards, and photos) provide to networks, locales, or consumer roles, immateriality is transferable and thus enables flexible identity possessions (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017).

In addition, in terms of consumer perceptions of the alternative consumption mode, compared to the traditional way of owning a product, consumers realize that renting provides a more flexible, convenient, and economical means of using the products. For example, a car purchase requires maintenance, and owning a parking lot is prohibitively expensive (Belk, 2014). Furthermore, for millennial consumers, due to the economic recession, such an alternative mode of renting consumption resonates with their increasingly economically sensitive mindset (Helena Pike, 2016).

2. Potential Consequences of Renting Consumption

Although previous research suggests how a consumer's ideology may contribute to the emergence of renting consumption in the digital age, the literature on how renting consumption can impact a consumer's other purchase decisions is minimal. One can argue that such alternative consumption mode disrupts or not the ownership regime on both sides. On the one hand, some researchers say that the higher usage of an access-based service increases the likelihood that consumers subsequently reduce ownership (Schaefers, Lawson, & Kukar-Kinney, 2016). The value of taking underutilized assets and making them accessible online to a community could

reduce a consumer's need for ownership of those assets (e.g., Stephany, 2015). On the other hand, there can be other possibilities that an excellent renting experience may allow consumers to know the product or the brand, further resulting in repurchase. Nevertheless, empirical studies investigating these potential effects are lacking thus far.

Research on how renting consumption may influence consumers' relationships with brands is also scarce. The existing literature on how consumers develop brand attachment and loyalty focuses only on the buying and ownership context. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) interviewed Zipcar car-sharing service users and found that consumers do not feel any psychological ownership. Although Zipcar is attempting to build a brand community, consumers currently do not prefer this engagement. Their lack of trust and their perception of the brand as an enforcer prompt them to engage with the brand solely as a service provider (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Nonetheless, empirical research assessing the potential effects of renting consumption on relationships with brands of rented items is lacking to date. Following the conventional reasoning, repetitive interaction, long-term commitment, and desire for the possession to signal self-identity could be the essential elements to build strong relationships with brands. In the renting context, however, as described in previous sections, consumers have temporary rather than long-term relationships with the accessed rather than privately owned products. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore this relationship.

3. Consumers' Perceived Value for Renting Over Buying

A critical issue in this research is determining a means of conceptualizing and measuring the value that consumers could attribute to renting products rather than buying them. Indeed, the objective of this dissertation is to understand how some specific antecedents affect the consumers'

preference for renting over buying and subsequently to ascertain how this tendency to choose to rent versus buying solutions can influence consumer relationships with the rented brands. This step is critical as it determines the operational and measurement choices described later in this thesis. In this section, we explain our choices in conceptualizing the perceived value that consumers attribute to renting rather than buying. First, we present the literature about the different approaches to perceived value. Second, we rationalize our choice of conceptualization.

3.1. Unidimensional Versus Multidimensional Conceptualization of Perceived Value

Previous research identifies two main approaches to conceptualizing perceived values: unidimensional and multidimensional. With the unidimensional approach, perceived value focuses on the tradeoff between gains and costs. With the multifaceted approach, consumers' perceived value construct can be a multidimensional concept representing the sum of different dimensions such as functional, emotional, and social values.

3.1.1. Unidimensional Approach to the Conceptualization of Consumers' Perceived Value

The early research on the most recognized conceptualization of perceived value was developed by Zeithaml (1988), reaching 24,353 citations on Google Scholar to date (March 16, 2021). Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived value as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given. "Though what is received varies across consumers (i.e., some may want volume, others high quality, still others convenience) and what is given varies (i.e., some are concerned only with money expended, others with time and effort), the value represents a tradeoff of the salient give and get components" (Zeithaml, 1988; p. 14).

Specifically, Zeithaml's empirical research with consumers suggests their definitions of value as follows: First, "value is a low price." This depiction aligns with some earlier industry studies revealing the salience of price in the value equations of consumers (e.g., Hoffman, 1984; Schechter, 1984; Bishop, 1984). Second, the idea that "value is whatever I want in a product" reflects an "economist's definition of utility, that is, a subjective measure of the usefulness or want the satisfaction that results from consumption" (Zeithaml, 1988; p.13). Schechter (1984) defines value as all qualitative and quantitative factors, subjective and objective, which constitute the complete shopping experience. Third, "value is quality." This definition is consistent with several others that appear in the literature (Bishop, 1984; Dodds and Monroe, 1984; Doyle, 1984). Fourth, "value is what I get for what I give." This fourth definition is consistent with Sawyer and Dickson's (1984) conceptualization of value as a ratio of attributes weighted by their evaluations divided by price weighted by its assessment. This meaning is similar to the utility per dollar measure of value used by Hauser and Urban (1986), Hauser and Simmie (1981), Hauser and Shugan (1983), and others.

3.1.2. Multidimensional Approach to the Conceptualization of Consumers' Perceived Value

Later studies argue that the consumers' perceived value construct can be a multidimensional concept representing the sum of dimensions other than the former unidimensional approach (e.g., Woodruff, 1997; Sheth et al., 1999; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). For example, Woodruff (1997) uses the term "customer value" to provide an integrative view for value studies, which refers to the "customer's perceived preference for, and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer's goals and purposes in use situations" (p. 142). Built on consumption theory (Sheth et al., 1991), scholars also find that functional, emotional, and social

values are three fundamental dimensions of the perceived value of products or service value (e.g., Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Keller, 1993).

Functional value is generally defined as the perceived utility for “functional, utilitarian, or physical performance”; emotional value pertains to the product’s capacity to “arouse feelings or affective states”; and social value is the value acquired from the product’s association “with one or more specific social groups” (Sheth et al., 1991). Furthermore, Keller (1993) indicates that consumers perceive experiential benefits related to emotional and symbolic benefits associated with social value. In addition to the three fundamental values, Chen and Chang (2012) propose the construct “perceived green value” to delineate values derived from consumers’ environmental concerns due to the increasing environmental degradation. They define green perceived value as “a consumer’s overall appraisal of the net benefit of a product or service between what is received and what is given based on the consumer’s environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs” (Chen and Chang, 2012; p. 505).

3.2. Choice of a Multidimensional Approach for Studying Consumers’ Perceived Value

Given the presence of social and personal attributes in the fashion rental context and in the context of the aim of this dissertation (i.e., to investigate the consumers’ perceived value in renting from an economic perspective), the multidimensional approach is adopted in this thesis to operationalize the main variable of interest of renting over buying. Specifically, for example, consumers can have access to rented fashion apparel at a fractional price compared to owning it (value for price or transaction utility); its subscription option creates convenience for consumers to update their wardrobe with different outfits (flexibility utility); by joining the exclusive social media group of users of the rental platform, the consumers can meet new friends (social utility);

and by reusing the fashion apparel, the user may fulfill environmental needs by consuming less harmful material to the environment (green value or pro-social utility).

Theoretically, Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) developed a model of “commercial sharing systems” based on Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2007) framework of file sharing determinants, in which consumer choice to use sharing programs is determined by the perceived cost and utility advantages of sharing relative to ownership (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2007; Sinha and Mandel, 2008). With this foundation, the Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) model expands the utility-theoretic approach and defines the antecedents of commercial sharing likelihood as various utilities, including transaction utility or “deal value.” Flexibility utility is described as the “absence of limitations on product use.” Social utility pertains to “gains that may accrue to sharing participants in the form of approval of reference groups.” Pro-social utility is defined in terms of the ways that consumers may “protect the environment or reduce waste.” Correspondently, in the existing literature in the fashion rental context, recent research highlights both economic motives (e.g., “financial value,” “ease of use,” “utilitarian”) and social motives (e.g., “experiential value”) in understanding consumers’ motivations to use online fashion renting (Vincent and Gaur, 2021; Lang & Zhao, 2020).

Consumers may also perceive emotional value in the new renting experience. For example, in fashion rental, the subscription-based service (SBS) model allows them to “collect” different experiences and create their fluid identities by having unlimited access to a cloud wardrobe. With the efforts to engage in the process of creating diverse identities, loyal users can invest their emotions when using rented products to construct their self-identity. For instance, in a qualitative research based on 14 fashion blogs, Heidi (2013) identifies six luxury renter identity themes. These luxury renter identity themes suggest that the luxury renter’s identity is a part of an individual’s whole identity, and it is constantly evolving and affected by personal and social identity cues.

Furthermore, with the customized rental options driven by artificial intelligence, consumers may develop emotional connections with the renting company, the brand of rented items, and/or the rented products. However, theoretically, there is no research exploring how renters may develop diverse emotional connections with or attachments to those counterparts during the renting process. No developed or validated scales to date have measured how consumers perceive emotional values in renting. The development of scales for measuring perceived values in renting is not the main objective of this thesis; thus, we adopt the existing validated scales in previous research. Therefore, we focus on measuring consumers' perceived transaction utility, flexibility utility, pro-social utility, and social utility.

3.2.1. Sub-dimension: Transaction Utility

The rental price is fractional compared to the retailing price of each item on fashion rental platforms such as Rent the Runway. The aim of such marketing activity is to highlight the transaction utility in renting consumption. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that sharing systems may be preferred because they allow access to the desired product at a lower cost (Sacks 2011). Specifically, Lamberton and Rose (2012) assert that perceived financial gain is an effective predictor of the propensity to use car-sharing services. Similarly, Möhlmann (2015) indicates that consumers are motivated to use car-sharing services (Car2Go) and lodging sharing (Airbnb) because of cost and financial advantages, whereas Mont (2004) finds that perceived economic benefits influence consumer satisfaction with car-sharing services. Other researchers such as Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) also contend that access-based consumption options are generally affordable and less expensive than ownership. The financial benefits are a crucial determinant of the propensity to use sharing services. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) underscore that the economic benefits of access-based consumption are potentially more potent than other relevant factors (i.e.,

ethical ones) in predicting the willingness to use access-based consumption. This interpretation is similar to the transaction utility illustrated in other sharing systems, the growth of which has been accelerated by the capacity of social media to facilitate online music and movie sharing (Galbreth, Ghosh, and Shor 2012; Gansky 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2007). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2007) argue that illicit movie copies allow consumers to “make a deal” and save money compared with consuming the same movie via commercial channels. Furthermore, Thaler (1985, p. 205) explains that such a deal can result in a transaction utility that refers not to the value of the consumed good (i.e., the movie) but to “the perceived merits of the ‘deal,’” or in other words, the customer’s satisfaction and pleasure of obtaining the financial advantage associated with the copy (Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan 1998).

As Lambertson and Rose (2012, p. 111) propose in their theoretical utility model, transaction utility is “the deal value perceived in sharing systems” and is likely to affect several factors, including an intention to use access-based consumption. In this study, “transaction utility” is defined as the consumers’ perceived advantage deal value in the digitalized renting consumption compared to the ownership of a commercialized product. This characterization can be explained by rational choice theory, upon which sociologists and political scientists have attempted to build theories. The key idea of this approach is that all actions are fundamentally “rational” in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do (Scott, 2000). Following this theory, consumers seek products that provide the most effective use at the lowest cost possible.

On the contrary, in Oyedele and Simpson’s (2018) empirical research in the car sharing, room sharing, and household goods sharing contexts showed that transaction utility had no direct effect on intention to participate in access-based consumption, although users may experience the transaction utility through flexibility utility. Oyedele and Simpson’s (2018) findings also suggest

that flexibility utility has strong effects on intention to use access-based consumption. Oyedele and Simpson (2018) interpret such results as flexibility utility of a sharing service may enhance the consumers' perceived economic utility of the sharing service. Hence, considering the potential mutual effect of transaction utility and flexibility utility, this study combines these two utilities into one factor and further tests their combined effect on consumers' relationships with rented brands in the fashion rental context.

3.2.2. Sub-dimension: Flexibility Utility

According to Gullstrand Edbrin, Lehner, and Mont (2016), the flexibility of temporal access and the capacity to try things before purchase are among the major perks of renting. They argue that consumers are interested in renting because they experience a reduced risk of spending money on a new product before better understanding its performance.

However, people define flexibility in different ways, or somewhat other features of the offer have additional value to consumers in terms of flexibility. For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) demonstrate how consumers perceive carpools as more flexible than private car ownership. Baumeister (2014) shows that people perceive private car ownership as more flexible than a car-sharing scheme membership. Rex and Hiort of Ornas (2009) highlight the importance of increasing the flexibility of access-based modes of consumption by offering consumers an opportunity to try out the concept before a contract is entered, thereby reducing consumer risk perception.

Following exchange theory and rational choice theory, perceptions of transaction utility and flexibility utility are likely to influence and mutually affect consumers' choice of renting over buying. Using the rigid flexibility model as a basis, Idris (2013) investigated the influence of service operation flexibility and perceptions of cost benefits to find that flexibility utility affects consumers' perception of economic or transaction utility. Meanwhile, Sven (2004) indicates that

service flexibility positively impacts perceived financial or transaction value in the context of business markets. Similarly, Shi and Su (2007) reveal that service flexibility, among other factors, affects hotel customer satisfaction and that the service flexibility of hotel wait staff positively impacts the customer perceptions of economic value. Based on this background discussion, access or flexibility utility is a benefit derived from digitalized renting consumption, such that consumers should consider renting versus ownership alternatives.

Enhanced flexibility degree in a digitalized platform may attract consumers to use such service while abandoning other less convenient modes of consumption. For example, enhanced functionality on a legal website decreases the consumers' tendency to pirate a digital song (Sinha and Mandel, 2008). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2007) also illustrate the superior "mobility utility" and "storage utility" of illegal copies compared to regular purchased DVDs with the fact that illicit copies can be stored on mobile devices (e.g., laptop computers, video iPods, PDAs), thereby enabling consumers to carry extensive movie libraries in minimal space when traveling or even in the consumer's domicile. Flexibility utility is also defined as "the absence of limitations on product use within a sharing system" for access-based consumption. It is about access to products and services when, where, and how they are needed (Lamberton and Rose, 2012, p. 111). The more consumers can access the product, the higher flexibility utility they perceive. For instance, Zipcars are available in many locations, several types of vehicles are available in the system, and the system's automobiles may be used for various purposes. As to digitalized renting service, the on-demand model augments the efficiency of switching choices at one's fingertips, and the subscription option further eases access to "the cloud of the wardrobe."

Moreover, according to Lamberton and Rose's (2012) utility framework and their research findings, flexibility utility is likely to affect intentions to use access-based consumption. In their empirical studies, Oyedele and Simpson (2018) similarly assert that flexibility utility has the most

significant effects on the choice to rent rather than to own, compared to other utilities, such as the deal value of access-based consumption. Such considerable results are shown in all three contexts: car sharing, room sharing, and household goods sharing contexts. They further suggest that the flexibility of a sharing service will enhance the consumers' perceived economic and utility value. Consumers can use several fashion products at the same price they must spend to purchase one piece in the digital renting of fashion apparel. Therefore, echoing with the discussion in the previous section on transaction utility, considering the close economic relationship between transaction utility and flexibility utility as well as their mutual effects on the primary variable of consumers' perceived value in renting over buying, the measurement integrates these two utilities into one dimension denoted as "perceived functional value in renting" in this thesis.

3.2.3. Sub-dimension: Pro-social Utility

Pro-social motivation is described as the desire to protect and promote the well-being of others, and it is distinct from altruism and independent of self-interested motivations (Grant and Berg, 2012). From an environmental orientation, pro-social or moral utility refers to the benefits derived from sustainability-oriented and environment-friendly consumption of products or services (Minton and Rose, 1997; Sacks, 2011). Such definition is similar to "green value," which is described as "a consumer's overall appraisal of the net benefit of a product or service between what is received and what is given based on the consumer's environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs" (e.g., Wei and Jung, 2017). As sustainable consumption aimed at saving the environment is currently recognized as part of corporate social responsibility (Chen and Chang, 2012) and as the unspoiled environment benefits entire societies and future generations, many brands begin to pay more attention to consumers' perceived pro-social value. A conscious consumer may consider the broader impacts of their consumption on other people, animals, and

the physical environment (McNeill and Moore, 2015) and regards sustainability as a present motivation to participate in the sharing economy (e.g., Loussaïef, Ulrich and Damay, 2019). Such a non-egoistic factor may motivate collaborative consumption behavior once an individual's self-centered needs are satisfied (Schuitema and De Groot, 2014). The focus of the current study is on the environmental perspective of perceived pro-social utility to adapt to urgent sustainability, as denoted in the fashion industry. Therefore, although adapted by context, the pro-social utility measure consists of the same item that Lamberton and Rose (2012) used.

However, different from the current literature on transaction utility or flexibility utility, debates have emerged regarding the issue of whether renting services contribute to environmental protection. On the one hand, the non-ownership modes of consumption are presented as collaborative and pro-social, altruistic, and environmentally sustainable (Belk 2007, 2010; Botsman and Rogers 2010; Chen 2009; Gansky 2010; Ozanne and Ozanne 2011). Specifically, rental services can reduce the environmental burden, considering that they may maximize product usage among the users (e.g., Lang, Li, and Zhao, 2020; Lahti & Selosmaa, 2013). Furthermore, as described in the Introduction, renting may have resource-saving potentials by minimizing materialism and reducing overconsumption (e.g., Ozanne and Ozanne 2011; Leismann, Schmitt, Rohn, & Baedeker, 2013; Foster, Slezak, Heimans, 2013), which is a significant cause of environmental degradation. On the other hand, rental services still lack empirical evidence from different perspectives, such as the ecological costs of incessantly transporting and cleaning the process of the rental apparel. Nonetheless, these factors may have significant negative impacts on the environment. Furthermore, the sustainable consequences are linked not only with the sharing service but also with the product itself. Most clothing sharing economy models do not purposefully consider the origin of the product they offer and its supply chain (Laukkanen and Tura, 2020).

Such contradictory uncertainty is consistent with conflicting research that portrays consumers' diverse perceived pro-social values of renting's environmental benefits. Adam Smith, who praised the selfishness of individuals in *The Wealth of Nations*, did not believe that only selfish motives matter for humans. In his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith wrote, "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it" (Smith 1759: 3). Following these arguments, consumers could also have different degrees of perceived pro-social values in renting consumption. Some studies find a link between pro-social or environmental concerns and access-based consumption (Bolton and Alba, 2012; Hamari et al., 2016; Leismann et al., 2013; Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010; Piscicelli et al., 2015; Prothero et al., 2011; Sacks, 2011), whereas other studies do not find a significant relationship between pro-social and commercial sharing and ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton and Rose, 2012; Oyedele, 2018). Specifically, some other consumers are skeptical about the real quantifiable environmental and societal impacts of renting services (e.g., Gullstrand Edbring, Lehner, and Mont, 2016).

Such contradictory findings may result from different measurements and other antecedents such as consumers' personality traits. Therefore, the goal of this dissertation is to provide additional insights by assessing the relationships between the chosen personality traits and consumers' perceived values in renting consumption. Furthermore, consumers' perceived pro-social utility may be primarily guided by self-serving and utilitarian motivation. It may affect their perceptions of the profit/cost values (flexibility utility/transaction utility in our case). For example, if consumers weigh more on transaction utility and flexibility utility than on pro-social utility, then a positive perception of pro-social utility may be a bonus to enhance their overall functional utility perception. Such perceived bonus of being able to undertake pro-social activities may be explained

by relying on the “extended” versions of the self-interested model: people may contribute to a public good if doing so is a precondition of receiving a private good (Olson 1965). Such pro-social perception could be practical in a more secure manner, as it can self-signal the consumers’ positive social reputation and good traits (Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Therefore, considering the potential close relationships among transaction utility, flexible utility, and pro-social utility and the primary research objective to investigate the overall functional utility versus social utility, this study assesses pro-social utility as one of three dimensions of the overall functionality of the renting consumption.

3.2.4. Sub-dimension: Social Utility

In this thesis, social utility refers to the benefits or relative advantages derived from using sharing systems as supported by the users’ social or peer group; for example, Sierra Club members may support car sharing because it conserves natural resources (Lamberton and Rose, 2012; Oyedele and Simpson, 2018). The initial cases of the file-sharing of music consumption (Huang, 2005) or accumulation of illegal movie copies also illustrate this point (Hennig, 2007). Such consumption enables consumers to establish social links with relevant others. Consumers can interact with their peers about illegal movie copies and related technology and become part of a social network. At the same time, consumers can demonstrate their expertise and receive social rewards for that expertise from others.

Yu and Lee’s (2019) empirical findings on upcycled products purchase follow a previous research by Kumar and Noble (2016). They argue that social value captures the ability to help consumers increase their perceived status in the community or improve their self-esteem. Research has emphasized the emerging role of consumers’ value co-creation (Sheth and Uslay, 2007), collective co-production (Peters et al., 2012), and community belonging (Närvänen et al.

2013) in consumption behavior. Community membership or the aspiration to be part of a group or community is one determinant of practicing sharing or collaborative consumption activities (Ostrom, 1990; Nelson and Rademacher, 2009; Galbreth et al., 2012).

Scholars generally argue that social utility significantly affects consumers' sharing intentions or behaviors. For example, Belk (2007) contends that sharing systems can help foster unique interactions and altruism or the need to care for others. Social utility is an essential factor in understanding the consumer use of sharing services. The relationship between the need for social interaction and consumer choice behavior is well established in the literature (Närvänen et al., 2013; Ostrom, 1990). In an access-based consumption context, Piscicelli et al. (2015) also find that sharing platforms facilitate consumer interactions, resulting in more robust consumer bonding. They also indicate that enduring trust and consumer need for social interaction are essential to explain the motives to participate in access-based consumption. This UK-based online platform facilitates sharing and lending goods, space, and people skills. Related to these findings, Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) similarly consider the need for social interaction and satisfaction as a vital motive of users of a toy-sharing service. Albinsson and Perera (2009) state that the need for social belonging and knowledge exchange predicts the likelihood of using sharing services. In empirical studies, Chen (2009) also uncovers the collective enjoyment in the context of art visitation. Albinsson and Perera (2012) underscore a sense of community as a principal driver of (regular) participation in sharing activities. They argue that people use community gatherings to share knowledge and goods for ideological and practical reasons. Mohlmann's (2015) empirical research also demonstrates that community belonging positively impacts the likelihood of using a sharing option again.

However, the existing literature also shows contradictory findings on the relationship between consumers' perceived social utility and participation in the sharing economy. Previous

studies suggest that social utility's relationship with the sharing economy may be context-based. Empirical evidence demonstrates a positive relationship between social value and sharing economy-related consumption. For example, Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) empirical studies find a significant relationship between social utility and room-sharing intentions. Albinsson and Perera's (2009) empirical research in clothing exchange events, which entail swapping items while socializing, shows that consumers perceive shared community and value social networking opportunities as benefits. Ozanne and Ballantine's (2010) quantitative studies with 397 toy library members reveal that "the socialites enjoy the social benefits of active participation in their library; the market avoiders also perceived social, and community benefits; [and] the quiet anti-consumers feel a sense of belonging to their toy library."

On the contrary, empirical evidence shows a negative relationship between social value and sharing economy-related consumption. For example, Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) empirical studies demonstrate no significant relationship between social value and intention to use Zipcar. Ozanne and Ballantine's (2010) empirical research similarly indicates that another group of consumers, whom they refer to as "passive members," is not socially involved during the sharing activities in the toy library. Lamberton and Rose (2012) also underscore that social utility has no significant relationship with the intention to use Zipcar. Such negative results align with Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) conclusion that sharing services' use-value is more critical than social value. However, no studies have analyzed the issue of whether different antecedents such as consumers' personality traits may impact consumers' perceived social value differently in renting consumption, specifically in the subscribed fashion rental context. Therefore, the potential relationships between antecedents and this social utility construct are worthy of an investigation. In this study, consistent with other utilities, we choose to use Lamberton and Rose's (2012) measurement on social utility but to adapt it to the fashion rental context.

Synthesis for Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, we have reviewed the principal concepts often used interchangeably with access-based consumption in the literature. We have also suggested the main criteria for conceptualizing renting consumption in the digital age that we focus on investigating in this thesis. Furthermore, we have proposed a multi-dimensional approach for operationalizing the main variable of interest in this thesis on renting over buying. Specifically, we offer to examine the consumers' perceived functional value in renting by understanding how they perceive the transaction utility, the flexibility utility, and the pro-social utility (environment-friendly utility) in the renting consumption. To measure the consumers' perceived social value in renting, we use Lambertson and Rose (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) social utility scale. Specifically, in the conceptualization of pro-social utility, the sustainability-oriented benefits that consumers perceive highlight the advantages for the environment in participating in the consumption of certain products or services. Meanwhile, the conceptualization of social utility underscores the benefits derived from the interaction with peers or other consumers who potentially form a community in participating in such consumption. An overview of the perceived utilities, the conceptualization we have chosen for each, and our primary references is shown in *Table 2*.

Perceived Values in Renting	Perceived Utilities in Renting	Conceptualizations in this Thesis	References
Perceived Functional Value in Renting	Transaction Utility	consumers' perceived advantage deal value in the digitalized renting consumption compared to the ownership of a commercialized product	Lamberton and Rose, 2012
	Flexibility Utility	access to products and services when, where and how they are needed	Lamberton and Rose, 2012
	Prosocial Utility	the benefits derived by sustainability-oriented and environment-friendly consumption of products or services	Minton and Rose, 1997; Sacks, 2011
Perceived Social Value in Renting	Social Utility	the benefits or relative advantages derived from using sharing systems as supported by the users' social or peer group	Lamberton and Rose, 2012; Oyedele and Simpson, 2018

Table 2: Summary of the Conceptualizations of Perceived Utilities in Renting

Chapter 2 – Conceptualizations of Antecedents

This chapter presents the four personality traits (or orientations) that we consider in this research as potential explanatory factors of the consumer's choice of renting rather than buying. Specifically, the roles of materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992), variety seeking (Olsen, Tudoran, Honkanen and Verplanken, 2016), frugality (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner and Kuntze, 1999), and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) (Spratt, Czellar and Spangenberg, 2009) in explaining consumers' choices of renting over buying are investigated in this thesis. These four personality traits are covered in the four sections of this chapter. Each section is divided into two main subsections. The first subsection provides a critical review of the literature on the focal constructs and justifies the choices made in this thesis in terms of concept definition. The second section shows how the investigation of the impact of these constructs on the preference for renting versus buying contributes to marketing research.

1. Materialism

Consumption is often linked with materialism (Belk, 1985) or a materialistic value orientation (MVO; Kasser et al., 2004; Richins and Dawson, 1992). Indeed, materialism has been an essential trait in understanding consumer culture, in which acquisitive consumption is considered a central means of achieving personal goals (Fournier and Richins, 1991; Richins, 2017). Empirically, materialism has been shown to explain how people relate to their possessions, with the investigation of crucial traditional marketing phenomena such as the incorporation of

possessions into the extended self (Belk, 1988), the different disposal tendencies (e.g., Joung 2013), compulsive buying (Faber & O’Guinn, 1988; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 1997; Roberts *et al.*, 2003), brand perception (Kamineni, 2005), social influence conformity (Schroeder and Dugal, 1995), and conspicuous consumption (Mason, 1981).

As described in Chapter 1, a switch from a traditional enduring, ownership-based consumption mode to a more liquid, ephemeral, access-based, and dematerialized mode has occurred (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). Therefore, a legitimate step is the investigation of the potential role of materialism in this new context where possessions seem to play a less critical role. Specifically, Atanasova and Eckhardt (2021; p. 18) suggest that “materialism’s boundaries have broadened in today’s marketplace. When ownership is de-prioritized, materialism can encompass strategic curation, experiential consumption, and adoption of bricolages across spectrums of solid–liquid, luxury–budget, and access–ownership.”

1.1. Comparison of Different Perspectives in Conceptualizing Materialism

Materialism originally referred to the philosophical notion that nothing exists except matter and its movements (Lange, 1865). Materialism is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the devotion of material needs and desires, neglecting spiritual matters; a way of life, opinion or tendency based entirely upon material interests.” Among numerous conceptualizations of materialism in consumer research (e.g., Schroeder and Dugal, 1995; Campbell, 1969; Dawson & Bamossy, 1991; Ward and Wackman, 1971; Fromm, 1976; Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Mukerji, 1983; Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser, 2002; Wang and Wallendorf, 2006), the two most dominant ones at an individual level of analysis are those of Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992).

1.1.1. Richins and Dawson's Conceptualization of Materialism

From another perspective, Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving primary life goals or desired states. They indicate that the construct of materialistic value encompasses three dimensions in the measure structure: “The first dimension (labeled “success”) represents the use of possessions as an indicator of success in life. The second dimension (“centrality”) concerns the importance of acquisition and possession generally. The third dimension (“happiness”) concerns the perception that possessions are needed for happiness” (Richins and Dawson’s 1992, p. 309). In other words, Richins and Dawson conceptualize material values as “encompassing three domains: the use of possessions as an indicator of success in life to judge the success of others and oneself, the centrality of possessions in a person’s life, and the belief that possessions and their acquisition lead to happiness and life satisfaction” (Richins and Dawson, 2004; p. 210).

Richins and Dawson (1992) further show that materialism significantly influences consumer behavior in various ways. First, “materialistic people value acquisition and the means to acquire possessions more highly than those low in materialism. They value acquisition more than other life goals” (Richins and Dawson, 1992; p. 311). Second, materialists are self-centered and unconcerned about others. Specifically, this result supports their hypothesis that “materialists prefer to retain their resources for their use and are less willing than others to share what they have, both in terms of their money and possessions” (Richins and Dawson, 1992; p. 312). In addition, “the relationship between materialism and Leonard-Barton’s (1981) voluntary simplicity lifestyle scale, while significant, is not especially strong” (Richins and Dawson, 1992; p. 313). For this latter result, Richins and Dawson surmise that this outcome may be due to the weaknesses of the voluntary simplicity scale.

1.1.2. Belk's Conceptualization of Materialism

Belk (1985) defines materialism as a personality trait, “the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions,” and considers it as a combination of three dimensions, namely possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy. Possessiveness refers to “the inclination and tendency to retain control or ownership of one’s possessions” (Belk, 1985). This definition highlights an individual’s post-acquisition relationship with objects (Belk, 1982). Consequently, possessiveness includes a concern about the loss of possessions (Belk, 1984b), a desire for greater control of ownership rather than the lesser control of rental, borrowing, or leasing (Berry and Maricle, 1973; Marshall, 1935). Second, non-generosity is “an unwillingness to give possessions to or share possessions with others” (Belk, 1984b). As non-generosity is based on egoistic self-interest (Hogan 1975), non-generous consumers are likely reluctant to lend or donate possessions to others. They may hold negative attitudes toward charity (Belk, 1984b). Third, envy pertains to “displeasure and ill will at the superiority of [another person] in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable” (Schoeck 1966). In contrast to jealousy that focuses on one’s possessions, envy is likely to emphasize another’s possessions (Schoeck 1966; Walcot 1978). Belk’s definition highlights the importance of possessions for materialists and consumers’ desire for the possessions themselves.

1.1.3. Terminal Versus Instrumental Materialism

Aside from Richins and Dawson (1992) and Belk’s (1985) conceptualizations of materialism as two most dominant perspectives in understanding the materialist traits, previous theoretical dichotomies of materialism also propose to distinguish “instrumental materialism” and “terminal materialism” as two diverging ways based on the purpose of the consumption and the

manner by which consumers relate to material objects (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1978).

On the one hand, “terminal materialism” involves the desire to acquire for acquiring purposes. Possessions could provide their owner with feelings of being secure and satisfied while boosting one’s ego (Richins and Dawson, 1991). To illustrate a narcissistic orientation, for example, “the guitar is purchased simply for the status it conveys” (Lambert and Desmond, 2013; p. 692). Another example is when one treats a car “as a status symbol, an anthropomorphized symbol of power, or as an object to be appreciated for the sake of its beauty” and that “it is valued for the sense of having it provides” (Belk and Pollay’s, 1985, p. 889). From this perspective, possessions themselves can drive an individual to wish to acquire and accumulate even more controls.

On the other hand, some scholars argue against the terminal form of materialism (e.g., Richins & Fournier, 1991) and contend that only instrumental forms of acquisitive behavior can exist. Arguments against terminal materialism are in line with the economic theory of utilitarianism (Richins and Dawson 1991). This group of materialists’ pleasures is derived from the positive feedback on their possessions from others (Fitzmaurice and Comegys, 2006). For example, in a social context, the ownership of certain goods symbolizes signal accomplishment (Richins, 1994) and the attainment of social status (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn, 1999). In addition, instrumental materialism highlights the social connection with peers. For example, this group of materialists may use a product for self-cultivation and for strengthening relationships with others; for instance, these materialists may purchase a guitar to become more skillful in playing it and play it for others (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

In sum, instrumental materialism is defined in this thesis as finding importance in possessions to an end, implying how consumers tend to value an object with derived values of this

object. For example, a person who builds model airplanes may love his tools to accomplish this task (Scott, 2009). On the contrary, terminal materialism is defined as viewing possessions as necessary as an end. For example, a person may value a large house simply because of the status of ownership (Scott, 2009). However, scales for measuring these two types of materialism are lacking to date. We conceptualize materialism by combining both aspects in this thesis.

1.2. Choice of Richins and Dawson's Conceptualization of Materialism in This Thesis

Based on the preceding literature review, we choose Richins and Dawson's (1992) conceptualization of materialism as an individual's value orientation for the following three main reasons:

1. This conceptualization follows the broader psychological values tradition (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992) in terms of conceiving values as goal-directed cognitive structures that shape behavior across various domains and contexts. Compared to Belk's definition that focuses on psychological dimensions, Richins and Dawson's conceptualization reflects how possessions are essential in projecting one's desired self-identity and social image. From this perspective, Richins and Dawson's (1992) conceptualization of materialism thus aligns better with other chosen antecedents in this thesis to represent how consumers perceive the relationships between self, possessions, and brands.

2. Specifically, possession, display, and use of goods – those consumer activities associated with materialism – help people to define, maintain, and enhance their self-concepts (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). In the fashion rental context, if we view the use of fashion products (i.e., display in social networking events) as a primary vehicle for status signaling or identity construction, renting creates an alternative means toward that end. Previous research also suggests that choosing liquid consumption by opting out of solid ownership may offer distinct benefits for identity (e.g.,

Weiss and Johar, 2016). Therefore, investigating how materialism may affect consumers' perceived values in the usage of fashion products implies exploring how materialism manifests in consumers' choices in fulfilling self-identity goals. This thesis also seeks to provide more empirical evidence for understanding "materialism as identity goal pursuits" (Shrum et al., 2013).

3. The published literature provides only limited information about the reexamination of Richins and Dawson's (1992) dimensionality. Only four studies besides Richins and Dawson's original article reported confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with mixed results. Ahuvia and Wong (1995) reported a "normed fit index" of .99 for the CFA, but they did not describe the model they used. However, other researchers identified significant problems with scale structure in CFA (e.g., Pinto, Parente, and Palmer 2000). Exploratory factor analyses in the literature suggest some problems with Richins and Dawson's (1992) scale. Of the 10 studies that reported exploratory factor analysis, "two indicated that they obtained results similar to those obtained by Richins and Dawson, but the remainder reported problems of varying magnitude (e.g., Watson 1998)" (Richin and Dawson, 2004; p. 210). By assessing the relationships between materialism with consumers' perceived values in renting consumption and their emotional attachment to the brands of rented items, this thesis intends to reexamine the further dimensionality of Richins and Dawson's (1992) measurement.

2. Variety Seeking

Previous studies suggest that variety seeking can be an essential determinant of behavior loyalty and intention to switch (e.g., McAlister 1982, Feinberg et al., 1992; Shirin and Puth, 2011). In addition, Shirin and Puth (2011) contend that variety seekers may also play a vital role in spreading the word about the brand if they had positive experiences with it, potentially resulting

in customer acquisitions for the brand. At the aggregate level, previous research indicates that “variety-seeking may become a relevant market characteristic affecting the performance of consumer service companies and the competitive strategies” (e.g., Berne et al., 2001; pp. 341-342). Specifically, meeting consumers’ needs for diversity contributes to the success of an effective marketing strategy in the fashion industry (Barry, 2014). As shown in the marketing campaigns of several renting companies, such as Rent the Runway and YCloset, the subscription options allow consumers to access the “closet in the cloud” with “unlimited” choices of fashion apparel. Therefore, understanding the variety-seeking trait may benefit renting companies in providing better service when targeting variety seekers who choose to rent over to buy.

2.1. Choice of Olsen et al.’s Conceptualization in This Thesis

Several previous studies propose definitions of variety seeking. Olsen et al.’s (2016) conceptualization of variety-seeking tendency is adopted in this thesis. Olsen et al. (2016; p. 7) define variety seeking as “an individual (internal) tendency to seek variety in daily routines and activities, based on a personality trait termed ‘optimum stimulation level’ (OSL), in line with Sharma et al. (2010).” The reason for choosing Olsen et al.’s (2016) conceptualization on variety-seeking tendency in this thesis is twofold. First, this definition highlights the internal motivation rather than external influences in explaining the consumer behavior of seeking variety. Second, this definition emphasizes the general tendency to seek variety rather than focusing on the more activity-specific level of consumption. Hence, this conceptualization is consistent with the features of other chosen antecedents in the proposed framework, underscoring voluntary motivations and a general tendency of personal traits. This conceptualization also implies that variety seekers tend to engage in greater exploration to escape from the “suboptimal level of stimulation” (Glaro Ganac,

2018) and to complicate the buying process with the trial of different products and brands (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982).

Other conceptualizations of variety seeking are found in the existing literature. Variety seeking denotes a person's general tendency to switch away from the choice made on the last occasion (Kim and Drolet, 2003) or the "tendency of individuals to seek diversity in their choices of services and goods" (Kahn 1995, p. 139). Variety seeking is also characterized by how a person expresses a desire to try new and different things (Donthu & Gillilan, 1996). In line with Sharma et al. (2010), Olsen et al. (2016, p. 7) define variety seeking as "an individual (internal) tendency to seek variety in daily routines and activities, based on a personality trait termed 'optimum stimulation level' (OSL)." This approach implies that the variety-seeking tendency is independent of preferences for shopping for a particular product in a specific situation (Menon & Kahn, 1995). This tendency may occur even when variety seeking results in relatively lower satisfaction with the new choice (Ratner, Kahn, & Hahnemann, 1999), as variety seekers have "the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences" (Zuckerman, 1994). Variety-seeking tendencies are also classified as hedonic behaviors associated with experiencing emotion and psychosocial motivation rather than rationality and functional benefits (Sharma et al., 2010; Verplanken & Sato, 2012). As Olsen et al. (2016; p. 21) explain, "feelings of fantasy, creativity, lively imagination, and intellect define variety seekers."

The literature also defines variety seeking based on antecedents such as internal personal motivations and external, or derived, driving forces based on external situations (Kahn, 1995). Specifically, Kahn (1995) discusses three primary reasons why consumers seek variety in their purchases. Consumers may pursue variety because of an internal need for variety due to satiation of attributes or a desire for additional stimulation. Consumers may also seek variety because of changes in the external environment. The retailer may directly manipulate these shifts through

changes in the marketing mix such as price or place, or these changes may simply be naturally occurring. The third reason why consumers seek variety is as a hedge against uncertainty in future tastes. A varied portfolio of options increases the likelihood that consumers will be able to choose their most preferred choice in the future. The variety-seeking tendency is rooted in need for a change to resolve the boredom associated with a brand and a product (Van et al., 1996).

Although researchers differ in their approaches and sources for explaining variety seeking, the concept of OSL is central to theories that explain the variety-seeking tendency (Sharma et al., 2010). OSL refers to the amount of stimulation that an individual prefers to receive from all possible internal and external sources, across all possible situations, over time (Zuckerman, 1979). In the OSL framework, variety seeking is a particular case of exploratory behavior, which is aimed at modifying the stimulation toward the optimum level (Orth and Bourrain, 2005). Thus, whenever a discrepancy exists between the actual stimulation level that an individual experiences and the optimum stimulation level that such individual possesses under the circumstances, for example, in a particular environment or when dealing with a specific product category, the individual may engage in variety seeking to resolve the discrepancy (Van Trijp, 1996). This approach implies that the variety-seeking tendency is independent of preferences for shopping for a particular product in a specific situation (Menon & Kahn 1995).

2.2. Roles of Variety Seeking in Explaining Consumers' Choices of Renting Over Buying

Variety-seeking tendency highlights the importance of variety for this group of consumers. It corresponds to the fast-paced evolving nature of fashion consumption and the characteristics of renting service, underscoring a large variety in available options in the digital age. Specifically, different from purchasing, participation in a subscribed rental consumption allows consumers to access and experience a large quantity of variety in products and brands on a more flexible and

economic basis without the burdens of ownership. Accordingly, such renting consumption also benefits consumers for constantly changing liquid identity projects in a digital age (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Understanding the role of variety seeking traits in explaining consumers' choices for renting over buying helps fill three main research gaps.

First, Lawson et al.'s (2016) cluster analysis based on the respondents' "attitudes toward access-based consumption" (Richins, 1997) identifies "change seekers" as one of the four cluster groups. These change-seeking consumers "score the highest on attitude and purchase intentions toward access-based consumption, and they are the least possessive and materialistic" (Lawson et al., 2016; p. 2619). Lawson et al. (2016) choose to examine the construct of variety seeking because it captures the traits of consumers seeking flexibility in access-based consumption. Specifically, "access-based consumption allows individuals to experience the newest trends and products without the burdens of ownership or commitment to a specific style or brand, for example, Rent the Runway, Borrowed Bling, and Bag, Borrow or Steal (Lawson et al., 2016; p 2617). However, Lawson et al.'s (2016) questionnaire focuses on exploring the potential users' attitudes and purchase intentions rather than the actual choice of renting over buying. Further understanding of how variety-seeking traits may affect consumers' perceived values in their renting choices over buying in general is still lacking.

Second, previous research suggests that the variety-seeking tendency is a vital consumer characteristic that influences both hedonic and utilitarian shopping values. For example, Chang's (2002) empirical studies in fashion apparel consumption suggest a positive relationship between variety-seeking tendency and hedonic shopping value. Consumers who seek variety and stimulation from fashion shopping are more likely to have hedonic shopping value than utilitarian value. Previous research indicates that the variety of items in hedonic shopping (Kahn and Isen, 1993) provides pleasant stimulation, rarity, novelty, and innovation (Roehm and Roehm, 2005),

thereby increasing gratification, excitement, and enjoyment in shopping (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1995; Lee et al., 2009). Hence, variety-seeking tendency reflects feeling-based decision making (Sharma et al., 2006). In addition, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), variety seeking is related to non-purposeful behavior (exploratory purchase behavior). Meanwhile, Lee et al.'s (2009) empirical studies on online auction behaviors suggest a positive relationship between variety-seeking tendency and hedonic values. The variety-seeking tendency also positively affects utilitarian values in online auctions. Therefore, greater product diversity helps buyers to reduce time costs and increase shopping efficiency. Similarly, Irani and Hanzae's (2011) empirical studies reveal that variety seekers evaluate apparel (Manto or Shirt) shopping as providing high utilitarian value and hedonic value. However, no current research has investigated the issue of how variety seeking may affect consumers' shopping behaviors with perceived utilitarian/functional value and social value in fashion rental consumption.

Third, in the research stream on access-based consumption, empirical research that examines the role of variety seeking in understanding the relationships between consumers and brands of rented items is lacking. Nonetheless, Feinberg et al. (1992) suggest that the intensity of variety seeking in a specific market could be an essential feature of the market as it may determine the potential market shares of brands. Previous empirical studies denote that higher variety-seeking traits decrease the probability of purchasing the same brand on the next occasion (e.g., McAlister 1982, Givon 1984, Lattin and McAlister 1985, Kah, Kalwani and Morrison 1986). More recently, Gounaris' (2004) empirical research similarly demonstrates that premium loyalty is associated with risk-averse individuals without an inclination to seek variety in their purchases. However, this research focuses on the purchasing context rather than the renting context. It still lacks an understanding of how variety seeking may influence consumers' emotional attachment with brands of the rented items or their loyalty to re-rent or buy the brand after the renting experience.

3. Frugality

Renting service provides an alternative means of accessing the usage of products with fractional rental service fees compared to the retail prices. From this perspective, renting could benefit frugal consumers to save money to serve their longer-term goals. Therefore, understanding consumers' renting choices over buying implies comprehending the economic traits. Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptualization of frugality is adopted in this thesis, which is defined as “a lifestyle trait reflecting disciplined acquisition and resourcefulness in product and service use. Frugality is sacrifice in denying a series of short-term purchasing whims and industriousness by resourcefully using what is already owned or available for use; all of this is to achieve longer-term goals” (Lastovicka et al., 1999; p. 96).

This section comprises three main parts. The significance of investigating the role of frugality is explained in the first part. A holistic review of origins and definitions of frugality from diverse perspectives in different disciplines of the social science literature is presented in the second part. The third part covers a review of the conceptualizations of frugality in consumer research and a justification for choosing Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptualization and measurement in this thesis.

3.1. Reason for Choosing to Examine Frugality in This Thesis

The frugality trait highlights implications for the usage stage of consumer behavior. Empirically, frugal individuals purchase less (Rose, Smith, and Segrist, 2010), and they reuse and repair objects (Albinsson, Wolf, and Kopf, 2010). This specific feature corresponds to the mode of renting consumption, as the latter also underlines the usage value of the rented products. For

example, one of the most important added values in the rental service is the repair service, which aims to maximize the lifespan of rented items. Therefore, from this perspective, choosing the construct of frugality is pertinent to understanding renting consumption in this thesis.

Furthermore, investigating the role of frugality in explaining consumers' choices of renting over buying aims to fill some research gaps. Existing empirical studies demonstrate that frugality helps to explain consumer buying behavior and consumer product-use behaviors. For example, the frugal are less susceptible to interpersonal influence, less materialistic, less compulsive in buying, and more price and value conscious (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Awais et al.'s (2020) empirical studies also show a positive relationship ($p = .05$) between frugality and sustainable consumption behavior (Awais et al., 2020). However, the existing literature focuses on the effects of thrift on buying and post-acquisition behaviors. It lacks studies exploring the topic of how frugality may affect consumers' behaviors before using or acquiring the products. Renting could allow consumers to try the new products and brands and to decide whether to buy them at a later stage. Hence, this thesis intends to fill this research gap by assessing the construct of frugality as an antecedent of consumers' choice of renting over buying.

3.2. Synthesis of Frugality Conceptualizations from Diverse Perspectives

Since Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptualization of frugality, frugal consumers and their behaviors have captured the attention of marketing academics. Todd and Lawson (2003) argue that such emerging need to understand the frugal behaviors is in line with the increasing recognition of the importance of understanding non-consumption (Gould et al., 1997), and the parallel move toward what some scholars have termed "voluntary simplicity" (e.g., Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Kilbourne, 1992; McDonald, 1998). Scholarly interest in frugal behavior (e.g., Bove et al., 2009; Awais et al., 2020) has grown in the past two decades for two main reasons. First, environmental

degradation and concern for the environment have prompted consumers to practice sustainable consumption (Young, 2010; Jackson, 2014). Second, during the writing process of this thesis (2016–2021), economic recession worldwide has compelled many consumers to become increasingly frugal (Birkner, 2013; Egol et al., 2010). In fact, “Consumers are taking up controlled sustainable consumption and simplicity with anticipation to re-establish prosperity and peace into their lives” Awais et al. (2020; p. 15).

In addition, frugality is a multi-disciplinary subject rooted in our human past (Wilk, 1996). The conceptualizations of frugality from religious, cultural, social, and ecopolitical perspectives are reviewed in the succeeding paragraphs.

From a religious standpoint, major religions discourage excess in the acquisition and encourage restraint (Duming, 1992) as well as promote the ethic of seeking satisfaction in achieving spiritual growth (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Eastern religions sanctify ascetic denunciation of possessions to reach a higher consciousness (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Similarly, Western Judeo-Christian traditions have precise prescriptions: the Old Testament law limits acquisition (Doris Janzen. Longacre, 1976), and Jesus spoke five times more about money and possessions than prayer in the Bible (Fisher, 1976).

From social and cultural perspectives, frugality has been embraced in different continents throughout history. East Germans resist hyper-consumption and throwaway-ism in the wasteland but choose to integrate their deep-rooted frugality value (Albinsson et al., 2010). Studies of Asian cultures’ values have also explicitly recognized the role of frugality as a guiding principle underlying consumer behavior (e.g., Anderson & Wadkins, 1991; Wang & Rao, 1995). Specifically, in China, moral frugality is viewed as a trait of Chinese national identity (Xie, 1916), and Chinese culture has been centered around a solid cultivated habit of thrift and frugality (Chan, Zhang, and Wang, 2006).

From an ecopolitical perspective, Wilk's (1996) economic model uses periods greater than individual life spans, and the benefit can explain disciplined acquisition to future generations. Frugality has been characterized as a central aspect of a "conservative society" (Henion & Kinnear, 1996), a goal worthy of national attention (Johnson, 1978, 1985), as well as an urgent issue during economic recessions (Evans, 2011; Henderson, 1978). Frugality illustrates the paradox of saving and thrift: on the one hand, it is regarded as a rational response to times of economic crises (Yeniaras & Akarsu, 2017), positioned as a risk minimization strategy (Terrence H. Witkowski, 2010). On the other hand, the macroeconomic impact of consumer frugality is not always positive: consumers' frugality might hurt the production level of the entire economy (Keynes, 1936).

3.3. Choice of Lastovicka et al.'s Conceptualization as Antecedent to Study in This Thesis

Despite the extensive literature on frugality from diverse perspectives, frugality has been largely ignored in the modern consumer research discipline. Little literature was found to understand frugal consumers and their consumption behaviors until the late 20th century. Such lack of interest in investigating this concept of frugality can be due to the nature of consumerism, upon which consumer research develops. Specifically, contemporary capitalist cultures that are reliant on competition and striving encourage acquisitiveness and possessiveness (Belk, 1983). On the contrary, frugality can be viewed as the converse of the prevalently materialistic consumer culture (Todd and Lawson, 2003). From an individual's perspective, materialism and possessiveness could also be Western individualist traits. By contrast, the importance of belonging to a collectivist trait may mean that one is less into the ownership paradigm to display how one is different from others. The existing research may consequently dichotomize frugality and materialism being opposite and contradictory orientations.

The seminal work and the most shared view to conceptualize frugality in consumer research is Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) qualitative research. In their studies, Lastovicka et al. (1999) used in-depth interviews with self-professed frugal consumers, description of a mean person by undergraduates, and reviews of episodes of Oprah Winfrey and Montel Williams' shows on cheap spouses. These preliminary studies resulted in Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptual definition of frugality as "a unidimensional consumer lifestyle trait characterized by the degree to which consumers are both restrained in acquiring and in resourcefully using economic goods and services to achieve longer-term goals" (Lastovicka et al., 1999; p 88). Hence, their conceptualization of frugality as a lifestyle trait refers to the available frequency and intensity of frugal actions that an individual tends to exhibit. Such a frugal lifestyle could include, for example, the aspect of "spending habitude," such as buying in bulk, buying used goods, and avoiding coupons, as well as the element of "careful product use and reuse," such as reusing plastic baggies, using less detergent than manufacturers recommend, and timing showers (Dacyczyn, 1998).

Todd and Lawson (2003) assess whether frugality can be viewed as a set of guiding principles or a single value orientation that drives one's ultimate consumption behavior from the perspective of values. Todd and Lawson (2003) sent questionnaires to 10,000 New Zealanders with Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) eight-item scale of frugality, together with a modified version (Odin, Vinais and Valette-Florence, 1998) of Schwartz's (Schwartz 1994; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987) values inventory. Their empirical results demonstrate a lack of a clear association between frugality and any item regarding values. Hence, Todd and Lawson's (2003) studies support Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) contention that frugality is a personal lifestyle trait because, by definition, lifestyle is a system construct that must be viewed more holistically (Lawson and Todd, 2002). Lifestyle is particularly defined in consumer behavior as a constellation of activities, interests, and opinions that reflect living patterns (Wells & Tigert, 1971).

In sum, this thesis chooses Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptualization for two main reasons. First, it aims to assess how individuals' general tendency to live a frugal lifestyle rather than a single value may affect their perceived values in renting consumption. Lifestyle is conceptualized in consumer research as "a system of individual differences in the habitual use of declarative and procedural knowledge structures that intervene between abstract goal states (personal values) and situation-specific product perceptions and behaviors" (Brunso et al., 2004). Viewing frugality as a lifestyle construct suggests that it is dependent on values and other psychological underpinnings (Todd & Lawson, 2003). Those elements may also influence how a frugality lifestyle impacts consumers' purchasing attitudes and behaviors. In this manner, combined with other chosen antecedents representing personal value and psychological traits, frugality could help in illustrating a holistic picture of consumers' unique characteristics in renting consumption.

Second, although different perspectives define frugality, Lastovicka's conceptualization reflects diverse aspects and is more complete than other definitions. Specifically, the conceptualization includes two phases of consumption in acquiring and using possessions. However, it highlights the two potential dimensions of extrinsic and voluntary motivations behind the frugal lifestyle, namely "restraint in acquiring possessions" and "resourcefulness in using them," respectively. Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) measurement reflects attitudes toward saving, shopping, consuming, and recycling behaviors. Hence, it provides a larger picture than would be reflected in any limited set of values as assessed in Todd and Lawson's (2003) measurement.

4. Brand Engagement in Self-concept (BESC)

Brand engagement with self-concept is a characteristic first explored by Fournier (1998) that describes how consumers use brands to explain, display, and form their self-concepts. More recently, Sprott et al. (2009) developed a scale measuring brand engagement with self-concept, which they define as “an individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves” (p. 92). Sprott et al.’s (2009) conceptualization of brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) is adopted in this thesis because it highlights “a general tendency of consumers to construe their self-concept in terms of their favorite brands” (Sprott, 2009; p102). By using the BESC measure, firms may benefit from adapting brand communication strategies to a different level of BESC of target segments. Previous empirical research on BESC suggests that such self-construal can have significant implications for marketers in terms of brand equity (Keller, 1993), attention to brands (Sprott et al., 2009), clothing brand loyalty (Goldsmith et al., 2012), and brand preference (Liu et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of understanding of how BESC may affect consumers’ perceived values in renting consumption and how it may subsequently affect consumers’ emotional attachment and brand loyalty toward the brands of rented items. Therefore, by investigating the role of BESC in explaining consumers’ choice of renting over buying, this study aims to fill these research gaps.

This section comprises two main parts. In the first part, the significance of investigating the role of BESC in this thesis is explained. In the second part, the theoretical background and the uniqueness of the conceptualization of BESC compared to other constructs on consumer-brand relationships are reviewed.

4.1. Reason for Choosing Brand Engagement in Self-concept in This Thesis

The construct of brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) is pertinent and essential to understanding the subscribed fashion rental consumption in a digital age at least because of three main reasons: First, the concept of BESC highlights a general engagement with brands rather than a relationship with a specific brand. This unique characteristic helps answer the main research question in comprehending consumers' general tendency to choose to own the brands of the products. Specifically, in fashion consumption, whereby consumers are very informed of diverse fashion brands and their symbolic values, consumers need to choose the specific brands that are congruent to a person's self-concept. Moreover, the subscribed renting option in the digital age allows consumers to have access to a large variety of brands that could represent different brand personalities and brand meanings. Understanding consumers' preference for renting over buying thus implies understanding how likely consumers tend to connect their self-concepts with brands rather than with a particular brand. Together with other chosen antecedents in the proposed framework, the constellation of characteristics of these concepts helps to provide insights into the primary variable in this thesis.

Second, the concept of BESC is distinct from and complements the construct materialism in understanding the relationships between consumers, brands, possessions, and self-concepts in the renting context. Although Richins and Dawson's (1992, p. 308) concept of materialism underscores the importance of possessions in one's life and those possessions may serve purposes of the self-extension of self-expression, Richins (1994) shows that such motivations are seldom the major reasons for valuing a possession. For example, Sprott et al.'s (2009) discriminant validity between these two constructs of BESC and materialism indicates that BESC is a better predictor of the number of brands in possession and that BESC is predictive of the number of brands beyond any effect attributable to material values. From another perspective, BESC also complements

materialism to improve the understanding of consumer–brand connections, considering that possession is often the carrier of brands. For example, consumers are likely to use precious jewelry brands to enhance their self-image while treating the jewelry as a special personal belonging (Jamal and Goode, 2001). However, empirical research has yet to explore how consumers relate brands and possessions to their self-concepts in the renting context. Therefore, this thesis intends to provide some insights to foster the understanding in this research stream.

Third, previous empirical research suggests that the concept of “BESC affects important aspects of brand-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions” (Spratt et al., 2009, p92). For example, empirical studies demonstrate that consumers construe their self-concepts in their favorite brands (e.g., Spratt et al., 2009; Liu and Minton, 2018). Other prior research also indicates that BESC affects brand equity (Keller, 1993), word of mouth (WOM; Nyadzayo et al., 2020), brand loyalty (Goldsmith et al., 2012, Spratt et al., 2009, Nyadzayo et al., 2020), product involvement (Goldsmith et al., 2012, Spratt et al., 2009), attention to brands (Spratt et al., 2009), product knowledge (Spratt et al., 2009), brand love, and brand advocacy (Samala and Singh, 2019). In addition, empirically, consumers with higher levels of BESC tendencies are more likely to try new products (Goldsmith et al., 2015), to interact more on brand websites (Alden et al., 2016), to engage more in social media posts (Giakoumaki and Krepapa, 2020), to prefer national to private brands (Liu et al., 2018), and to become enthusiastic advocates of the brand (Samala and Singh, 2018). However, research has yet to investigate how BESC may affect alternative forms of consumption behaviors such as renting consumption. The understanding of how BESC may influence the consumers’ emotional attachment to the brands of rented products is also lacking. Therefore, the assessment of BESC as an antecedent in the proposed framework aims to fill these research gaps.

4.2. Uniqueness of the Conceptualization of Sprott et al.'s BESC Compared to Other Related Concepts on the Consumer–Brand Relationship

Previous marketing research conceptualizes several forms of customer–brand relationships. Related constructs include brand attachment (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), emotional attachment to brands (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), emotional brand attachment (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger; 2011), brand attitude (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), brand commitment (Warrington & Shim, 2000), brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978), customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011), customer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011), brand prominence (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), consumer–brand identification (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012), self–brand connection (Escalas, 2004; Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Tan et al., 2019), self–brand congruity (Sirgy, 1982), online brand engagement (Mollen and Wilson, 2010), and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC; Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009). An overview of the definitions of these similar yet different constructs on customer–brand relationships is presented in *Table 3*.

In general, three main features distinguish the concept of BESC from other related images on consumer–brand relationships. First, as highlighted in *Table 3*, similar to BESC, these concepts demonstrate different forms of connections between consumers and brands. Although other concepts describe consumers' relationships with a specific brand or a specific state of mind in brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011), the conceptualization of BESC distinguishes itself from each of these concepts because it highlights a generalized tendency to include brands rather than a particular brand as a part of self-concept. For example, “the self-brand connection scale (Escalas,

2004) measures the strength of the link between the self and a particular brand, while BESC provides a more comprehensive view of the person–brand connection by accounting for the notion that multiple brands are integrated into a consumer’s self-concept” (Sprott et al., 2009; p. 93). This conceptualization of BESC corresponds to the aim of this thesis, which is to explore the potential relationships between individuals and brands in general rather than with a particular brand, as it could contribute to an improved understanding of exciting patterns and concepts related to the alternative modes of consumption behaviors.

Second, BESC highlights whether consumers may develop self-schemas about how the brands they use and like are related to themselves (Sprott et al., 2009). This aspect is highly relevant to the research objective of the current thesis. Specifically, in fashion consumption, some consumers can be prone to certain brand categories, and they need to choose specific brands. Hence, understanding consumer preferences of renting over buying fashion products implies understanding how consumers tend to link brands with their self-construal. The theoretical background of Sprott et al.’s (2009) idea is cognitive schema theory. The self is understood as a set of schemas representing a stable structure of knowledge (Markus, 1977). Individuals show different self-schemas, and these differences engender various attitudes and behaviors toward objects that are relevant to these schemas, such as brands (Markus, 1983; Markus et al., 1982). Thus, this concept builds on the established view that the self can organize and maintain brands as part of the self-schema and associated memory structures (Keller, 1993; Liu et al., 2018). In other words, BESC demonstrates the importance of brands to consumers’ self-schemas (Alden et al., 2016). Notably, self-schemas are shaped by culture and shape culture (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 2010). This premise may indicate that BESC as an individual tendency will also depend on the cultural or the socioeconomic context (e.g., Razmus et al., 2019; 2020). Indeed, according to Markus and Kitayama’s self-construal theory (1991), culture determines self-construal, and

individuals from different cultures have reliable differences in self-construal (e.g., Jakubanečs et al., 2019).

Third, Sprött et al. (2009) propose that consumers form relationships with or engage with brands and that consumers differ in the extent to which they undertake these activities. For example, previous research has shown that consumers with a higher degree of BESC are less price- and time-sensitive when purchasing their favorite brands (Franzak et al., 2014). According to Sprött et al. (2009), this individual difference variable can be measured reliably and validly via a self-report. Sprött et al. (2009) consequently developed and validated an eight-item Likert scale to operationalize BESC and present various pieces of evidence supporting its validity. In Chapter 5 (Methodology), further details on the measurement and scales of BESC are discussed.

Concept	Definition	Authors	Difference from BESC
Brand Attachment	The strength of the bond connecting a brand with the self.	Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci (2010)	a Specific Brand
Brand Attitude	The individual's judgment of the extent to which a brand is good or bad.	Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci (2010)	a Specific Brand
Brand Commitment	The individual's emotional or psychological attachment to a brand within a product class, i.e., the degree to which a brand is firmly entrenched as the only acceptable choice within such a product class.	Warrington & Shim (2000)	a Specific Brand
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	Consumers' propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves.	Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg (2009)	General Engagement with Brands
Brand Love	The degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name.	Batra et al. (2012); Ahuvia (2005); Carroll & Ahuvia (2006)	a Specific Brand
Brand Loyalty	A deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.	Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Jacoby & Chestnut (1978); Oliver (1999)	a Specific Brand
Brand Prominence	The salience of the cognitive and affective bond that connects a brand to the self.	Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci (2010)	a Specific Brand
Brand Trust	The willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function.	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)	a Specific Brand
Consumer-Brand Identification	Customer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand.	Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert (2010)	a Specific Brand
	The consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand.	Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen (2012)	a Specific Brand
Customer Engagement	A psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships.	Brodie et al. (2011)	a Specific Brand
Customer Brand Engagement	The level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in brand interactions	Hollebeek (2011)	a Specific State of Mind
Emotional Attachments to Brands	An emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific brand	Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005)	a Specific Brand
Emotional Brand Attachment	The bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand and that involves feelings (i.e., affection, passion, and connection) toward the brand.	Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger (2011)	a Specific Brand
Online Brand Engagement	The customer's cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	a Specific Brand
Self-Brand Connection	The extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept	Escalas (2004); Escalas and Bettman (2005); Tan et al. (2019)	a Specific Brand
Self-Brand Congruity	The degree of fit between the consumer's self and the brand's image	Sirgy (1982)	a Specific Brand

Table 3: Constructs on the Customer–Brand Relationship

Synthesis for Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, we have presented the four antecedents of our conceptual model. An overview of these antecedents, the conceptualization we have chosen for each, and our main references is provided in *Table 4*.

Antecedents	Conceptualizations in this Thesis	References
Materialism	"A value that guides people's choices and conduct in a variety of situations, including consumption arenas", which can be measured with "a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life"	Richins and Dawson (1992; p307, 308)
Variety Seeking	"An individual (internal) tendency to seek variety in daily routines and activities, based on a personality trait termed 'optimum stimulation level' (OSL)"	Olsen, Tudoran, Honkanen, and Verplanken (2016; p12)
Frugality	"A lifestyle trait reflecting disciplined acquisition and resourcefulness in product and service use. Frugality is sacrifice in denying a series of short-term purchasing whims and industriousness by resourcefully using what is already owned or available for use; all of this is in service of achieving longer term goal."	Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, and Kuntze (1999; p 96)
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	"A general tendency of consumers to construe their self-concept in terms of their favorite brands"	Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009; p102)

Table 4: Summary of the Conceptualizations of Antecedents

Chapter 3 – Outcomes of the Consumer’s Choice of Renting Over Buying

In an access-based consumption context, consumers’ interaction with a *brand* is shifting in nature – part of it is from long-term committed ownership to short-term temporary access of an *object*. Such alternative interaction mode between an individual and *objects* may challenge the traditional ways of how consumers develop an emotional attachment to *brands*. However, to our best knowledge, no empirical research has examined how consumers may connect themselves with the brands of temporarily accessed items in the renting context. Specifically, the issue of how consumers’ renting behavior may impact their relationship with the brands of rented items remains unknown. This thesis aims to address these research gaps by investigating how the preference for renting over buying impacts two main dimensions of consumers’ relationship with the brand of rented items, namely consumers’ emotional attachment to the brand of rented items and consumer loyalty toward the brand of rented items. This chapter includes a literature review of these two concepts. For each of them, we first critically present the different theoretical perspectives in the literature and explain the choices in terms of conceptual definitions that we have developed. In the second sub-part, we subsequently illustrate the research gaps that can be fulfilled by exploring how a change in access mode can impact consumers’ relationship with the brand of rented items.

1. Emotional Attachment to the Brands of Rented Items

Previous studies suggest that people form an emotional attachment to various brands (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). For example, Slater (2000) indicates that various emotions (e.g., love, warm feelings) characterize collectors' emotional attachment to the brands of Coca-Cola and Hallmark. Theoretically, Batra et al. (2012) identify seven core dimensions of the brand love construct, namely passion-driven behaviors, self-brand integration, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, overall attitude valence, and attitude certainty. Previous research on consumer-brand relationships demonstrates that understanding the moving components of such relationships is highly relevant to both marketing academics and practitioners (e.g., Fournier, 1998). For example, establishing an emotional attachment to brands helps in boosting a company's financial performance by increasing the willingness to pay a price premium (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

Traditionally, brand attachments are often based on consumers' interactions with attachment *objects* over time (Baldwin et al., 1996). Specifically, during the process of owning the products, consumers are likely to spend time and effort thinking about which brand to choose to buy, where and how to acquire it, on which occasion to use it, and finally, how to store, maintain, repair, or dispose of the item. This process requires the consumers' high level of involvement in each phase. Consequently, consumers will likely develop various emotional attachments to the brands based on their frequent interactions with the pertinent item. On the contrary, there is significantly less time and fewer occasions to interact with an object than owning it in the renting context. For example, aside from the relatively short-term usage period, the renting process is characterized by the overseeing of the maintenance or repair of the rented items by the renting service firm rather than the renter.

Such limited interactions may then challenge consumers to bolster committed relationships with the brands of the rented items. However, from another perspective, as an alternative mode of consumption, renting could also create a hedonic and exotic shopping experience. Some consumers may obtain awareness of new brands that they did not know before. For example, variety seekers may perceive such explorations of new brands as an enjoyable or even a luxury experience. Consequently, these consumers may develop an emotional attachment to the brands of rented items. However, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical study has investigated whether and how a user may develop an emotional attachment toward the brands of rented items. Therefore, this thesis intends to fill the research gap by determining whether and how consumers may develop emotional attachment toward the brands of rented items. It also seeks to offer practical insights for brands when designing renting service strategies from the managerial perspective. These insights can also help the renting service firms to enhance their decision to choose the brands with which to cooperate.

1.1. Emotional Attachment from Diverse Theoretical Perspectives in Consumer Research

The concept of consumers' emotional attachment to brands has gained much attention in the marketing literature (e.g., Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994; Ahuvia, 1992; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). The desire to make a strong emotional attachment to others serves a basic human need, beginning from a child's attachment to their mother (Bowlby, 1980) and continuing through the adult stage with romantic relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 2021), kinships, and friendships (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). People can also form an emotional attachment to pets (Sable, 1995), places (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992), and celebrities (Alperstein, 1991). Following Shimp and Madden's (1988) analysis of consumer-object love based on Sternberg's paradigm (1986),

researchers have focused on consumer–brand relationships (Fournier, 1998), emotional attachment to brands (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005), brand romance (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011), romantic brand love (Sarkar, Ponnampalath and Murthy, 2012), and brand love (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012; Sajtos, Cao, Espinosa, Phau, Rossi, Sung and Voyer, 2021). These studies adopt multiple theoretical perspectives, such as attachment theory, self-expansion model (Reimann & Aron, 2009), and grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 283). Among these studies, the dominant views among scholars are based either on attachment theory or the self-expansion model (Aron et al., 1998). In the following subsections, we compare these different perspectives to understand the emotional attachment to brands. We also explain why this thesis uses Thomson, MacInnis, and Park’s (2005) conceptualization of the emotional attachment of brands over other conceptualizations to assess the renter’s emotional attachment to the brands of rented items.

1.1.1. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park’s Conceptualization of Emotional Attachment to Brands Based on Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was originally developed by John Bowlby in the 1950s and 1960s as an extension of psychoanalytic theory (Peluso, Peluso, White, and Kern, 2004). In psychology, attachment is an emotion-laden bond between a person and a specific object (Bowlby 1980). This definition echoes Belk’s (1985) conceptualization of materialism, highlighting a consumer’s attachment to worldly possessions. The pioneering work on attachment was conducted by Bowlby (1980) in parent–infant relationships. As Bowlby (1980) states, attachment behavior is guided by mental or internal working models that individuals develop of themselves, as well as their attachment figures based on their experiences in infancy and childhood. Specifically, according to Bowlby, attachment behavior has both a protective and an instructive function. The protective role

serves to keep the child close enough to the mother in times of potential danger so that the former can be protected. When no danger occurs, the instructive function of attachment is indicated, as the mother becomes a secure base from which the child can explore the environment (Bowlby, 1988; Krause & Haverkamp, 1996). Thus, attachment theory suggests that “greater familiarity and responsiveness produce stronger attachments” (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; p. 76). In the renting context, renters could perceive the renting experience as an opportunity to freely and securely explore the new brand. If the renters dislike this brand, they can still return the rented item without the commitment.

Among the research streams following attachment theory, Thomson, MacInnis, and Park’s (2005) seminal empirical work is the most cited, with 3,249 citations on Google Scholar to date (October 2021). Drawing from attachment theory, Thomson et al. (2005) define emotional attachment to brands as an emotion-laden bond between an individual and a specific brand. Thomson et al.’s (2005) empirical studies reveal that “the conceptualization of emotional attachment as a second-order factor [comprises] three first-order factors, namely connection, affection, and passion (eigenvalues >1).” Specifically, Thomson et al. (2005) develop a psychometrically reliable 10-item scale for measuring the strength of consumers’ emotional attachment to brands. The factor of affection reflects a consumer’s warm feelings toward a brand. The factor of passion denotes intense and aroused positive feelings toward a brand. The factor of connection indicates a consumer’s feeling of joining the brand. The factor of connection has the highest factor loading score ($=0.85$). Such a result suggests that the enhancement of the emotional attachment to brands entails nurturing a consumer’s warm feelings toward a brand and increasing the feeling of being connected and joined with the brand. These feelings represent a “hot” effect from the brand’s linkage to the self (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007).

Consumers could develop intense and aroused positive feelings toward a specific rented item brand during the renting process because of one's positive user experience. At the same time, by joining the renters' community, renters can receive feedback from other users or share the renting expertise of a specific brand with other users on the social media group. Echoing attachment theory, responsive interactions among users could enhance familiarity with the brand, which could further develop the affection and connection with the specific brand. In this case, the renter may depend on the user experience of the brand of rented items to temporarily enhance the renter's self-identity in the renting community. Therefore, Thomson et al.'s (2005) conceptualization of emotional attachment to a brand measures the emotions and implies how the consumer may connect the brand with one's self-identity during a social interaction with other renters.

1.1.2. Patwardhan and Balasubramanian's Conceptualization of Brand Romance Based on the Self-expansion Model

The self-expansion model (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013) integrates two themes: "First, the central human motive to enhance the self to achieve goals; and second, such enhancement is possible by 'including others in the self'" (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; p. 75). Self-expansion models suggest that consumers seek out brands that provide novelty, excitement, and arousal, similar to "a romantic relationship in which partners progressively discover each other" (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; p. 74). For instance, Aron et al. (1998) underscore that affection and the need for stimulation develop in a romantic relationship.

To our best knowledge, the studies of Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) are the first ones to apply the self-expansion model to understand the relationship between brands and consumers. Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011; p. 299) conceptualize brand romance as "a

state of emotional attachment (evoked in response to the brand as a stimulus) that is characterized by strong positive affect toward the brand, high arousal caused by the brand, and a tendency of the brand to dominate the consumer's cognition." Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) also conducted two empirical studies with two sets of data samples to explore and assess the factor structure of brand romance. Patwardhan and Balasubramanian's (2011) findings suggest a three-factor structure of brand romance, including pleasure, arousal, and dominance dimensions. According to Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011; p299), the pleasure dimension represents "to the extent that the stimulus brand imparts pleasure to the consumer"; the arousal dimension suggests that "the positive feelings must be intense enough to arouse the consumer to be meaningful or effective"; and the dominance dimension captures "the brand's tendency to engage the consumer's cognition." For example, Oliver (1999) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995) report the complete immersion of Harley-Davidson bikers within their community, illustrating how this group of consumers puts the focus brand as a center in their lives.

Following Patwardhan and Balasubramanian's conceptualization of romantic love, consumers rent a specific brand in the renting context because renting consumption as a new shopping experience may please and arouse the consumer. However, the expansion of the self requires frequent interactions between the consumer and the brand. It also needs to slow the process by rationing out novel perspectives, recourses, and identities (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2013). Therefore, for the renters, perceiving the centrality of the brand of rented items in their lives can be difficult due to the fast-changing nature of fashion renting consumption. In addition, different from Thomson et al.'s (2005) conceptualization highlighting the consumer-brand connection, Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011; p299) assert that "consumers can be strongly involved with a brand (of rented items in our context), with which they have no emotional connection."

1.1.3. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi's Conceptualization of Brand Love with the Grounded Theory Approach

In the realm of love-type attachment to consumables, Ahuvia (1992) addresses this exemplar of love as “object love” and finds similarities to the relationship literature (e.g., Miller, 2000). Specifically, Ahuvia’s empirical findings demonstrate that love objects involve a sense of enduring attachment and can provide emotional outcomes such as thrill, excitement, passion, sentiment, contentment, and relaxation. Previous literature mentioned many varied examples of consumable love by the respondents in Ahuvia’s (1992) study, including music, travel, clothing, pets, and food. Similarly, Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi’s (2012; p2) empirical studies using qualitative and quantitative methods suggest presenting brand love as a high-order construct, “including multiple cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, which consumers organize into a mental prototype.” Consequently, one probably needs sufficient time and frequent interactions with a particular object to develop such an enduring and high-order attachment. However, consumers only have limited time to experience the rented product in the renting context. These temporary interactions may challenge the traditional committed and long-term means of inducing such enduring “object love.” Nonetheless, the existing literature does not explicitly specify the prerequisite for timing and consumption modes for developing such “object love.”

In addition, Batra et al. (2012) identify seven core dimensions of the brand love prototype: passion-driven behaviors, self-brand integration, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, overall attitude valence, and attitude certainty. Batra et al.’s conceptualization of brand love overlaps with that of Thomson et al. (2005), which highlights the emotional connection. Batra et al. likewise offer richer insights into the consumer relationship with the preferred brand (i.e., measurement of how likely the consumer desire to

develop a lasting connection with a loved brand). However, in the renting context, different from a consumer's commitment to a brand of possessions, asking renters to select a specific brand of rented items that they love may constitute bias, considering that renters may not have sufficient time to explore, compare, and be aware of their loved brand during a brief usage period.

Existing literature converges in understanding the nature and character of the brand attachment. First, they all agree that this construct deeply taps into the affective realm. Second, they agree on the multidimensional nature of the attachment construct. Third, overlaps occur between these concepts. For example, the dimensions of intimacy and passion (Sarkar et al., 2013) overlap with the components of passion-driven behaviors and a positive emotional connection (Batra et al., 2012), which in turn are analogous to affection, passion, and connection constructs (Thomson et al., 2005). Sajtos et al. (2021) also suggest that emotional attachment to the loved brand could reinforce “the positive emotional connection” with consumers, which is a second-order dimension of the construct brand love. Fourth, these approaches all imply new consumer–brand relationships, which allow consumers to construct new identity projects (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2020) that can become more fluid, ephemeral, and in flux (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera, 2014). Fifth, their empirical studies demonstrate the significant positive influence of emotional attachment on brand loyalty.

1.1.4. Choice of a Conceptual Definition for Emotional Attachment to the Brands of Rented Items

In this thesis, we adopt Thomson et al.'s (2005) multidimensional conceptualization and measurement scale based on attachment theory for several reasons: First, their work is a seminal empirical study articulating the concept of emotional attachment to brands. Second, their work receives a high number of citations (3,249 citations on Google Scholar to date, October 2021). Third, Thomson et al.'s conceptualization assesses a consumer's emotional attachment to the brand

and implies understanding how the consumer connects the brand with the consumer's self-identity. Hence, it corresponds to the research objective of this thesis (i.e., to explore the relationships between the self and the brand of rented items following the renting consumption). Fourth, Thomson et al.'s (2005) study is more rigorous in terms of its validity and stability tests compared to other measurements. For example, Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) do not estimate any intercorrelations between the dimensions of brand romance in their scale development study. We provide further details of the comparison of the methodology of these two studies in Chapter 5.

1.2. Research Gaps in Understanding Renters' Emotional Attachment to the Brands of Rented Items

3.1.2.1. Research Gap 1: Empirical Evidence for Understanding Emotional Attachment to the Brands of Rented Items in Renting Context

In Thomson et al.'s (2005) questionnaires, the issue of whether the brand relates to an owned or a rented product is not explicit. This concern is essential to mention for two principal reasons. First, Thomson et al.'s empirical studies may restrain consumers from thinking about a brand they previously owned rather than renting. Based on the previous literature, strong attachments develop over time and are often based on interactions between an individual and an attachment object (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Therefore, if consumers develop a strong emotional attachment to a particular brand, then they should have spent a considerable amount time on interacting with the attached object. Specifically, in Thomson et al.'s (2005) first two studies, the respondents were asked to "think about a brand to which they

were ‘strongly’ emotionally attached.” This instruction may direct consumers to think about those brands with which consumers have spent a period long enough to interact to develop strong attachments. (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Such interactions encourage the development of meaning and invoke strong emotions about the attachment object (Thomson et al., 2005). These emotional solid attachments can develop through the direct ownership of objects, as the owners provide a long-term interaction with the object and commitment to the brand. Hence, this instruction can potentially restrain the condition of the brand–consumer relationship in a long-term exchange and commitment but exclude the renting circumstance. Consumers only access the products temporarily and interact with the objects during a limited period.

Second, consumers may still develop “some degree” of emotional attachment to a brand based on the information received, but without any personal interaction with the brand, such as through renting. To confirm the stability of the EA scale in the third study, the authors changed the question by asking the respondents to think about a brand to which they had “‘some degree’ of emotional attachment”; however, such amendment cannot guarantee that the respondents think about a brand with which they had a personal interaction only during a limited time. Hence, the degree to which consumers may be attached to the brand that adheres to a rented object remains unclear. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by adapting the EA scale to the research topic regarding consumer–brand relationships specifically under renting conditions.

1.2.1. Research Gap 2: Exploring Attachment and Self-identity in the Renting Context

People could develop an attachment to surroundings in different contexts and those attachments may vary in strength. Such attachments have a common feature: their importance in defining self in contemporary consumer culture. Strong attachments are characterized by a rich set

of schemas and affectively laden memories that link the object with the self (Holmes, 2000; Mikulincer, Hirschberger, Nachmias, & Gillath, 2001). In “Attachment to Possessions,” Belk (1992) asserts that seeking to understand one’s bonds to the material environment may imply seeking to understand oneself. Previous research indicates that those measuring attachment should concentrate on detecting the existence and importance of self-worth when utilizing a particular possession (Ball and Tasaki, 1992). Specifically, “if an object is included in an evaluative self-schema, that object is tied to the individual’s self-worth” (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; p157). Furthermore, the attachment construct is concerned with how the possessions are attached to the individual’s self-identity and imply the extent to which the object is “used” for self-concept support.

Such connections between the consumer’s self-identity and the brands of possessions can be explained by self-expansion theory (Aron et al., 2005). Self-expansion theory (Aron et al., 2005) posits that people possess an inherent motivation for self-expansion or a desire to incorporate others (here brands) into their conception of “self.” In fact, “The more an entity brand is included in the self, the closer is the bond that connects them. Attachment develops over time as relationships between the self and entity evolve” (Park et al., 2010; p 4). Such relationships probably highlight that attachment is essentially time-dependent (e.g., strong attachments with possessions may need long-term interactions); however, previous research merely focuses on the usage of possessions and ownership of these possessions when examining consumers’ attachment to the object or the brand. Thus far, empirical studies in marketing have yet to investigate the extent to which consumers may develop an attachment to the brands of rented items and how consumers may link the brand of rented items with themselves based on their *actual usage of the rented products*. Therefore, this thesis intends to fill this research gap by measuring consumers’ emotional attachment to brands in the renting context.

2. Renter's Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

Brand loyalty has a long history, as marketing scholars and managers continue to recognize its importance. Rooted in the work of psychologist Lester Guest, customer brand loyalty is the “constancy of preference for commercial brands of various products over a period of years in the life of the individual” (Guest 1944, P17). Similar to the effects of brand attachment, previous studies demonstrate that brand loyalty creates numerous marketing advantages such as increasing market share, cash flow, and profits (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Homburg, Morgan and Rego 2009; Watson et al. 2015; Wernerfelt 1991). Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) definition of attitudinal loyalty is adopted in this thesis: “the consumer's predisposition towards a brand as a function of psychological processes. This includes attitudinal preference and commitment towards the brand.”

Renting service provides consumers with an alternative means of using and experiencing the different brands of rented items. By trying other brands through renting items, consumers may find more new brands to commit to following their user experience. As Lawson et al. (2016; p 2617) emphasize, “accessing products may be a way for consumers to determine the products they like, thus providing an alternate route to product loyalty.” On the contrary, variety seekers may find difficulty in developing loyalty to a specific brand on the renting platform. They may prefer to experience diverse experiences with the brands of rented items. Understanding consumers' feedback on the brands of rented items implies understanding how consumers are likely to reuse, commit to, or pay a higher price for a specific brand on another occasion. Hence, such insight could help renting companies to improve the management of their brand inventories and design cooperation strategies with the potential brands of rented items. Furthermore, it could help the independent brands of rented items to obtain firsthand feedback from consumers and plan for

retailing strategy. Nevertheless, no empirical evidence exists to date to ascertain whether and how consumers may develop loyalty toward the brands of rented items. Therefore, this thesis aims to address and fill this critical research gap.

2.1. Diverse Conceptualizations of Brand Loyalty

Being loyal could be a basic noble instinct of human nature, which suggests that an individual has conviction, trust, and fidelity (Oliver, 1999). The term loyalty implies a steadfast faithfulness in the face of any temptation to renounce, desert, or betray (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Similarly, in the marketing literature, ultimate loyalty is shown by a consumer who pursues the desire to rebuy a product or a service “against all odds and at all costs” (e.g., Oliver, 1997, p. 392).

Within this conceptual umbrella term for loyalty, brand loyalty has been developed into an essential concept in marketing research. Previous research suggests that higher brand loyalty benefits favorable word of mouth and a strong resistance among loyal consumers to competitive strategies (Dick and Basu, 1994). Customer loyalty is the central thrust of marketing efforts (Dick and Basu 1994; Evanschitzky, Ramaseshan, Woisetschläger, Richelsen, Blut, & Backhaus, 2012), and developing a high proportion of loyal consumers is one of the key goals for marketing practitioners. Greater brand loyalty has also been demonstrated to produce superior brand performance outcomes. For example, it generate a more significant market share when the same brand is repeatedly purchased by loyal consumers, regardless of situational constraints. In addition, brand-loyal consumers are likely to pay for higher price premiums for a brand because they perceive some unique value in the brand that no alternative can provide (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Reichheld 1996). This uniqueness can be derived from greater trust in a brand’s reliability

or from positive feelings and more favorable effects when customers use the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Although the importance of brand loyalty has been widely recognized in both academic literature and organizations, no universal definition of loyalty in consumer research from a consumer perspective is available. For example, the rich early history of customer loyalty research allowed Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) to cite more than 50 definitions. Generally, loyalty is often used interchangeably with its operational (measurement) purpose to refer to repeat purchases (Paul, Hennig-Thurau, Gremler, Gwinner, & Wiertz, 2009), preference (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995), and commitment (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005). In addition, loyalty has been referred to in various market-specific contexts (e.g., service, store, and vendor loyalty) and contexts that reflect the unit of measurement: customer and brand loyalty (Bennett et Rundle-Thiele, 2002). However, ultimate loyalty is difficult to achieve because each phase of the cognitive-to-action loyalty sequence, which includes “cognitive loyalty,” “effective loyalty,” “conative loyalty,” and “action loyalty,” is subject to attack by competitors (Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, some researchers characterize loyalty as a general orientation reflected by non-purchase behaviors such as advocacy (Jones et al. 2008), willingness to pay a premium (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001), and continued silence in the hope that circumstances will improve (Hirschman 1970). Colombo and Morrison (1989, p. 90) believe that “only the researcher’s imagination limits the number of plausible definitions for this term.” Consequently, previous research on loyalty presents “ad hoc measures that are sometimes composed of attitudinal items, sometimes composed of behavioral items, or both, and even both together with items that measure ancillary constructs (e.g., word of mouth)” (Watson et al., 2015; p792). *Appendix I* presents a summary of representative papers on diverse conceptualizations of loyalty (ref: list in Watson et al., 2015) in the existing marketing literature.

Despite diverse conceptualizations on loyalty, the measurement for brand loyalty has not flourished in the marketing literature. For example, in the *Marketing Scales Handbook* (Bruner, 2012), no scale explicitly measures the construct of “brand loyalty.” Instead, some of the loyalty-related concepts mentioned in the *Handbook* include, for example, “affective response to a brand” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) measuring the degree of positive affect that a consumer has toward a brand, and “brand relationship (commitment)” (Breivik and Thorbjørnsen, 2008) measuring the degree to which a person expresses the intention to continue using a particular brand. However, all these concepts regarding loyalty and measurements investigate consumers’ emotions or intentions rather than focusing on the behavioral or attitudinal tendency to commit to a specific *brand*.

Until Day (1976) and Jacoby (1978), the marketing field viewed brand loyalty in terms of outcomes (repeated purchase behavior) rather than cognitive reasons (Wernerfelt, 1991; p231). More recently, researchers often selectively examine brand loyalty as an attitude, purchase behavior, or multidimensional construct combining both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty depending on the specific context. For example, in their empirical studies, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) examine the linking role of brand loyalty to understand the relationship among brand trust, brand effect, and brand performance outcomes (two aspects of the firm-related side of brand equity, namely “market share” and “relative price”). Their results suggest that the two dimensions of brand loyalty, namely “purchase loyalty” and “attitudinal loyalty,” may positively affect market share and relative price. Specifically, the utilitarian product categories for those two effects show p values $<.05$. Other scholars argue that attitudinal brand loyalty can be divided into emotional and cognitive dimensions (e.g., Härtel and Russell-Bennett, 2010). The behavioral aspect leads to three dimensions of the overall concept of loyalty (i.e., behavioral, emotional, and cognitive), which reflects the standard attitude model (ABC: affective, behavioral, cognitive). This

perspective corresponds to Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) definition of brand loyalty as "the consumer's predisposition towards a brand as a function of psychological processes and represents attitudinal preference and commitment towards the brand." Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) conceptualization and measurement of brand loyalty are adopted in this thesis. Specifically, both the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty as potential outcomes of consumers' renting consumption are examined. Such investigation could provide a more holistic understanding of how consumers may develop loyalty toward the brands of rented items. The two chosen components of brand loyalty and their measurement are explained in the next sections.

2.2. Components of the Brand Loyalty Concept: Attitudinal and Behavioral Loyalty

Despite the divergent conceptualizations and measurements, the majority of scholars agree that both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (or purchase loyalty) are essential components of the brand loyalty concept (e.g., Dick and Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Aaker 1991; Day, 1976; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). The dimension of attitudinal loyalty includes a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand. By contrast, the dimension of behavioral loyalty focuses on repeated brand purchases. Moreover, the consensus among scholars is that behavioral loyalty is most relevant for low-involvement, routinized purchases, whereas attitudinal loyalty is more relevant to high-involvement, hedonic, high-risk purchases (e.g., Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001; Russell-Bennett et al., 2007). Consumers may enroll in the subscription to rent clothes for daily use in the fashion rental context. Hence, such behavior could be considered as a routinized purchase. From another perspective, consumers may also participate in fashion renting consumption to try diverse brands. Therefore, such consumption can also be considered as a hedonic and high-risk purchase. Thus, understanding how consumers may develop loyalty with the brands of rented items underlies the investigation of

behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. The succeeding sections cover a review of the literature on the two-dimensional brand loyalty measurement and an explanation of why Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) scales for measuring loyalty toward the brands of rented items are selected in this thesis.

Despite clear delineations between attitudes and purchase behaviors, theories of customer loyalty suggest that both factors are integral (Dick and Basu 1994; Oliver 1999). Some empirical studies also find that measures composed of combined attitudinal and behavioral items are more effective than attitude-only or behavior-only measures (e.g., Watson et al., 2015). Attitudes and purchase behaviors complement each other, but existing studies also show how they influence each other. Specifically, the existing literature often highlights how attitudinal brand loyalty affects behavioral loyalty. For instance, attitudinal brand loyalty is shown to be a vital driver of behavioral loyalty for many types of products, including business-to-business products (Russell-Bennett et al., 2007), services (Chiou and Droge, 2006), and high-involvement consumer goods (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007; Mellens, Dekimpe, and Steenkamp, 1996). In a modification of Oliver's (1997, p. 392) definition to include the act of consuming, loyalty is described here as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing."

Considering the close relationships between attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty, it is reasonable why Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) two-dimensional measurement of brand loyalty has been continuously the most widely used by scholars in this field, with 943 citations on Google Scholar since 2018. Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) measurement combines four statements constructed to reflect either the purchase-related or attitudinal aspects of brand commitment. In terms of theory development, since Jacoby and Chestnut's (1975; 1978), measuring the behavioral element of brand loyalty and the attitudinal aspect of brand loyalty has been highlighted in consumer research. Specifically, Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) analysis indicates that consistent

purchasing as the only indicator of loyalty could be invalid because of happenstance buying or a preference for convenience and that inconsistent purchasing could mask loyalty if consumers are multi-brand loyal. As Jacoby (1975) illustrates in the example of the housewife dutifully purchasing her husband's shampoo, repeat purchasing behavior reflects the acting out of *someone's* commitment, not necessarily the brand-related commitment of the purchaser. Due to these possibilities, Jacoby and Chestnut suggest that it would be unwise to infer loyalty or disloyalty solely from repetitive purchase patterns without further assessing consumers' beliefs, affect, and intentions within the traditional consumer attitude structure. Renting behavior with a subscription to the renting service is the focus of our research; it represents a repetitive purchase pattern as consumers switch monthly rental items. This repetitive renting mode can imply these consumers' specific beliefs, affect, and intentions to choose to rent over to buy the products. Hence, this thesis follows Jacoby and Chestnut's suggestion that the understanding of consumers' attitude structure within the traditional consumer attitude structure is necessary when measuring consumer loyalty toward a brand.

Aside from the behavioral aspect of brand loyalty, Jacoby and Chestnut highlight the advantage of the attitudinal approach. One can distinguish between different mechanisms leading to repeat purchase behavior. For example, this delineation involves a conceptual distinction between brand purchase due to fit between personal tastes and brand attitudes and brand purchase due to past purchases (Wernerfelt, 1991). In addition, operationally, measuring attitudinal brand loyalty could provide more insights into the identification of vulnerable customers in a non-stable environment with changing needs, specifically in some service markets (Bennet and Rundle-Thiele, 2002).

More specifically, Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) propose a scale for measuring purchase loyalty by agreement with the following two statements: "I will *buy* this brand the next time I buy

[product name]” and “I intend to keep *purchasing* this brand.” They measure attitudinal loyalty by the following statements: “I am committed to this brand” and “I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.” The details of the measurement, psychometric properties, and items of Jacoby and Chestnut’s (1978) empirical studies are summarized in Chapter 5. Chaudhuri and Holbrook’s (2012) observed evidence shows that the coefficient alphas for purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty are .90 and .83, respectively, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. Similar to Jacoby and Chestnut’s (1978) measurements, existing empirical studies are mainly based on data that solely focus on the *sequences of purchases* and *consumers’ ownership* of a brand. However, empirical research has yet to investigate the issue of whether and how consumers may develop brand loyalty in the *access-based* rather than ownership-based context. In addition, no studies have explored the *usage-related* aspects of brand commitment. However, consumers can *use* brands through ownership and mere *access* to the brands. Distinguishing between market types is important because the very nature of the market indicates that the measures used for capturing loyalty should be very different, as will be antecedent variables (Bennett et Rundle-Thiele, 2002).

2.3. Research Gaps to Fill in Understanding Whether and How Consumers May Develop Loyalty Toward the Brands of Rented Items

In the renting context, users who subscribe to the renting service could choose to *use* the same brands of rented items again through renting or buying them on the next shopping occasion. Such repetitive behavioral tendency could also be due to easy access to the same brands on the renting platform or happenstance buying in a retail store. Thus, aside from the behavioral aspect of loyalty to the brands of rented items, the attitudinal part of loyalty to these brands based on the consumers’ actual renting experience is worthy of an investigation. Two reasons underlie the

embedding of both the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of loyalty in the measurement of consumers' loyalty toward the brands of rented items. The first one pertains to the centralized renting services' difficulty in guaranteeing a consistent, sufficient inventory to satisfy consumers' changing demands. Sometimes, consumers may not gain access to what they want due to the unavailability of a specific item. Artificial intelligence could also recommend to consumers similar categories of brands based on their past shopping behaviors on the renting platform. Such recommendations may provide consumers with a sense of convenience of accessing the specific types of brands on the renting platform. Hence, merely assessing behavioral loyalty based on repetitive access to the same brand can be restrained by outside factors. The second reason is that consumers may regularly change their tastes or may be inspired to discover their fluid identities (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould, 2012; Bardhi and Eckhard, 2017) in physical and digital venues. Tracking consumers' repetitive access records to the same brand over a lengthy period can be unrealistic. Therefore, in this thesis, the measurement includes both the *usage-related* and attitudinal factors of brand loyalty.

Furthermore, as Dick and Basu (1994, p. 99) indicate, the nomology of brand loyalty in behavioral theory (i.e., its relationships with other concepts in the expanding vocabulary of marketing research) requires a more robust integration. Specifically, consumers with various traits may develop loyalty to the brands of rented items differently in the renting context. Therefore, considering the comprehensive and integral component of Jacoby and Chestnut's measurement, this thesis chooses to use Jacoby and Chestnut's scale for measuring consumer loyalty toward the brands of rented items. Specifically, this dissertation intends to fill the research gap to understand how consumers may develop brand loyalty based on their actual renting experience. To operationalize the construct, the adapted scales will adjust Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) measurement to the renting context: the original statements on *purchase loyalty* will be adjusted

to user loyalty. Specifically, this thesis chooses to adapt the original two words “I will *buy* this brand the next time I buy [product name]” and “I intend to keep *purchasing* this brand” into “I will *use* this brand the next time I *use* [product name]” and “I intend to keep *using* this brand” in the updated measurement, respectively.

Synthesis for Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, we have presented the two outcomes of our conceptual model. An overview of these outcomes, the conceptualization we have chosen for each, and our main references is presented in *Table 5*.

Outcomes	Conceptualizations in This Thesis	References
Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items	An emotion-laden bond between a person and a specific brand	Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005)
Brand Loyalty towards the Brand of Rented Items	“The consumer’s predisposition towards a brand as a function of psychological processes. This includes attitudinal preference and commitment towards the brand.”	Jacoby and Chestnut (1978)

Table 5: Summary of the Conceptualizations of Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items and Brand Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

Chapter 4 - Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The existing literature on the main constructs studied in this thesis is reviewed in the first three chapters. Specifically, Chapter 1 introduces renting over buying and explains why we measure consumers' perceived value for renting over buying to operationalize this primary variable. Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the literature on the potential antecedents, including materialism, variety seeking, frugality and BESC. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on the possible outcomes, including an emotional attachment to a brand and loyalty toward the brand of rented items. The objective of Chapter 4 is to present a conceptual framework that links these variables together to address two main research questions. First, we investigate the respective impacts of each personality trait, materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) on consumers' choices for renting over buying. Second, we explore the influence of consumers' preferences for renting over buying on consumers' emotional attachment to a brand and subsequently loyalty toward the brands of rented items.

The proposed conceptual framework is presented in *Figure 4-1*. A conceptual framework is "a result of bringing together several related concepts to explain or predict a given event or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest – or simply, of a research problem" (Imenda, 2014; p189). Following an hypothetico-deductive approach, the proposed conceptual framework comprises 20 hypotheses. In the succeeding sections, the existing literature is reviewed to corroborate these hypotheses.

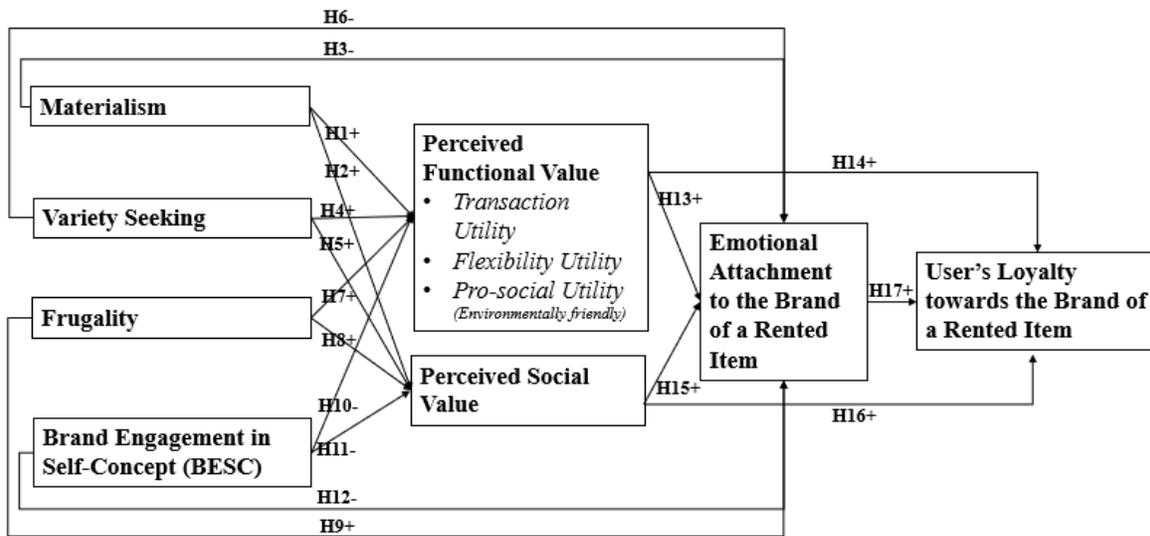


Figure 4-1: Proposed Conceptual Model with the Hypotheses, Antecedents, and Outcomes of the Consumer's Choice of Renting Over Buying

1. Impacts of Consumers' Psychological Traits, Values and Lifestyles

1.1. Impacts of Materialism

According to the previous literature, materialism may be positively related to the intention to participate in renting behaviors (Davidson, Habibi, and Laroche, 2018; Ni, 2021), as renters with materialist traits may perceive temporary psychological ownership of the rented products. In the renting context, with the same budget during a specific period, these consumers can multiply their satisfaction of temporarily “owning” a larger quantity of products by exchanging the products more often compared to buying a limited number of products. Therefore, consumers who have a higher degree of the materialism trait are more likely to perceive the functional advantage of the renting consumption mode in comparison to buying.

Previous empirical studies also show that expensive luxury products that represent high levels of material achievement can satisfy the needs of materialistic consumers (Sun, Wang, Cheng, and Chen, 2017). By allowing the access to products that consumers otherwise cannot own due to financial constraints, renting enables these consumers to satisfy their materialistic desires. From this perspective, renting allows materialistic consumers to access and experience “more” and “a larger variety” of options of products and brands compared to buying with a limited budget and within a limited time frame; thus, renting is likely the more attractive feature to create diverse identities in a liquid society. As Eckhardt and Bardhi (2019; p28) suggest, “The new logic of distinction is having the flexibility to embrace and adopt new identity positions, projects, and possibilities, and the ability to attract attention.” Some renting service companies focus on renting luxury products (e.g., Ziniosa in India, Bag Borrow or Steal, Vivrelle). Such time-bound access in renting not only could enable social identity creation or enhancement but could also compromise some of the pricing advantages of luxury (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015).

The benefits of not owning, such as relinquishing required maintenance, repair, or storage over time, may also attract materialistic consumers to participate in renting consumption. Furthermore, materialistic consumers may consider such experience as having greater ownership of their time by accessing fashion or luxury products for special occasions. For example, the participants in Christodoulides et al.’s (2021; p94) studies considered “time [as] a scarce resource. [The] participants’ idleness when staying in an Airbnb luxury accommodation was viewed as having greater ownership of their time.”

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Materialism positively affects the user’s perceived functional value in renting over buying.

In addition to focusing on the acquisition of possessions, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochber-Halton (1981) and Shrum et al. (2012) define materialism as a tendency to use possessions that are designed to enhance goals such as safety, longevity, and happiness. Similarly, Shrum et al. (2012) also describe the materialism concepts of meeting basic physiological and security needs and hedonic (enjoyment) requirements. Moreover, the previous literature suggests that materialism can highlight the derived social meanings of the acquisition of possessions based on the communicative function of the ownership of the good, such as signaling social status within a group (Richins, 1994; Eastman et al., 1999). Prior empirical studies similarly indicate that materialistic consumers are likely to use clothing to symbolize social status, prestige, and success (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997). Consumers with a high degree of materialism are therefore likely to value various utilities of instrumentality in renting consumption. Such utilities include not only functional values but also social values that evoke the hedonic feelings of consumers. For example, in the virtual renters' group on social media, members can share their user experiences or comments on a specific rented item with other users (members). Accordingly, a renter may meet new friends in the renting community. Hence, these members can derive pleasant and hedonic feelings from such interactive social experience. Additionally, by providing feedback to other users' choices, consumers with higher materialist trait may perceive such sharing experience as an effective means of enhancing their power and constructing their self-identity as opinion leaders (Voyer and McIntoch, 2013).

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2. Materialism positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.

Materialism reflects the "importance [that] a consumer attaches to worldly possessions," including branded products (Belk, 1985, p. 265). Moreover, individuals high in materialism

(Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins and Dawson, 1992) heavily rely on products and brands to construct their sense of self. Although materialistic individuals appear to strongly desire status brands (Richins and Dawson, 1992), prior research has shown that they are often dissatisfied with status brands post-purchase (Richins, 2013; Wang and Wallendorf, 2006). As Wang and Wallendorf (2006) assert, “their (materialists’) continuous comparisons between actual and desired possessions hasten the decline in their satisfaction” (p. 497). Hence, materialistic individuals are unhappy with what they currently own and often seek to upgrade their possessions (Richins, 2013; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Shrum et al., 2014). Such emotional vulnerability due to discrepancies between actual and desired possessions is inconsistent with self-discrepancy theory. Higgins (1987) adopts the self-discrepancy approach to underscore that discrepancies between the genuine/own self-state (i.e., self-concept) and ideal self-states (i.e., representations of individuals’ beliefs about their own or a significant other’s hopes, wishes, or aspirations for the individual) signify the absence of positive outcomes, which is associated with dejection-related emotions (e.g., disappointment, dissatisfaction, sadness).

From this perspective, renting provides more opportunities for materialists to switch brands than purchasing and owning them. In this manner, renting may encourage materialists to change more often to keep their unfulfillable desires for possessions satisfied, even with temporarily accessed products, in which they may feel “psychological ownership” (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2001; Fritze, Marchand, Eisingerich, and Benkenstein, 2020). By contrast, emotional attachment to brands conveys a state of contentment with one’s current possessions and a sense of enduring connection with a particular brand that deepens over ownership (Langner, Schmidt, & Fischer, 2014). Therefore, materialism is likely to be strongly associated with a yearning for new brands and possessions to meet the satisfaction of materialists rather than to be emotionally attached to a particular brand of rented items.

Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H3. Materialism negatively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

1.2. Impacts of Variety Seeking

As discussed in Chapter 2, variety seeking is defined as the tendency of individuals' inherent need for change (Vazquez-Carrasco & Foxall, 2006) and of seeking diversity in their choices of services or goods (Kahn, 1995; p. 139). The variety-seeking tendency is rooted in the need for a change to resolve the boredom associated with a brand and a product (Van Trijp et al., 1996). This tendency reflects the effort of consumers to achieve an optimum stimulation level (OSL; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1995). Although the majority of previous studies on the source of variety seeking focus on sensory effects (Inman, 2001) and that consumers seek more variety in hedonic product categories (Ratner et al., 1999; VanTrijp et al., 1996), Baltas, Kokkinaki, and Loukpoulos' (2017) empirical studies demonstrate that the variety-seeking behavior may also derive from functional, non-sensory attributes. Sensory attributes are described as "pleasant and fun, enjoyable and appealing to the senses, whereas functional attributes [are] defined as useful, practical, and performing a specific operation" (Baltas et al., 2017; Pe3). For example, in Baltas' empirical studies, the survey respondents distinguished that in yogurts, nutrient content was rated as a highly functional attribute ($M = 5.28$), whereas flavor was viewed as a highly sensory attribute ($M = 1.36$; $t(24) = 8.36$, $p < .001$). Specifically, their studies demonstrate that in hedonic products (e.g., yogurts), variety seeking is stimulated by sensory attributes (e.g., flavor of yogurt). Consumers tend to perceive sensory attributes to be more repetitive. By contrast, utilitarian attributes in utilitarian products stimulate variety seeking (e.g., dish detergents) in useful products, and consumers perceive functional attributes (e.g., cleaning action of dish detergents) as more

repetitive. As described in the Introduction, most products have utilitarian and hedonic attributes. For example, fashion apparel can keep users warm in winter (functional) or stylish on social occasions (hedonic). Therefore, variety-seeking tendencies may induce consumers to perceive sensory and utilitarian attributes in rented fashion products and renting experience. Hence, the more consumers seek variety and novelty, the more they may perceive original values in renting service in terms of saving money, switching new clothes, protecting natural resources, and even meeting new friends in a social media group.

Furthermore, consumers with a variety-seeking orientation are likely to perceive non-ownership modes of consumption as an alternative experience to shop to adapt to changing lifestyles. Previous studies in the research stream of alternative modes of consumption also suggest a positive relationship between variety seeking and collaborative consumption. For example, Moeller et al. (2010) argue that lifestyle changes (i.e., consumers focusing on the practical effects of products and seeking experiences when consuming products or services) encourage non-possessive consumption. To adapt to the trend, consumers with a variety-seeking orientation will not be satisfied with a lifestyle of owning things; instead they seek a lifestyle with fewer possessions. Collaborative consumption, such as P2P accommodation (Lyu, Li, and Law, 2019) and shared insurance (Milanova and Maas, 2017), is a new consumption style that is attractive to consumers who seek novelty (Lyu et al., 2019; Milanova and Maas, 2017). Previous research also indicates that renting may enable consumers to experience more products and services. Those who wish to consume the latest designs and releases are thus more likely to rent products (Moeller and Wittkowski, 2010). Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2019) find that consumers' innovativeness is positively associated with their attitudes toward the use of Airbnb.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4. Variety seeking positively affects the user’s perceived functional value in renting over buying.

H5. Variety seeking positively affects the user’s perceived social value in renting over buying.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bowlby’s “attachment theory suggests that greater familiarity and responsiveness produce stronger attachments” (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; p76). However, consumers with more desire to seek variety tend to switch brands more frequently, such that they may have a shorter time to interact with the brand. Consequently, becoming familiar with the brand or receiving adequate feedback can be more challenging for consumers with more variety-seeking traits. Furthermore, subscribed online renting service provides consumers with a more flexible and economical means of accessing and switching to more brands within a limited period than owning products. This premise can be explained by previously mentioned arguments on variety seekers’ need to maintain an optimal stimulation level (OSL) to be satisfied. Renting may make the OSL continuously increase and re-establish, thereby further inducing more desire to switch brands. Therefore, the higher degree of variety seeking, the less likely are consumers to develop an emotional attachment to brands. This conclusion echoes Vazquez-Carrasco and Foxall’s (2006) inference, indicating that consumers could not have brand loyalty and love for their brands. Specifically, Vazquez-Carrasco and Foxall (2006) examined the relationship between variety seeking and brand love. They found that consumers with a much more need for variety establish a bond with their brands at a superficial level, and they are inclined to shift to other brands of rented items.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H6. Variety seeking negatively affects the user’s emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

1.3. Impacts of Frugality

As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4), renting can be considered as an example of “frugal innovation.” For Tiwari et al. (2016, p. 17), frugal innovation involves the “[creation of] attractive value propositions for [the] targeted customer groups by focusing on core functionalities and thus minimizing the use of material and financial resources in the complete value chain, and substantially reduces the cost of usage and ownership while fulfilling or even exceeding prescribed quality standards.” As described in Chapter 2, consumers who voluntarily choose a frugal lifestyle highlight resourcefulness in using products. For instance, this group of consumers may tend to use resources more carefully (De Young, 1985) or be price conscious (Lastovicka et al., 1999; Pettit et al., 1985). Contrary to the hyperopia (Haws & Poynor, 2009), which hinders spending by reducing the motivation to spend, frugality inhibits spending by increasing the incentive to save (Pan et al., 2019). The reasons of people who pursue a frugal lifestyle can be economic or utilitarian in nature; perhaps frugal individuals are also careful with money (Birkner, 2013; Cervellon et al., 2012; Goldsmith et al., 2014; Pepper et al., 2009). Hence, the higher degree an individual’s tendency to be frugal, the more this individual may perceive the functional values in renting and highlight transaction, flexibility, and pro-social utilities, which correspond to the individual’s mean value.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7. Frugality positively affects the user’s perceived functional value in renting over buying.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 3.2), social justice considerations (Pepper et al., 2009), a culture that emphasizes the desirability of frugal behavior (Albinsson et al., 2010), and social influence (Bearden et al., 1989) are important factors for explaining frugality. If frugal consumers’

renting consumption reflects their frugal values and lifestyle, then they are likely to highlight the social value in participating in renting consumption. For example, users can connect and interact in a members-only group on social media. Such interactions among users may allow them to connect with like-minded new friends, participate more often, and enhance their frugal identity.

From this perspective, consumers' choice of renting over buying can be explained by social contagion theory, indicating that "actors' adoption behavior is a function of their exposure to other actors' knowledge, attitude, or behavior concerning the innovation" (Van den Bulte and Lilien, 2001; p1410). Consumers with frugal traits may perceive renting consumption as an innovative way to signal their exposure to the frugal value shared among other users. According to the principle of social proof, individuals determine that the appropriate behavior for themselves in a situation is to examine the behavior of others there, especially similar others (Cialdini et al., 1999). In the renting context, interacting with other users may further confirm to the consumer that renting consumption is an "appropriate behavior" aligned with the frugal value. Consequently, frugal consumers may perceive rented brands as agents that help them enhance the positive social image to be frugal. Accordingly, as the brands enhance their frugal identities, consumers could further develop an emotional attachment to the brands of rented items through renting.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H8. Frugality positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.

H9. Frugality positively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

1.4. Impacts of Brand Engagement in Self-concept

As reviewed in Chapter 2 (Section 4.1), Sprott et al. (2009) define brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) as "an individual difference representing consumers' propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves" (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009, p.

92). BESC affects the essential aspects of brand-related consumer attitudes and behaviors, such as clothing brand loyalty (Goldsmith, Flynn, and Clark, 2012a). The theoretical background of this idea is cognitive schema theory, in which the self is understood as a set of schemas representing a stable structure of knowledge (Markus, 1977). In cognitive schema theory, individuals show different self-schemas, and these differences engender various attitudes and behaviors toward objects relevant to these schemas, such as brands. In particular, Sprott et al.'s (2009) construct of BESC highlights the consumers' tendency to incorporate multiple brands into the self-concept, different from the occasional interpretation of self-concept from a single brand. As Goldsmith et al. (2012, p105) explain, "BESC is gratification through the acquisition of specific, branded goods that express some important element of the self, while materialism involves acquiring possessions in general."

The two concepts of materialism and BESC have a common feature: both highlight the role of a complete ensemble of consumption objects or branded goods in representing one's "diverse and possibly incongruous aspects of the total self" (Belk, 1988; p. 140). Notably, Sprott et al.'s (2009; p. 97) empirical studies underscore the "owned brands," meaning the brand names of products that consumers own, when assessing how BESC affects the consumer memory for branded consumer possessions. Their findings suggest that BESC is a meaningful predictor of consumers' recall of currently owned brands. They further note that "to some extent, many brands materialize intangible products, so a straight-forward way to enhance BESC would be through favorite brand product acquisition." This inference aligns with Belk's (1988) argument suggesting that a means of extending the self through objects is the acquisition of possessions through purchases, gifts, heritage, and so forth.

However, consumers have temporary access to but not legal ownership of the products in the renting context. Consumers may not have adequate time to have repetitive interactions with

the brand or a relatively long period to explore the preferred brand. Consequently, sharing expert insights into the brand with other users becomes difficult for consumers, and they may not perceive the social value in the renting consumption. The ephemeral and fast-changing nature of fashion renting consumption can also prohibit renters from connecting their identities with the brand without committing to the rented items. In this case, consumers with a high degree of BESC trait may consider that brands of rented items could not represent their identities. Hence, they are less likely to consider brands of rented items as their favorite or preferred brands and attach to the brand of recently rented items emotionally.

Previous research has also shown that consumers with a higher level of BESC are less sensitive to price and time when purchasing favorite brands (Franzak et al., 2014). This premise implies that to own the famous brands, consumers who have a higher degree of BESC can bear to pay a premium price for them. Consequently, although renting may allow users to access the use of a particular brand of products with a fractional price compared to the retailing price, consumers who have a higher propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves are unlikely to perceive such advantaged transactional utility in renting consumption.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H10. BESC negatively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.

H11. BESC negatively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.

H12. BESC negatively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

2. Impacts of a Consumer's Choice of Renting Over Buying

2.1. Impacts of a Renter's Perceived Functional Value on Brand Attachment and Brand

Loyalty

Arising from the interactive relationship between the consumer and the brand, self-congruity theory (Park, 2009; Malar et al., 2011; Aron et al., 2005) highlights how consumers may integrate the symbolic meaning of products into their own identity or use the brands to support and to develop that identity. Consumers tend to like, prefer, and ultimately maintain a long-term relationship with a brand that has an image consistent with themselves (Aaker, 1999; Fournier 1998; Keller, 2003). Brand commitment can be described as a construct with the attitudinal aspect of brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999) or as the intention to maintain a continuous relationship with a brand (Fournier, 1998).

According to Laukkanen and Tura (2020), the increasing consumption habits around renting and sharing will optimize the use of natural resources and perhaps even successfully reverse over-consumption. In their empirical research, Hamari et al. (2016), conclude that sustainability is a motivation for consumers to participate in the sharing economy, and it may be more apparent in participants for whom ecological consumption is important. Similarly, when consumers participate in renting consumption, they may perceive that such consumption mode is more environmentally friendly compared to buying the product, as it can increase the lifetime value offered by a product. Especially for consumers with a stronger environmental self-identity, they are more likely to engage in the renting consumption and build long-term commitment when they perceive the pro-environmental values in such behavior and the relevant brand image of the product. For some other renters who pursue a fluid and liquid lifestyle, they may establish

commitment with the brand that participates in the renting model, as it aligns with their nomad identity and lifestyle.

Aside from symbolic resources, Park et al. (1986, 2006, 2008) emphasize that functional resources are also an important type of resources that are particularly relevant to emotional bond and brand attachment. Vázquez et al. (2002) also measure the relationship between consumers and brands based on the brand's function and hedonic and symbolic utility. In their empirical research on the hotel industry in China, Liu et al. (2020) find that hotel brand attachment is influenced by functional value. Nazar et al.'s (2016) empirical results based on the purchasing of luxury brands also indicate that emotional attachment (Thomson et al., 2005) can be achieved by improving customers' favorable perceptions toward functional benefits (Anisimova, 2007; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2008). In the renting context, consumers can access the functional values in the same product with a fractional price compared to buying the same product. Hence, the more functional values consumers perceive in renting service, the more positive emotional attachment they will develop toward brands of the rented products.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H13. Perceived functional value positively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

H14. Perceived functional value positively affects the user's loyalty toward the brand of a rented item.

2.2. Impacts of a Renter's Perceived Social Value on Brand Attachment and Brand Loyalty

Previous empirical studies demonstrate that consumers can use brands that match the reference group to which they belong to establish a psychological connection (Escalas and Bettman,

2005). On the contrary, symbolic benefits are extrinsic values of the brands, which convey the brand's variety of meanings and attributes to the consumer. Consumers can perceive the symbolic meanings of products. For example, consumers may interpret the personality (Aaker, 1997) of a product, and appreciate the prestige that a product brings to the consumer (Belk, 1988; Smith and Colgate, 2007). Consumers can also perceive a sense of belonging to a community or a group (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Smith and Colgate, 2007). These benefits satisfy the customer's social and self-expressive needs (Liang and Wang, 2004). When brands have symbolic benefits, which show the customer's ideas, customers feel oneness and develop an emotional attachment to the brand (Fournier, 1998; Malar et al., 2011).

Consumers who become members of the renting company may perceive the social benefits of the renting service. Specifically, by interacting with each other in the exclusive digital group for members, users are likely to feel resonance with each other in terms of distinguished self-identities. For example, they may consider themselves as responsible consumers, pioneers to drive new modes of consumption, "culture elites," or "modern nomads" who pursue a "liquid lifestyle," as described by Zygmunt Bauman, thereby distinguishing themselves from those who seek a "solid lifestyle." These enhanced self-identities represent the symbolic benefits of the rented brands.

In addition, emotional attachments result when brands tie in with "affectively laden memories" (Park and MacInnis, 2006, p. 17), evoking or symbolizing nostalgic experiences, eras, people, places, or memories (Holbrook, 2006; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). This case parallels the phenomena in special possession attachment (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Users enrich their knowledge and collect memories with the rented brands by using rented products on different social occasions or sharing their experiences within the membership group. These interactions with brands enable the realization of symbolic meanings of brands, which can further positively increase their emotional attachment to brands. For example, a user can take a photo of herself

wearing a rented fashion dress with a specific brand at a beach during a vacation tour. When sharing this photo with other users, this user could recall the beautiful moments of the vacation while she was wearing this rented dress with a specific brand. Hence, the sharing process of the user experience of the rented items with a particular brand could enhance the positive emotions toward the brand of a rented item.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H15. Perceived social value positively affects the user’s emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.

Keller and Swaminathan’s (2020) conceptualization of brand engagement centers on consumers’ multi-dimensional activities to show their loyalty toward the brand. This actual or active brand engagement is defined as “the extent to which consumers are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, money – on the brand, beyond those resources expended during [the] purchase or consumption of the brand” (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020, p. 320). By this definition, engagement behavior involves collecting information about the product to learn more about it and participating in brand marketing activities such as using samples or interacting with other product users, as when an online community is joined. For users of the renting service, by receiving compliments and positive feedback from other users on their outfits, for example, they can feel positive emotions toward the group. Consumers could benefit from the renters’ community to satisfy functional and social needs. Hence, users can be encouraged to rent the same brand of the rented items again to maintain their relationships with other users.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H16. Perceived social value positively affects the user’s loyalty toward the brand of a rented item.

2.3. Impacts of a Renter's Emotional Attachment on the Brand of a Rented Item

Theories of affect in psychology research have demonstrated that different emotions are associated with other behavioral responses (Lazarus, 1991). Prior research has shown that once consumers become attached to a brand, they are likely to have a long-term relationship with it (Schultz et al., 1989). Individuals firmly attached to a person, or an object are generally committed to preserving their relationship with the person or the object (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Miller, 1997). More recently, a group of researchers demonstrated the importance of brand attachment in achieving profitable repeat purchases, even compulsive buying, and in generating brand love and loyalty (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Park et al., 2013; Japutra et al., 2016; Japutra et al., 2017). Similarly, the brand love model (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012) proposes that brand love boosts loyalty, creates positive word of mouth, and increases the resistance to competitive products. For example, brand attachment to a hotel increases brand equity (Ittner et al., 2003) and influences perceived trust in a brand (Japutra et al., 2018), brand credibility, brand loyalty, and consumer satisfaction (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Schmalz and Orth, 2012; Japutra et al., 2018). In addition, brand attachment can lead to the love of a hotel brand (Tsai, 2011).

Although brand love and emotional attachment to brands are two different concepts, the meanings of their measurements overlap in terms of the positive feelings that consumers derive from using the brand. Therefore, the construct of emotional attachment to brands (Thomson et al., 2005) effectively aligns with this affective basis of truly loyal repurchasing.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H17. Emotional attachment to the brand of rented items positively affects the user's loyalty toward the brand of the rented item.

Synthesis for Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, we have presented the 17 hypotheses of our proposed conceptual framework.

The summary of the hypotheses is presented in *Table 6*.

Hypothesis	
H1	Materialism positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.
H2	Materialism positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.
H3	Materialism negatively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.
H4	Variety Seeking positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.
H5	Variety Seeking positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.
H6	Variety Seeking negatively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.
H7	Frugality positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.
H8	Frugality positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.
H9	Frugality positively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.
H10	BESC negatively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.
H11	BESC negatively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.
H12	BESC negatively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.
H13	Perceived functional value positively affects the user's emotional attachments to rented brands.
H14	Perceived functional value positively affects the user's loyalty towards the brand of a rented item.
H15	Perceived social value positively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.
H16	Perceived social value positively affects the user's loyalty towards a brand of rented items.
H17	Emotional attachment to a brand of rented items positively affects the user's loyalty towards the brand of a rented item.

Table 6: Summary of the Hypotheses in This Thesis

Chapter 5 - Methodology

A thorough assessment of the proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses entails the design of an appropriate methodology approach. The aim of this chapter is to present the methodological approach for studying our research questions. More particularly, we explain the following:

- In the first part, we describe our epistemological approach: we adopt a positivist approach and a quantitative research method; more specifically, we conduct a questionnaire-based survey, using multi-item scales for measuring each concept.
- In the second part, we explain the first element of our research design: the sampling process and the selection of participants; more specifically, we define the target population, select the sampling frame, choose the sampling technique, determine the sample size, collect the data, and assess the response rate.
- In the third part, we describe the second element of our research design, namely developing the questionnaire research instruments and materials.

1. Inquiry Paradigm

1.1. Positivist Research Paradigm

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm is the entire belief system or worldview guiding the investigator. This paradigm needs to be addressed before the questions of method. Inquiry paradigms define for investigators “what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate

inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108); inquiry paradigms also guide investigators in their choices of methods and epistemologically and ontologically fundamental ways. Hence, in this section, we first present the positivist research paradigm that we follow to guide our choice of methodology in this thesis. Positivism is a dominant paradigm within consumer research (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989). The central goal of positivism is to explain via subsumption under universal law and seek prediction (Anderson, 1983): that is to say, if one can demonstrate a systematic association of variables, one can also predict the phenomenon by applying the general laws to different people, places, and times. As Ozanne and Hudson (1989; p. 3) explain, “Passivists hold a realist stance regarding the nature of reality; that is, they believe that a single, unchanging reality exists, which is divisible and fragmentable.” For example, we could hold that outside influences can determine the renting consumption behavior, including external factors (e.g., consumption culture in China; fashion product) and internal states (personal cultural values), which act as objects that trigger such behavior.

Positivism emphasizes adherence to the proper scientific protocol to produce accurate, repeatable results (Campbell and Stanley, 2015). According to Ozanne and Hudson (1989; p. 3), the central elements of this research protocol “involve the a priori identification of a conceptual framework and the use of a controlled environment where extraneous sources of variance are minimized so ‘true’ relationships among variables may be identified. Through applying this protocol, the positivist seeks to reveal relationships that can be generalized and predicted to other contexts.” In addition, objectivity is preserved by the researcher acting as a distanced and neutral observer and using neutral language to communicate scientific practices (Sandelowski, 2003). Therefore, in this thesis, we adhere to these scientific protocols during the research process.

In line with the positivist paradigm, this thesis adopts the ontological position of scientific realism. Specifically, our research adopts scientific realism in conceptualizing the *truth*: rather

than an entity, the *truth* is conceptualized as an *attribute*, which encompasses both beliefs and linguistic expressions (Hunt and Hansen, 2009; p17). For example, it is an attribute of such linguistic expressions as those denoted by the labels “theories,” “laws,” “propositions,” and “hypotheses” (Hunt and Hansen, 2009). Specifically, in this thesis, as shown in **Figure 4-1** in Chapter 4, the proposed conceptual framework posits entities (e.g., the entities labeled “renters,” “brands,” and “choice of renting over buying”), attributes of entities (e.g., the identifiable characteristics or properties of renters, such as materialism, variety seeking, frugality and brand engagement in self-concept), and structures (e.g., the proposition that a positive relationship exists between variety seeking and the choice of renting over buying). Following the ontological position of scientific realism, the proposed conceptual framework posits that the entities, attributes, and structure referred to in **Figure 4-1** exist in the world external to the theory. Operationally, following the hypothetico-deductive approach (Popper, 2005), this thesis initially formulates theoretical concepts for the phenomena under investigation (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3), deduces research hypotheses from these concepts (Chapter 4), and subsequently tests these hypotheses with the help of empirical data (Chapter 6).

1.2. Quantitative Approach

This study adopts a quantitative approach based on primary data, using an online survey to collect the data. The reasons for choosing a quantitative method through a questionnaire survey in this thesis are threefold. First, most studies in business research employ a quantitative approach (Cameron and Molina-Azorin, 2011). These existing studies show that a quantitative approach could assess research quality by testing validity and reliability criteria. Validity represents the accuracy and trustworthiness of instruments, data, and findings in research (Colton and Covert, 2007). Some measures for establishing validity in the quantitative analysis include statistical tests,

sampling techniques, and pilot testing of instruments (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 2017). Reliability is associated with the “agreement between two efforts to measure the same trait through maximally similar methods” (Campbell & Fiske, 1959, p. 83). Reliability tests include the split-half method and test-retest method in quantitative research (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 2017). In this thesis, the enhancement of the validity and reliability of the quantitative studies involves the use of existing validated scales for measuring the chosen variables and conducting Cronbach alpha reliability tests (Peterson, 1994) to assess the reliability of the items for each variable.

Second, operationally, compared to qualitative research (i.e., semi-structured individual interviews), the standardized questionnaire allows the comparison of responses on a larger scale within a limited time frame. Notably, all the survey participants are active internet users. This characteristic may also benefit the quality of the research, as previous studies suggest that an online survey may not encounter serious validity problems when its target respondents are internet users (Lee, 2010).

Third, given the deductive nature of the quantitative method, using a structured survey with random sampling helps to achieve the primary purpose of the research in testing the proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses, the relationships between the main topic of interest on consumers’ choice of renting over buying, its antecedents, and outcomes. Specifically, this quantitative methodology helps to study two main research questions: How do materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and BESC influence the perceived value of the decision of renting versus buying? How does the decision of renting versus buying influence the consumers’ emotional attachment to the brand and brand loyalty? We perform structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to test the different hypothesized relationships between the variables of our conceptual model. SEM is a multivariate method for testing hypotheses regarding the influences among interacting variables (Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996). The popularity of SEM usage in quantitative social sciences

can be attributed to the three significant advantages of this method over traditional multivariate techniques: (a) estimation of error variance parameters for both independent and dependent variables (Byrne, 2001); (b) model testing where a structure can be imposed and assessed as a fit of the data (e.g., comparative fit index values); and (c) availability and simplicity of software (e.g., LISREL, EQS, AMOS, SPSS) dedicated to SEM (Oberski and Satorra, 2013).

2. Research Design: Sampling Process

As explained in the previous section, we used a survey-based research design. Specifically, we developed a questionnaire comprising multi-item scales for measuring each of the concepts of our conceptual framework. We then administered this questionnaire to a sample of active users of China's largest fashion rental company. In the next sections, we precisely describe each step of the sampling process. Following Taherdoost's (2016) sampling process steps (as shown in *Table 7*), five main steps to collect the sample data were undertaken in this thesis. First, we defined the target population. Second, we selected a sampling frame. Third, we chose the sampling technique. Fourth, we determined the sample size. Fifth, we collected the data and assessed the response rate.

Sampling Process Steps (Taherdoost, 2016)	Sampling Process in this thesis
Clearly Define Target Population	Chinese consumers who have real renting consumption experience in the digital age
Select Sampling Frame	Active users who participate to renting consumption (customers of a rental firm)
Choose Sampling Technique	Probability sampling - Simple random sampling
Determine Sample Size	306-368 respondents
Collect Data	Methods for Handling Non-Sampling error: Guarantee anonymity; Provide an incentive for participating
	Methods for Handling Sampling error: Multi-stage sampling combined with simple random sampling
Assess Response Rate	2.09%

Table 7: Sampling Process Steps (Taherdoost, 2016) and the Corresponding Sampling Process in This Thesis

2.1. Stage 1: Define the Target Population

The thesis defines the target population as consumers (users or renters) in China who have real renting consumption experience in the digital age. The main reasons for this choice are twofold. First, China ranks at the top of countries with the most internet users. As of the first quarter of 2021, China had 854 million internet users.⁶ This large number can be because of the country's relevantly fast-paced economic development and a cultural inclination toward technology. Collaborative consumption has rapidly spread in China in recent years. In 2018, China had approximately 760 million users of the sharing economy in the country (To add in ref: State Information Center of China, 2019⁷). In 2018, the Central Government Annual Work Report

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262966/number-of-internet-users-in-selected-countries/>

⁷ To add in ref: State Information Center of China, 2018. The 42nd China Statistical Report on Internet Development (In Chinese). Retrieved from. https://cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hl_wtjbg/201808/P020180820630889299840.pdf.

emphasized the importance of “developing the platform economy and sharing economy, forming an innovation and entrepreneurship pattern, which combines the online and offline worlds, synergizes the industry with academic, research and application, and integrates small, medium and big enterprises.”⁸ The development of the sharing economy has become one of the economic development priorities of China. Sharing economy defined here includes the rental business model as explained in Ma and Zhang (2019, p. 469): “sharing transactions often do not involve a change of ownership and can be undertaken in a profitable or nonprofitable way.” Therefore, considering the vast market potential of the growth in renting related the consumption in China in the digital age, it is necessary to pay special attention to understanding how Chinese consumers choose to rent over to buy.

Second, although access-based consumption is global and is growing rapidly in China (e.g., fashion renting), academic research into the phenomenon focusing on the Chinese market has lagged. Except for Davidson, Habibi, and Laroche’s (2018) cross-cultural study of American and Indian consumers on the relationship between materialism and the sharing economy, most empirical studies in the research stream on the access-based consumption has been primarily conducted in the Western context (e.g., Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Chen, 2009; Habibi, Davidson, and Laroche, 2017; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Specifically, Ryu, Basu, and Saito (2019) used Scopus, a database of citations, to search for articles on collaborative consumption published between 2008 and 2017. Most studies focused on a European context.

Eckhardt and Bardhi (2016; p219) further indicate that “contemporary access practices could differ across cultural contexts, especially in the sharing economy.” They argue that the sense

⁸ Premier Li Keqiang, 2018 Report on the Work of the Central Government (in Chinese) March 5, 2018 at the first session of the Thirteenth National People’s Congress, available at http://www.gov.cn/premier/2018-03/22/content_5276608.htm

of self and the risk-and-reward relationship in the access context can vary culturally. For example, in the Chinese context, trust-based relationships – *guanxi* – strongly influence what is shared and why (Shin, Ishman, and Sanders, 2007). *Guanxi* is a typical traditional Chinese cultural value (Sun, D’Alessandro, and Johnson, 2014) and the foundation of Chinese society (Chen and Chen, 2004). The difference between *guanxi* in China and relationships in other countries is that friends of friends can be transferred (extended) to others as friends, and they have a solid reciprocal relationship that transcends the rules of organizations and countries (Tse and Yoshida, 2011). As China’s social structure is a social network of countless private *guanxi* (relationships), this thesis operationalizes the primary variable with how consumers perceive social values in renting consumption; that is, how the chosen personal traits or orientations, which also reflect Chinese consumption culture, may affect Chinese consumers build *guanxi* and friendships with other users through renting consumption.

2.2. Stage 2: Select the Sampling Frame

2.2.1. Choice of the company YCloset as a research field

As shown in **Table 7** on the sampling process steps (Taherdoost, 2016; p19), after clearly defining the target population, we need to select a sampling frame, which is the list of elements from which the sample is drawn (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018). We utilize a consumer panel of active users with accounts on China’s largest fashion rental company. Founded in 2015, the Beijing-based fashion rental company YCloset (also named Yi23; *yi* means clothing in Chinese) operated a business model similar to U.S. counterparts Stitch Fix and Rent the Runway. YCloset is targeted toward female users, and it allows subscribers to rent branded apparel and accessories.

As the largest fashion rental company in Asia, YCloset has reached 20 million users⁹ in the first- and second-tier cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, Zhejiang province, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. The detailed presentation of YCloset is shown in *Appendix 2*.

This thesis chooses to define the sampling frame with the actual data of this leading fashion rental company for two main reasons. First, all the respondents are experienced renters. Second, these active users are familiar with the renting process via the digital renting platform.

2.2.2. Empirical data on real renting consumers

The actual users' preferences for renting over buying based on their real experience with the fashion renting platform are explored in this thesis. Operationally, the questionnaires are designed to obtain the respondents' replies to how they perceive values in renting consumption based on their personal experience. Although previous research suggests that attitude is regarded as a significant determinant of behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and a possible discrepancy between attitudes and behavior may occur (e.g., Hamari et al., 2016), this thesis focuses on understanding consumers' attitudes based on their actual behavioral experience. Hence, these attitudes can be the necessary condition for this group of renters, and their renting behaviors can be the sufficient condition of their attitudes. If consumers have chosen to rent over to buy, then they could have had perceived transaction utility, flexibility utility, pro-social utility, or social utility. The achievement of this goal entails having a direct access to a random sample of a rental company's client database to help reach the actual renters and comprehend their perceived utilities in an efficient manner.

Notwithstanding the lack of empirical evidence for the difference between perceived values in renting consumption before and after the actual participation, this thesis highlights the

⁹ <https://technode.com/2021/07/14/alibaba-backed-fashion-rental-app-ycloset-shuts-down-after-five-years/>

importance of considering the consumers' actual experience of renting consumption. Specifically, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3.2), consumers' roles in renting consumption in the digital age are not only limited to being users but also value co-creators. For example, consumers may provide feedback on their renting experience or suggest to other users the rental choices of a specific brand of rented items. This premise can also be supported by Quero and Crie's (2020) research suggesting how a digital experience can influence consumers' global value perception. Furthermore, as Quero and Crie's (2020) qualitative studies on the impact of value creation on the perception of the consumption experience of individuals enrolled in a non-medicalized and digitized weight loss program indicate, the integration of co-participants can impact value dimensions, leading to global value perception. Roos and Hahn's (2017) empirical studies with 168 consumers also reveal that consumers' past shared consumption behavior has statistically significant positive cross-lagged effects on future altruistic values, attitudes, subjective norms, and personal norms. Lamberton and Rose (2012; p. 116) also suggest that a limit of using the sample comprising consumers with lower propensity to participate in car sharing (and without real sharing experience) may probably be due to the participants' non-performance of "mental calculations to determine cost savings from sharing, meaning that cost-related elements could be underweighted." Therefore, understanding the actual users' perceived values in their real renting consumption experience may differ from potential users' perceived values in their possible choices of renting over buying.

From the methodological perspective, this thesis is different from previous studies that adopt quantitative approaches in the research stream of access-based related consumption. Previous empirical studies in this domain use non-probability sampling techniques such as convenience sampling. For example, in such empirical studies, questionnaires were sent to the public or potential users. These samples can also include those who have no renting experience at

all. The main variables used in previous studies explore potential consumers' likelihood, intentions, or motivations to utilize alternative modes of consumption, rather than asking consumers about their perceived values in renting consumption based on their own experiences. For example, Lamberton and Rose (2012) used Amazon's Mechanical Turk and recruited a sample of 369 licensed U.S. drivers. They asked participants about their likelihood of choosing a sharing program such as Zipcar. Oyedele and Simpson (2018) distributed questionnaires to a convenience sample of 356 undergraduate business students at a U.S. Midwestern university during class time. They asked participants about how they perceive the features and utilities of sharing versus owning in three different contexts: car sharing, room sharing, and household goods purchase. Meanwhile, Lawson et al. (2016) collected data from self-report questionnaires completed by 220 adults using Amazon's Mechanical Turk online subject pool. They conducted cluster analysis to classify respondents' motivations for access-based consumption. Lang and Joyner Armstrong (2018) purchased a consumer panel of the target population from a research firm. They asked about the consumers' intention to rent clothing or attend clothing swap events.

2.2.3. Rationale for a focus on fashion renting

A few previous studies have explored the “collaborative consumption” (Ni, 2021) or “sharing economy” (Ma and Zhang, 2019) in China; however, no empirical studies to date have employed quantitative survey methods and directly utilized actual data from a fashion rental company in China. Considering that the chosen company is a local leader in terms of market size in the fashion rental industry and that its operations reach an extensive range of cities in China, using the data sample of this company ensures an important diversity of the pool of respondents in terms of demography, geography, social class, and local culture. Furthermore, fashion consumption may be different from the consumption of other types of products, as fashion products

offer not only functional values but also social values such as the conspicuous reflection of one's social status, expression of one's self-image, and enhancement of one's self-esteem with branded fashion accessories (Souiden et al., 2011). To improve the understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of consumers' renting consumption of fashion products, this thesis also aims to provide entrepreneurs and managers in the fashion industry with additional insights into this alternative mode of consumption.

2.2.4. Rationale for a focus on female consumers

As highlighted in the handbook of *Marketing Research: Methodological Foundations* by Iacobucci and Churchill (2018; p. 260), "there is rarely a perfect correspondence between the sampling frame and the target population of interest." This thesis seeks to focus on consumers in China who participate in renting consumption in the digital age as the target population; however, the accessed sampling pool of the rental firm provides a somewhat limited listing because the users of this fashion rental firm are all female consumers; that is, the sampling frame may omit male consumers. Although a focus on female consumers could be considered as a limitation in the data representativeness, it also contributes to the literature in terms of understanding access-based consumption, particularly in the fashion rental context. Female consumers can be more involved in fashion products than male consumers (O'Cass, 2004), and they dispose of clothing at higher rates (Lang and Armstrong, 2018). In addition, female consumers are the most influential consumer segment in China, with a total amount of consumption of 4.8 trillion yuan (\$730 billion) in 2020.¹⁰ Previous research also highlights the role of gender in e-commerce. For example, in their empirical studies, Rodgers and Harris (2003) explain how emotion, trust, and convenience

¹⁰ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0419/c90000-9840537.html>

may predict women's dissatisfaction versus men's satisfaction with the online shopping experience. Nonetheless, research that highlights the important key roles of women shoppers in alternative modes of consumption and that examines female consumers' adoption of clothing renting consumption is lacking.

2.3. Stage 3: Choose the Sampling Technique

In the third step, we selected a sample procedure. In cooperation with the rental firm, we used the probability sampling technique of simple random sampling (SRS; Sharma, 2017) for collecting data; that is, every case of the population has an equal probability of inclusion in the sample. The advantages of using the probability sampling technique include the reduction of the chance of systematic errors, minimization of the chance of sampling biases, production of a better representative sample, and generalizability to the population of the inferences drawn from sample (Alvi, 2016; Sharma, 2017). Sharma (2017; p. 750) adds that "one of the best things about simple random sampling is the ease of assembling the sample. It is also considered as a fair way of selecting a sample from a given population since every member is given equal opportunities of being selected."

In our case, with the help of the rental firm, we randomly selected 16,000 of its active users located in different geographical regions as the sampling pool to study, which fully reflects the lottery drawing. As these users are active on the rental platform, their registration information (i.e., rental activities and other personal information) is listed in the rental firm's records. Although the users were randomly selected for this thesis, those individuals invited to participate in the study are pre-validated active users and have a pre-existing relationship with the firm. Accordingly, this sample represents the overall users who join in renting consumption. Thus, the analysis of their

responses could enable us to generalize their results to understand the female consumers' choice of renting over buying based on their real renting consumption experiences.

2.4. Stage 4: Determine the Sample Size

Three criteria typically need to be specified to determine the appropriate sample size: level of precision, level of confidence or risk, and degree of variability in the attributes being measured (Miaoulis and Michener, 1976). According to Israel (2003), the level of precision, sometimes denoted as sampling error, is the range in which the actual value of the population is estimated to be. The confidence or risk level is based on the ideas conveyed in the central limit theorem. This theorem states that when a population is repeatedly sampled, the average value of the attribute obtained by the sample is equal to the actual population value. Approximately 95% of the sample values are within two standard deviations of the actual population value (e.g., mean) in a normal distribution. The third criterion, the degree of variability in the attributes being measured, refers to the distribution of characteristics in the population. The more heterogeneous a people, the larger the sample size required to obtain a given level of precision. The less variable (more homogeneous) a people, the smaller the sample size. A proportion of 50% indicates a greater level of variability than either 20% or 80%. As a ratio of .5 indicates the maximum variability in a population, it is often used in determining a more conservative sample size; that is, the sample size may be larger than if the true variability of the population attribute were used.

Cochran's (2007) developed Equation A for large populations to yield a representative sample for proportions. In Cochran's equation, which is valid where n_0 is the sample size, Z^2 is the abscissa of the standard curve that cuts off an area α at the tails ($1 - \alpha$ equals the desired confidence level, e.g., 95%), e is the desired level of precision, p is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, and q is $1-p$. The value for Z is found in statistical tables, which

contain the area under the normal curve. In our case, the current population of China is more than 1.4 billion,¹¹ indicating that the target population could represent a large population size. However, we do not know the variability in the proportion that will adopt the renting consumption practice. Therefore, if we assume $p = .5$ (maximum variability) and suppose a desired 92% confidence level (Z value = 1.75) and $\pm 5\%$ precision, the resulting sample size is demonstrated in Equation 1. If we assume $p = .3$ and suppose a desired 95% confidence level (Z value = 1.96) and $\pm 5\%$ precision, the resulting sample size is demonstrated in Equation 2. If we assume $p = .4$ and suppose a desired 95% confidence level (Z value = 1.96) and $\pm 5\%$ precision, the resulting sample size is shown in Equation 3. Thus, the preferred sample size ranges from 306 to 368 respondents.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Equation A

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} = \frac{(1.75)^2 (.5)(.5)}{(.05)^2} = 306 \text{ users}$$

Equation 1

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 (.3)(.7)}{(.05)^2} = 322 \text{ users}$$

Equation 2

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 (.4)(.6)}{(.05)^2} = 368 \text{ users}$$

¹¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/>

Equation 3

2.5. Stage 5: Collect the Data

During the data collection process, two generally recognized types of error arise in any study, namely sampling error and non-sampling error (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018). The sampling errors are described in the next sections.

2.5.1. Reducing Sampling Error with Samples Selected from Diverse Geographical Regions

Sampling error is defined as “the difference between [a sample] statistic and [the population] values expected over many repetitions of sampling” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p. 297). The theory behind sampling is that “if a sample selected is as close as possible to being representative of a population, then any observations made regarding that sample should also hold true for the population. Hence, researchers aim to be as wide and as random as possible in coverage” (Lee, 2010; pp. 495-496). In this thesis, as the Chinese culture encompasses diverse regional cultures (Fan, 2000) and gross domestic product (GDP) is classified in different provinces, the firm used the multi-stage sampling technique (Taherdoost, 2016) for randomly selecting samples covering diverse geographical regions in China. Specifically, the firm successively sent the surveys five times during one month to various groups of active users living in different cities or provinces in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, Guangdong, and Jiangsu. The screenshots on the data collection report for each region are shown in *Appendix 3*. In total, the firm randomly solicited its 16,000 active users’ responses to an online survey by sending the survey link in a text invitation on mobile phones in November 2019. This multi-stage sampling technique could help maintain the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the respondents in the sample. In

addition, previous research (e.g., Lee, 2010) suggests that the simultaneous use of the multi-stage sampling method and simple random sampling could help eliminate the self-selection problem in non-probabilistic sampling methods.

2.5.2. Reducing Non-sampling Error with Incentives and Homogeneous Populations

Second, non-sampling errors “reflect the many other kinds of errors that arise in research, even when the survey is not based on the sample” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p297). One of the most challenging non-sampling errors is that respondents may refuse to cooperate in the survey. For example, “some individuals refuse to participate because they do not wish to be identified with their responses, so a guarantee of confidentiality (if true) is often effective in calming such fears” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p301). In the introduction of the questionnaire, we highlight the anonymity of the questionnaire by indicating that “all information will be anonymized and used for non-profit academic research purpose only” (see *Appendix 4* for the full questionnaire).

In addition, sometimes money or another incentive is offered (Görizt, 2004). Specifically, Görizt (2004) finds that response is higher with bonus points than with the other two lotteries, namely money and gift lottery. Görizt’s (2006) two meta-analyses further reveal the effectiveness of incentives in a web survey. Specifically, their results suggest a significant effect with an odds ratio equal to 21.19 and a 95% confidence interval between 1.13 and 1.25, indicating that incentives motivate people to start a web survey. Furthermore, their studies yield a significant effect with an odds ratio equal to 1.27 and a 95% confidence interval between 1.12 to 1.44, indicating that once people have accessed the survey for whatever reasons, they are more likely to finish it if an incentive is offered. To encourage the respondents to participate in and complete the surveys, the respondents are informed at the beginning of each study that a voucher will be

awarded to compensate for their efforts to complete the survey (refer to the entire questionnaire in *Appendix 4*).

Previous research likewise suggests that incentives may also negatively impact data quality, as the respondents can be tempted to distort data by, for example, entering the survey several times to increase their chances of winning a prize (Ilieva, Baron, Healey, 2002). To reduce such non-sampling errors, each respondent can only reply once to the survey with their registered phone number on the rental platform.

Even with all these efforts, obtaining non-response errors is inevitable, which represents a failure to obtain information from the sample as another source of non-observation bias (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p. 229). Out of 16,000 eligible units in the sample, 335 finished the entire survey, signifying a completion rate of approximately 2.09%. These completed responses comprised the final sample, satisfying the preferred sample size range as calculated above (see Section 5.2.4). However, compared to previous quantitative empirical studies in the research stream related to renting consumption, this completion rate seems lower. For example, Lang and Armstrong's (2017) surveys on the influence of fashion leadership, need for uniqueness, and materialism on female consumers' opinion of collaborative consumption such as clothing renting and swapping in the US reached 431 consumers out of 552, indicating a completion rate of 78.08%.

In contrast to our case, in which we cooperate with a real renting firm, Lang and Armstrong used a consumer panel of the target population purchased from a research firm. This target population may not have real renting experience. Furthermore, the individuals invited to participate in Lang and Armstrong's study had a pre-existing relationship with the firm and received an incentive from the firm. Hence, their higher completion rate could be because those individuals are more used to participating in diverse research surveys to receive an incentive from the research firm than are the actual consumers in the renting firm.

Low return rates are presumed to suggest biases in data; however, Leslie (1972; p323) asserts that “when surveys are made of homogeneous populations (persons having some strong group identity) concerning their attitudes, opinions, perspectives, etc., toward issues concerning the group, significant response-rate bias is probably unlikely.” Fan (2000) identified 71 core cultural values shared by the Chinese people regardless of where they live. From this perspective, the target sample of Chinese consumers represents a homogeneous population. Therefore, the non-response error is unlikely to be significant in this thesis.

3. Research Design: Development of Questionnaire and Scales

3.1. General Logic of Questionnaire Building

In this thesis, existing validated scales are used for measuring the chosen constructs. The use of existing scales in the field has two significant advantages (Schrauf and Navarro, 2005). First, existing scales that have been thoroughly validated across several different samples, such as with other age groups or different consumer groups, are likely to provide a better measurement of the construct. Second, using existing scales is time-saving because developing a new scale would require additional preliminary work to develop and validate the scale, which may be beyond the research scope of this thesis.

Operationally, the aim of the first part of the questionnaire is to measure the model’s independent variables, namely materialism orientation, variety-seeking orientation, frugality orientation, and brand engagement in self-concept orientation. The purpose of the second part of the questionnaire is to measure the outcomes on consumers’ emotional attachment and loyalty to the brands of rented items. The goal of the third part of the questionnaire is to understand the consumer’s renting activities and measure the primary variable of consumer choices of renting over buying. The aim of the fourth part of the questionnaire is to understand the renter’s

demographic portraits (refer to *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5* for the full questionnaire in English and Chinese, respectively). The subsections below include the reviews of the relevant scales for measuring the chosen constructs and introduce the choice of scales for measuring the variables in this thesis.

Cronbach alpha reliability tests (Peterson, 1994) are conducted to test the reliability of the items for each variable. In this thesis, following the convention for most social science research situations, a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is preferable. If less than 10 items are involved, then .05 or higher is acceptable. Otherwise, intercorrelation is reported in detail. The reliability analysis of each variable is introduced as follows.

In addition, in developing the survey instrument and modifying the scale items for a cross-cultural adaptation, the guidelines for conducting international consumer research were closely followed (Craig and Douglas, 2000). The instrument was constructed in English in the first step of this iterative process. As the targeted respondents' mother tongue is Mandarin, the English language used in the original questionnaire was translated into simple Chinese by a professional translator while adapting to the local culture (Harkness, Pennell, and Schoua-Glusberg, 2004). Then, to assess the quality of the translation and guarantee the accuracy of the meaning of each question, the instrument was translated back into original English by another professional translator (Behr, 2017). A group of multilingual researchers, including the author of this thesis, then carefully inspected the measurement items derived from the international literature to ensure that the translation is decentered from the literal language translation (Douglas and Nijssen, 2003). All the scales used in the study were also adapted to fit the current research context in fashion renting (see *Appendix 4* for the final questionnaire).

3.2. Measuring Materialism Orientation

As mentioned in Chapter 2, we borrow Richins and Dawson's (1992) 18-item material values scale (MVS) with a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure renters' materialistic value in this thesis. In *Table 8*, we indicate the specific items we use for measuring the materialism variable in this thesis.

Although some other studies have also measured materialism in various ways (e.g., Jackson, Ahmed, and Heapy, 1976; Heslin, Johnson, and Blake, 1989), those measures do not receive as much popularity in consumer research as how Richins and Dawson's does. The work of Richins and Dawson (1992) has consistently been the most cited literature on materialism, with 1,540 Google citations since 2018. This can be because former studies do not involve the psychometric procedures of construct definition or they do not refine the scale or assess the validity of the measurement. To test the reliability and validity of the scale, Richins and Dawson (1992) conducted the reliability assessment with data from three surveys for the 18 items as a single scale. The reliability results suggest an acceptable or an excellent level of reliability ($.71 \leq \alpha \leq .88$). In terms of scale validation, Richins and Dawson's (1992) multiple preliminary tests assessing the relationships between materialism and related constructs, including the value of acquisition, self-centeredness, voluntary simplicity, and satisfaction, indicate that the scale validity is successful.

In the exploratory process of item generation and item refinement, Richins and Dawson (1992) initially asked a convenience sample of 11 adult consumers to describe the attitudes and values of materialistic people in an open-ended format. Combined with a literature review, the initial data collection generated 120 items. Second, Richins and Dawson refined the data with three universities in different parts of the US. Based on reliability, social desirability, and validity assessment, this process resulted in the retention of 48 items for further analysis. Third, Richins and Dawson conducted exploratory factor analysis, reliability assessment, and social desirability

tests on data from the first survey in the US (N = 144) and retained 30 materialism items because of these analyses. Fourth, they performed a factor analysis and additional reliability assessments for these 30 items using data from another three data samples (N > 200). These analyses resulted in a scale containing 18 items. Therefore, their reliability tests showed that the final retained 18 items consistently behaved across the samples.

As explained in Chapter 2, Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualize materialism as a value, which can be measured with a set of beliefs. Accordingly, their material values scale (MVS) measures three belief domains. The MVS respectively measures how a consumer uses possessions as an indicator of success in life, how the acquisition and possession are generally important for a consumer, and how a consumer perceives possessions as a necessity for happiness. Richins and Dawson performed confirmatory factor analysis with the data from three surveys (N = 250, 235, 205). The analysis results suggest an acceptable fit of the three-factor model ($.86 < \text{GFI} < .88$; $t\text{-value} > 5.0$). In terms of scale validation, Richins and Dawson's (1992) multiple preliminary tests assessing the relationships between materialism and related constructs, including the value of acquisition, self-centeredness, voluntary simplicity, and satisfaction, reveal that scale validity is successful. Therefore, how Richins and Dawson's (1992) measure the materialistic value is more rigorous than other materialism measurements. For example, in previous consumer research, the most frequently used measures for assessing values are ranking scales such as those developed by Rokeach (1973) and Kahle, Beatty, and Homer (1986); in this ranking approach, respondents are asked to rank a set of end behaviors according to their importance. However, such ranking approach could render the information gained about the value highly superficial; it could also make comparisons across individuals impossible. To avoid such problems inherent in ranking and rating procedure, Richins and Dawson (1992) measure those beliefs that are relevant to the value.

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 1 (with three sub-questions) aims to measure a renter’s materialistic value.

Dimensions	18 Items in the MVS Arranged by Subscale (Richins and Dawson, 1992)	
Success	1	I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.
	2	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
	3	I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.*
	4	The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
	5	I like to own things that impress people.
	6	I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own*
Centrality	7	I usually only buy the things I need.*
	8	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*
	9	The things I own aren't all that important to me.*
	10	I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.
	11	Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
	12	I like a lot of luxury in my life.
	13	I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.*
Happiness	14	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*
	15	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
	16	I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.*
	17	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
	18	It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.

Table 8: 18-Item Material Values Scale (Richins and Dawson, 1992)

3.3. Measuring Variety-seeking Orientation

As explained in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), we borrow Olsen, Tudoran, Honhanen, and Verplanken’s (2016) conceptualization to define renters’ variety-seeking traits in this thesis. Accordingly, we borrow Olsen et al.’s (2016) variety-seeking tendency (VST) scales for measuring renters’ variety-seeking orientation in this thesis. Olsen et al. (2016) use five items with a seven-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to measure the VST construct (see *Table 9*). These reflective items were selected from Steenkamp and Baumgartner’s (1995) seven-item measure of optimum stimulation level (OSL; Raju, 1980), which was developed based on Garlington and Shimota’s (1964) 95-item Change Seeker Index (CSI)

scale. To test the validity of the VST scale, Olsen et al. (2016) performed confirmatory factor analysis, and the results showed factor loadings of $\geq .56$ ($p < .001$). This factor loading value met the requirement of being .50 or higher for a new developed scale, denoting that indicators with factor loadings greater than 0.50 should be retained in the model and indicators beyond this requirement should be removed (Afthanorhan, 2013).

Olsen et al. (2016) also calculated construct reliability (composite reliability) ($CR = .79$) and average variance extracted ($AVE = .45$). Construct reliability assesses the internal consistency for a given block of indicators (Werts, Linn and Joreskog, 1974). AVE seeks to measure the amount of variance that a latent variable component captures from indicators relative to the amount due to measurement error (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Based on Olsen et al.'s VST results, the AVE value indicates that 45% variance of the indicators is accounted for, which is lower than the 50% standard (Hair, 2009). However, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), even if AVE is less than 0.5 but the construct reliability is higher than 0.6 ($CR = .79$ in Olsen et al.'s case), the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate. In terms of the value of CR, the variety-seeking tendency construct exceeds the .70 standard (Afthanorhan, Ahmad, & Mamat, 2014). These combined results provide evidence to confirm the convergent validity of the variety-seeking tendency construct.

In addition to the validity assessment of Olsen et al. (2016), the use of Olsen et al.'s (2016) variety-seeking scale in this thesis is made for other reasons. First, Olsen et al.'s (2016) items imply the understanding of renters' general tendency to seek variety in diverse brands rather than their preferences for a specific product or brand. Therefore, Olsen et al.'s (2016) scales correspond to the main objective of this thesis (i.e., to understand the renters' general tendency to choose to rent over to buy). Specifically, in measuring the variety-seeking construct, Olsen et al.'s (2016) chosen items use words such as "constantly," "in daily routines," "continually," and "way of life"

to illustrate the variety-seeking tendency. This measure is different from other domain-specific variety-seeking measures. For instance, Van Trijp and Steenkamp's (1992) eight-item "VARSEEK-scale" is specifically designed for the food consumption context, and some of its items are based on a particular situation. For example, one of Van Trijp and Steenkamp's (1992) items asks the respondents to rate how they would agree with the statement, "While preparing foods or snacks, I like to try out new recipes."

Second, understanding consumers' actual renting choice over buying implies investigating how consumers need to explore and engage with the novel and stimulating experience of renting consumption. Accordingly, using Olsen et al.'s variety-seeking tendency scale for measuring the degrees to which a renter tends to seek variety signifies the degree to which a consumer tends to consider renting as an alternative change compared to ownership and to engage with such a novel phenomenon of renting. As Olsen et al. (2016; p. 40) describe the chosen items to measure variety-seeking tendency, their scales reflect the degree to which a renter needs "intellectual stimulation, change and variety" (Olsen et al., 2016; p 40). In addition, Olsen et al.'s (2016) empirical studies provide evidence showing a positive relationship between openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997) and variety-seeking tendency (standard error of the estimate (STD = .35; $p < 0.001$; $t\text{-value} = 8.57$; structural model fit - CFI = .92; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05; $R^2(VST) = .30$).

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 2 aims to measure a renter's variety-seeking tendency.

Items in the Variety Seeking Tendency (VST) Scale (Olsen et al., 2016)	
(1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree")	
1	I am constantly seeking new ideas and experiences.
2	I dislike change and variety in daily routines*
3	I like continually changing activities.
4	I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change*
5	I like to experience novelty and change in daily routine.
<i>An asterisk indicates reverse scored items.</i>	

Table 9: Items Used for Measuring Variety-seeking Tendency in This Thesis

3.4. Measuring Frugality Orientation

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), we adopt Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) conceptualization of frugality to define renters' frugal orientation in this thesis. Accordingly, we borrow Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) scales for measuring renters' frugal orientation in this thesis. Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) original scales for measuring the frugality lifestyle are shown in *Appendix 7*. Lastovicka et al. (1999) provide the seminal and the only well-recognized measure of consumer frugality in consumer research. This measure has obtained 654 Google citations to date (February 2022). Our primary reason for choosing Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) frugal orientation is that it displays the face validity of voluntary frugality. Specifically, to align with the research objective of this thesis (i.e., to understand consumers' voluntary renting behaviors), we choose to measure renters' tendency to voluntarily live a frugal lifestyle rather than to restrain one's purchasing due to financial burden. Therefore, we choose five items that reflect the voluntary frugality in Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) original frugality scales, with a six-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) (see *Table 10*), to measure renters' frugal orientation in this thesis.

Furthermore, Lastovicka et al. (1999) conducted a nomological validity test by asking about product use in the questionnaire. By using items asking respondents about last week's behaviors with a multiple-act behavioral index (Lastovicka and Joachims-thaler, 1988) of product usage, the regression model reveals that frugality offers the only linear explanation of the usage measure, with standardized regression weights $\beta = .29$ ($|t| > 1.96$; $p < .05$). Consequently, the face validity distinguishes Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) scale from other measurements of related yet different constructs, such as Bearden, Money, and Nevins' (2006) measures of the construct of "long-term orientation." Although both concepts of frugality and long-term orientation place more emphasis on long-term time horizons and less on short-term gratification, the long-term orientation scale does not offer statistical explanations of product use. On the contrary, the chosen items in Lastovicka et al.'s (1999; p88) scales reflect both disciplined acquisition and resourceful use. Therefore, this result suggests that Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) frugality scale is a reasonable explanation of an index to understand consumers' product-use behaviors. Hence, it aligns with a main objective of this thesis (i.e., to measure the antecedents of consumers' renting behaviors, which focuses on the usage phase of the accessed products).

In addition, with diverse empirical methods, including "experiment vs. survey, convenience vs. probability samples, multimethod vs. monomethod designs, qualitative vs. quantitative research" (Lastovicka et al., 1999; p95), the discrimination validity tests show that the frugality measure is independent of response biases, denoting that the scale reflects frugality rather than the respondents' tendency to self-report in a socially desirable manner. Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) empirical studies also reveal that the frugality trait is distinct from six other consumer behavior traits. Specifically, frugality sum scores are not correlated ($p < .05$) with Dunlap and Van Liere's (1978) ecological measure, Faber and O'Guinn's (1992) compulsive buying measure, Lichtensten, Netemeyer, and Burton's (1990) measure of coupon proneness and value

consciousness, or Lichtenstein et al.'s (1993) measure of price consciousness. To our best knowledge, empirical research using Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) frugality measure for understanding renters' choices of renting over buying is lacking thus far. Therefore, we intend to fill the research gap with this thesis.

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 3 aims to measure a renter's tendency to voluntarily choose a frugal lifestyle.

Chosen Items in the Frugality Scale (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Shaw Hughner and Kuntze, 1999)	
(1="strongly disagree"; 6="strongly agree")	
1	If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run
2	There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful
3	Making better use of my resources makes me feel good
4	If I can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new
5	I believe in being careful in how I spend my money

Table 10: Items Used for Measuring Voluntary Frugality in This Thesis

3.5. Measuring Brand Engagement in Self-concept Orientation

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4), Sprott et al.'s (2009) brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) scale is chosen in this thesis to measure consumers' orientation to connect brands with their self-construal. One of the main reasons for this choice is that Sprott et al.'s measures the consumer general tendency to engage with all brands that consumers consider important by including these brands as part of their self-concept. This construct is different from others that measure the strength of the connections between a consumer's self and a specific brand (e.g., Escalas, 2004). In an experimental study, Escalas (2004) developed a seven-item self-brand connection (SBC) scale that measures the strength of the link between the self and a particular brand. The SBC scale includes items such as "Brand X reflects who I am" and "I think Brand X

(could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be” (Escalas, 2004, p. 175). In comparison, all the items in the BESC scale use the plural form of “*brands*.” They highlight the self-connection with multiple brands rather than with a particular brand (refer to **Table 11** showing the items for measuring this construct). Therefore, compared to other scales measuring self-brand connections, the BESC scale provides a more comprehensive view of the person–brand connections by accounting for the notion that multiple brands are integrated into the consumer self-concept (Sprott et al., 2009; p93). Consequently, it could contribute to a more holistic understanding of the brand–self connection in general in the renting context and develop relevant concepts related to alternative modes of consumption behaviors.

Another important reason for choosing Sprott et al.’s (2009) BESC scale is that they not only develop the eight-item Likert scale but also present several pieces of evidence supporting the validity of the scale. Specifically, based on a review of relevant branding and self-concept literature streams, Sprott et al. (2009) generated an initial pool of 36 scale items intended to capture various aspects of brand engagement with the self. Nine scholars then evaluated the content validity of each item with respect to Sprott et al.’s definition of BESC, which resulted in a modified set of 32 items. On the final step, after administering the 32 items to an undergraduate student sample (N = 430) and undergoing an item purification procedure using conventional factor analytical iterations, Sprott et al. developed the final BESC scale comprising eight items (see **Table 5-5**) anchored by “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (7). The reliability of Sprott et al.’s (2009) BESC scale met the conventional standards of internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) and intertemporal reliability (ranging between .62 and .78).

Another major advantage of the BESC scale is that several other previous studies also provide empirical evidence of its utility, validity, and reliability for investigating the link between consumer self-concept and brands. For example, drawing on Sprott et al.’s (2009) BESC scale,

Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman (2011) developed a self-extension tendency scale. Goldsmith, Flynn, and Clark (2012) used the BESC scale in surveys sent to a sample of North American university students ($N = 258$) to investigate the relationship between BESC, status consumption, and brand loyalty for clothing. Their results indicate that the BESC scale has good construct reliability ($\alpha = .90$). Positive correlations between BESC and status consumption ($r = .46, p < .01$), as well as between BESC and brand loyalty ($r = .51, p < .01$) are also found. In line with Sprott et al.'s (2009) findings, Goldsmith et al. (2012) find that gender has no effect on BESC ($r = .00, p = \text{n.s.}$). Goldsmith and Goldsmith (2012) also implemented the BESC scale in a sample of North American university students ($N = 132$) to examine the relationship between brand personality and BESC. Their results also report a good reliability of the BESC scale ($\alpha = .89$). Furthermore, the correlational analysis results suggest that BESC is positively correlated with brand personality ($r = .26, p < .01$).

In addition, Sprott et al. (2009) conducted bivariate correlation analyses to investigate the correlations between BESC and 12 related constructs (see *Appendix 8* for the summary chart of Sprott et al.'s (2009) nomological validity test). The results of the analyses show that BESC does not correlate with the measures of the social aspects of the self (i.e., independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal, collective self-esteem). Accordingly, the correlations of $r = -.027, p = \text{n.s.}$ (independent self-construal; Singelis, 1994), $r = .058, p = \text{n.s.}$ (interdependent self-construal; Singelis, 1994), and $r = -.009, p = \text{n.s.}$ (collective self-esteem; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) are found (Sprott et al., 2009, p. 94). However, significant positive correlations are found between BESC and relational-interdependent self ($r = .152, p < .05$) as well as between BESC and materialistic values ($r = .42, p < .01$; Sprott et al., 2009, p. 94). Given the correlation between BESC and materialistic values, Sprott et al. (2009) conducted further analyses to examine whether the Material Values Scale (Richins, 2004) and the BESC scale measure two distinct theoretical

constructs. Analyses of the predictive validity of the two constructs indicate that the materialism scale is not correlated with the number of brands reported by respondents ($r = .15, p = .28$), whereas the correlation between BESC and total brands possessed (summation of the number of brands) remains significant after controlling for material values ($r = .36, p < .01$). Thus, while BESC and material values are correlated, Richins' (2004) scale and Sprott et al.'s (2009) scale measure two distinct constructs. Furthermore, Sprott et al. (2009) conducted five experimental studies using six different samples of undergraduate students ($N = 585$) to validate the BESC scale from various theoretical perspectives. The findings of the validation studies confirm that BESC positively affects major steps of the consumer decision process toward brands (i.e., memory, brand choice, product preferences, brand perceptions, brand attitude, and brand loyalty).

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 4 aims to measure a renter's tendency to engage with brands in one's self-concept.

Items in the Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC) Scale (Sprott, Czellar and Spangerberg, 2009) (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree")	
1	I have a special bond with the brands that I like.
2	I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.
3	I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.
4	Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.
5	I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.
6	I can identify with important brands in my life.
7	There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.
8	My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.

Table 11: Items Used for Measuring Brand Engagement in Self-concept in This Thesis

3.6. Measuring the Main Variable of Consumers' Choices of Renting Over Buying

As explained in Chapter 1, the main topic on consumers' choices of renting over buying with consumers' perceived values in renting over buying is operationalized in this thesis. Four constructs are chosen from Lamberton and Rose's (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) measurements, namely "transaction utility," "flexibility utility," "pro-social utility" (environmental sustainability), and "perceived social value." We adapt some items to the specific fashion context in this research. The aim of this thesis is to provide empirical evidence to understand the potential individual differences in perceived values in the fashion renting consumption, through which consumers may also co-create functional and social values. Specifically, to measure what we denote as a renter's perceived functional value, we borrow from Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) sharing utility scale two items for measuring transaction utility, four items for measuring flexibility utility, and one item for measuring pro-social utility scale. We also borrow four items from Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) and Lamberton and Rose's (2012) sharing utility scales for measuring a renter's social value in this thesis.

Quantitative research into consumers' perceived utilities in consumers' choices of renting over buying fashion products is rare. To our best knowledge, we are unaware of a single empirical study that directly addresses these questions and measures the related constructs. Previous research explores consumers' general attitudes and intentions toward online fashion renting retailing (Lee and Chow, 2020). Nonetheless, the goals of this thesis is to provide detailed empirical evidence for understanding the relationships between consumers' self-concepts, brands of rented items, and rented objects. The choice of scales for measuring consumers' perceived values in renting over buying in this thesis is introduced as follows.

Operationally, this thesis primarily borrows Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) sharing utility measures. Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) scales were developed based on Lamberton and Rose's (2012) augmented scale of overall sharing utility model. The sharing utility model was originally developed by Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler (2007). *Appendix 9* shows the original items used for measuring sharing utility in Oyedele and Simpson (2018) and Lamberton and Rose (2012). Specifically, the measures of the chosen constructs, namely transaction utility, flexibility utility, pro-social utility, and social utility, consist of the same items used by Oyedele and Simpson (2018), although adapted to the fashion renting context. As Oyedele and Simpson (2018; p. 166) state, "prosocial utility measure consisted of the same items used by Lamberton and Rose (2012), although adapted by context" and "transaction utility, flexibility utility and social utility measures were expanded and adapted versions of the Lamberton and Rose (2012) measures." As presented in *Table 12*, similar to Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) measures, all the measures are assessed using a seven-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from "1" for strongly disagree to "7" for strongly agree. The aim is to compare the results. The three main reasons for the choice of operationalizing these constructs with Lamberton and Rose's (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) scales are explained below.

First, the choice of these constructs aligns with the research objective to re-assess why and how consumers may perceive different utilities in the renting consumption, for which different studies have shown divergent results to understand these chosen constructs' roles in driving the consumer propensity to participate in access-based consumption. For example, Lamberton and Rose's (2012) empirical studies in the car-sharing context suggests that social utility and pro-social utility are not significant determinants of consumers' sharing propensity. However, Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) empirical studies on room sharing indicate that the effect of social utility on the intention to use is significant. Moreover, in the research stream on the so-called "sharing economy,"

a group of researchers (e.g., Eckhardt, Houston, Jiang, Lamberton, Rindleisch and Zervas, 2019) call for the revision of current traditional utility models or the development of new ones, as such approaches could help obtain “a fuller appreciation of value creation (and erosion) in the sharing economy” (Eckhardt et al., 2019; p. 13). In response to Eckhardt et al.’s (2019) call, by choosing to use some of the measurements from Lamberton and Rose’s (2012) utility model and to adapt to the fashion renting service and consumption contexts, this thesis hopes to provide new insights into how and why consumers with diverse personal traits or orientations may perceive and/or co-create different values in the renting context. Thus far, no empirical studies have re-assessed these scales based on consumers’ real renting experience or in the fashion renting context. Hence, this thesis also intends to provide empirical evidence for the reassessment of these constructs and scales with the actual renters in the fashion renting consumption.

Second, both Lamberton and Rose (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson’s (2018) empirical studies re-assessed the reliability of Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2007) utility model. With empirical studies in different contexts, Lamberton and Rose’s (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson’s (2018) findings confirmed the reliability of the scales used in Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2007) utility model. Lamberton and Rose augmented Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2007) model with measures of the perceived risk of product scarcity to test its role relative to cost, utility, substitutability. Lamberton and Rose’s (2012; p. 114) first study in the car-sharing context involved the “[recruitment of] a sample of 369 licensed U.S. drivers (43% male, M age = 34.19 years, 80% white).” Lamberton and Rose (2012) used the online panel provided by Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk to make the results comparable to those of Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler (2007). Lamberton and Rose (2012) captured the responses to measures on a six-point scale (from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree”). The results of all the reliability coefficients based on the empirical study in the car-sharing context were acceptable ($\alpha = .74$ for flexibility utility; $\alpha = .83$ for social utility; α

= .70 for moral utility). Additionally, the “correlations between all constructs were equal to, or less than .5” and “no variance inflation factors were greater than 2.5, suggesting that this correlation did not introduce problematic levels of multicollinearity” (Lamberton and Rose, 2012; p. 116). Lamberton and Rose’s results imply that transactional utility and flexibility utility are determinants of sharing propensity in the car-sharing context. Oyedele and Simpson (2018) tested Lamberton and Rose’s (2012) commercial sharing utility model of the effects of various utilities in access-based consumption use and extended the model by examining the roles of emerging adulthood and online applications that make cost sharing among friends more convenient. Specifically, drawing on Lamberton and Rose’s (2012) sharing utility measures and emerging adulthood questions, Oyedele and Simpson (2018) developed and distributed a questionnaire to a convenience sample of 356 undergraduate business students at a U.S. Midwestern university during class time.

Oyedele and Simpson (2018) then tested the hypothesized relationships with the collected data (N = 345) using partial least squares structural equation modeling in three different contexts: car sharing, room sharing, and household goods sharing. Their results indicated that the scales have good construct reliability, with transaction utility ($\alpha = .86$ in the car-sharing context; $\alpha = .91$ in the household goods sharing context; $\alpha = .94$ in the room-sharing context); social utility ($\alpha = .90$, generalized measures relevant to access-based consumption with one statistic referring to all the contexts); flexibility utility ($\alpha = .88$ in the car-sharing context; $\alpha = .89$ in the household goods sharing context; $\alpha = .93$ in the room-sharing context); and pro-social utility ($\alpha = 1.0$, as only one item is available). Oyedele and Simpson (2018) also found that all the average variance extracted (AVE) statistics were above the required 0.50 for convergent validity. As an indicator of discriminant validity, “the AVE of each construct was higher than the squared correlations of the construct with other constructs (the Fornell–Larcker criterion), and the factor loadings for all items were greater than all their cross-loadings” (Oyedele and Simpson, 2018; p. 166).

Oyedele and Simpson's (2018; p. 170) results suggest that

“In all three contexts, transaction utility has a significant and positive impact on flexibility utility, ‘share aids’ has a positive and significant impact on social utility and familiarity has a significant effect on flexibility utility. Flexibility effects on intention to use are significant in all three contexts. The effects of social utility on intention to use are only significant in the room-sharing context. Transaction utility does not significantly affect intention to use access-based consumption. Effects of trust and pro-social utility on intention to use access-based consumption are insignificant in all three sharing contexts. Finally, emerging adulthood is found to affect transaction utility positively and significantly and ‘share aids’ for all contexts.”

Third, Lamberton and Rose (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) scales provide a high degree of content validity (Haynes, Richard, and Kubany, 1995) to measure the chosen utilities in the fashion renting context. Their scales offer all the necessary items about the chosen construct that this thesis aims to measure. Specifically, the work of Lamberton and Rose (2012) is a seminal study to understand the consumers' participation in commercialized sharing services (with Google Scholar citation reaching 1,020 in September 2021). Lamberton and Rose (2012) and Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) scale measuring sharing utilities in access-based services was adapted to the empirical field study in this thesis in the fashion rental consumption because fashion renting service in the digital age can be considered as “commercialized sharing service” (Lamberton and Rose, 2012; p109). Beyond the cost-related benefits of sharing, Lamberton and Rose (2012; p. 109) highlight the role of product scarcity risk in measuring commercial sharing propensity by suggesting that “commercial sharing systems are characterized by between-consumer rivalry for the limited supply of the shared product.” Such sharing systems may increase “consumers' perceived product scarcity risk – the likelihood that a product or product-related resources will be unavailable when a consumer desires access” (Lamberton and Rose, 2012; p.

110). Consequently, Lamberton and Rose use three studies in the rivalry context to investigate the role of cost, utility, and risk-related elements in the propensity to share. These contexts include a car-sharing program Zipcar, a cell phone minute-sharing plan, and an ecologically valid bicycle-sharing system.

From this perspective, Lamberton and Rose's (2012; p. 114) empirical study suggests "the empirical and theoretical distinctiveness of commercial sharing systems from [the ones] that do not involve rivalry for the shared products," such as digital files sharing. For example, although Hennig-Thurau, Henning and Sattler (2007) also provide a utility model to understand the determinants of illegal electronic motion picture file sharing, consumers may access unlimited digital copies rather than compete for limited tangible inventory. In the fashion renting context, as the renting firm owns the fashion apparel and each brand has limited samples in the inventory, consumers may also perceive the risk of product scarcity for some specific brands of fashion products when the demand is higher than the available inventory. This premise conforms to Lamberton and Rose's (2012; p. 114) description of commercial sharing systems: "high demand on the part of some consumers can preclude product access for others." Therefore, Lamberton and Rose's commercial sharing utility model adapts to the empirical study field in the fashion renting service and consumption, which represents a profitable alternative to ownership (Belk 2007).

In addition, as shown in *Table 13*, in which the constructs used in Oyedele and Simpson (2018), Lamberton and Rose (2012), and Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler's (2007) models are compared, not all the constructs are chosen in this thesis. Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler's empirical studies focus on the illegal consumer file sharing of motion pictures in the movie industry, and Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2007) model includes "collection utility" related to collecting music or movies by download or illegal copying. On the contrary, Lamberton and Rose (2012) omit this "collection utility" construct from their model because this measure is not relevant

in commercial sharing systems, as the latter ones highlight the rivalry for the shared products. The detailed explanation for this point is explained as follows.

Oyedele and Simpson (2018) only choose and assess the constructs of transaction utility, flexibility utility, social utility, and pro-social utility from Lambertson and Rose (2012) but eliminate storage utility and anti-industry utility. Oyedele and Simpson do not provide detailed explanation on why they omit these latter two utility constructs. Perhaps storage utility is not related to the empirical study in the room-sharing context that Oyedele and Simpson plan to examine; furthermore, in the car-sharing context that is studied in Lambertson and Rose (2012), anti-industry motivation seems to not drive sharing propensity. Instead, Oyedele and Simpson propose another four constructs to explore in their model, including trust, shareaids, and emerging adulthood. Shareaids pertain to “online apps that facilitate and promote transaction utility, often through social media,” such as the “‘split bill’ tool launched by Uber” (Oyedele and Simpson, 2018; p. 164). Their results suggest that shareaids positively impact social utility. However, this construct can be restrained by the object context, as some renting services may not offer such online apps facilitating transaction utility. Hence, this construct is not embedded in our model. Concerning the other two constructs of familiarity and trust, they may not be related to what the renting service offers but only depend on consumers’ subjective assessment. Hence, these constructs are also eliminated in our model. With regard to emerging adulthood, this construct is not related to the main purpose of this thesis.

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 11, Question 12, and Question 13 aim to measure a renter’s perceived functional value in the choice of renting over buying, including “transaction utility,” “flexibility utility,” and “pro-social utility” (environmental sustainability), respectively. Meanwhile, the purpose of Question 14 is to measure a renter’s “perceived social value” in the choice of renting over buying.

Dimensions	Utilities	Items to Measure Perceived Values in Renting over Buying (1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree")	
Perceived Functional Value	Transaction Utility	1	I feel that renting clothes products offers significant cost saving relative to ownership
		2	I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying service is a good deal
	Flexibility Utility	1	I believe renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go
		2	Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs
		3	Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of product virtually anywhere, anytime I want
		4	Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming
	Prosocial Utility	1	Renting instead of owning them reduces our usage of natural resources
Perceived Social Value	Social Utility	1	I often use sharing services with my friends.
		2	I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends
		3	I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people
		4	Meeting and socializing with other people are an important advantage of using sharing services

Table 12: Items Borrowed from Oyedele and Simpson (2018) and Lamberton and Rose's (2012) Sharing Utilities to Measure Perceived Values in the Choice of Renting Over Buying in This Thesis

Authors and Publication Dates	Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler (2007)	Lamberton and Rose (2012)	Oyedele and Simpson (2018)
Utility of Substitution or Alternative Consumption mode	Specific Utility of the Illegal Copy	Sources of Overall Sharing Utility	Sharing Utilities in Access-based Services Model
Chosen Utility Constructs in Common	Transaction utility	Transaction utility	Transaction utility
	Mobility utility	"Sources of utility related to flexibility" (analogues to "mobility utility")	Flexibility utility
	Social utility	Social utility	Social utility
		Pro-social utility	Moral utility (Pro-social utility)
Other utilities	Storage utility	Storage utility	Storage utility
	Anti-industry utility	Anti-industry utility	Anti industry utility
	Collection utility	Collection utility	
Main Reference	The Rochelandet and Le Guel's (2005) model with different drivers of sharing illegal music copies	Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler's (2007) utility-based framework for understanding the way that consumers negotiate sharing versus ownership	Lamberton and Rose's (2007) commercial sharing utility model of access-based consumption use
Field Study	illegal electronic motion picture file sharing in the movie consumption	three contexts: a car-sharing program Zipcar, a cell phone minute-sharing plan and an ecologically valid bicycle-sharing system	three contexts: car-sharing, room-sharing and household goods sharing

Table 13: Comparison of the Constructs and Items in Oyedele and Simpson (2018), Lamberton and Rose (2012), and Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler's (2007) Measurements of Utilities

3.7. Measuring the Renter's Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1), Thomson, Macinnis, and Park's (2005) emotional attachment (EA) to brands scale is chosen in this thesis to measure the renter's emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. One of the main reasons for this choice is that Thomson et al. (2005) provide the seminal empirical work on the EA construct. Its measurement on EA is the most cited to date (with 3,257 citations in October 2021). Across three studies, they conducted reliability and stability tests and developed an EA scale. As shown in **Table 14**, the scale includes 10 items loaded in three nonorthogonal dimensions (eigenvalues > 1), labeled affection, passion, and connection. Affection includes the items affectionate, loved, friendly, and peaceful, reflecting

the consumer's warm feelings toward a brand; passion includes the items passionate, delighted, and captivated, reflecting intense and aroused positive feelings toward a brand; and connection includes the items connected, bonded, and attached, describing a consumer's feelings of being joined with the brand (Thomson et al., 2005). The correlations between dimensions indicated that they were "all positive and significant (Affection–Connection, $r = 0.48$; Affection–Passion, $r = 0.24$; Passion–Connection, $r = 0.24$)" (Thomson et al., 2005; p. 80). These three dimensions not only provide a comprehensive and focused understanding of detailed emotional attachment forms but also denote that these diverse feelings represent a "hot" effect from the brand's linkage to the self (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007).

The second main reason for choosing Thomson et al.'s EA scale is that compared to the scales in other studies, this EA scale assesses more rigorously the validity of the EA measurement. Specifically, Thomson et al.'s (2005) empirical findings demonstrate that the EA construct can stand alone and better represent the data than each EA component independently does. Consequently, we decided to use the global EA construct rather than its independent dimensions to assess its relationships with other variables in the proposed framework. Thomson et al. (2005) likewise assessed the scale stability and showed that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the EA scale is 0.93. Thomson et al.'s (2005) fourth study revealed convergent validity for the EA scale and the representation of the three dimensions as first-order factors that load onto the global EA construct.

First, the internal consistencies of scales reflecting EA and the four attachment behaviors, including proximity maintenance, emotional security, safe haven, and separation distress, are good with all Cronbach alpha scores at or above 0.87. These validity results correspond to the conclusion drawn from existing literature that the intensity of an attachment can be inferred from the levels of

these four attachment behaviors (e.g., Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011). Therefore, the EA measure adequately assesses attachment strength.

Second, Thomson et al.'s (2005) study examined the relation of each of the three component dimensions of the EA construct to each of the four attachment behaviors. However, this latter model suffers from poor fit based on its fit statistics. In fact, the "CMIN/DF statistic exceeds the rule-of-thumb cutoff of 5, whereas each of the other fit statistics lies below the acceptable 0.90 value" (Thomson et al., 2005; p. 81). Therefore, in a revisited model, in which affection, passion, and connection each load onto a latent EA construct, shows significant ($p < 0.01$) and positive effects toward all the four attachment behaviors. Furthermore, all the fit statistics of this revisited model are acceptable, that is, "CMIN/DF = 3.50; NFI = 0.97; RFI = 0.95; CFI = 0.98" (Thomson et al., 2005; p. 83).

However, compared to Thomson et al.'s (2005) tests of the diverse index to assess the validity of the scale, other studies on constructs that are similar to emotional attachment toward brands do not provide sufficient reference. For example, Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) do not estimate any intercorrelations between the dimensions of brand romance in their scale development study on brand romance, a complementary approach for explaining emotional attachment toward brands. Specifically, as explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1), Patwardhan and Balasubramanian's (2011) research aims to clarify consumer attraction to brands when stimulation needs are paramount using the perspective of the self-expansion model. They conducted a series of four studies and validated a three-factor, 12-item measurement scale for brand romance using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. They also performed reliability, convergent, criterion, discriminant, and nomological validity assessments and found established results; however, how the three dimensions of brand romance are correlated to each other are unknown.

Thomson et al. (2005) similarly assessed the discriminant validity of the EA scale by an exploratory factor analysis using an oblique rotation that included the EA dimensions with items. Their empirical results show that affection, passion, and connection dimensions all load on the construct of emotional attachment, with factor loadings equal to 0.87, 0.86, and 0.64, respectively. These results indicate that the measure is empirically distinguishable from similar constructs such as attitude favorability (Batra and Stayman, 1990), satisfaction (Mano and Oliver, 1993), and involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985). The findings correspond to the existing theoretical literature highlighting the differences between these constructs.

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 7 aims to measure the renters' emotional attachment to the brands of rented items.

Dimensions	Items in Measuring Emotional Attachment to Brands (Thomson, Macinnis and Park, 2005) (1="describes poorly"; 7="describes very well")	
Affection	1	Affectionate
	2	Friendly
	3	Loved
	4	Peaceful
Passion	5	Passionate
	6	Delighted
	7	Captivated
Connection	8	Connected
	9	Bonded
	10	Attached

Table 14: Items of Emotional Attachment to Brands Scale (Thomson, Macinnis, and Park, 2005) Used for Measuring Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items in This Thesis

3.8. Measuring the Renter's Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2), Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale (see *Appendix 10*) is adopted in this thesis to measure a renter's loyalty toward the brand of rented

items. One of the main reasons for this choice is that Jacoby and Chestnut's scale measures two essential dimensions of brand loyalty, namely attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. As explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.2), despite the divergent conceptualizations on brand loyalty in the marketing discipline, a majority consensus supports that both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty are two essential components of the brand loyalty concept (e.g., Dick and Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). In their research involving a comparison of 163 studies published in marketing journals since 1980 that measure loyalty as an attitude, a behavior, or both to determine when loyalty is the most effective for predicting performance outcomes, Watson et al. (2015) conclude that measures composed of combined attitudinal and behavioral items are more effective than attitude-only or behavior-only measures. Rundle-Thiele and Mackay (2001) also suggest that brand loyalty studies should include both attitudinal and behavioral measures. Operationally, as shown in the *Appendix 10*, Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale measures behavioral loyalty with Items 1 and 2 and measures attitudinal loyalty with Items 3 and 4.

In the renting context, Jacoby and Chestnut's brand loyalty scale could also provide a relatively more holistic perspective in understanding how a consumer's real renting consumption experience can affect the consumer loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Consumers may not only develop dispositional commitment to the brand of rented items based on their user experience of the brand, but also tend to *use* the specific brand of rented items repeatedly *by both renting and buying* in the future. As shown in *Table 15*, to measure a renter's loyalty toward the brand of rented items in this thesis, we adopt Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) seven-point (1= very strongly disagree; 7 = very strongly agree) brand loyalty scale with four items and adapt the scale to the renting context. Specifically, we change the terms "buy" and "purchasing" into "use" or "using" to adapt to the research context in renting rather than buying a product.

The second main reason for choosing Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale is that Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) are one of the most adopted brand loyalty scales, with 4172 citations on Google Scholar to date (October 2021). Previous studies provide empirical evidence suggesting that Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) scale have acceptable psychometric properties to measure a consumer's loyalty toward a specific brand. For example, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2012) conducted a pioneer study to measure brand loyalty considering both aspects of brand loyalty (i.e., purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty). Their study has obtained 9,170 citations on Google Scholar since October 2021. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2012) adopted Jacoby and Chestnut's four-item brand loyalty scale and conducted a field survey of 30 actual users of a specific brand for each of the 149 brands in 49 product categories. Their study results showed a coefficient alpha of .90 for purchase loyalty and a coefficient alpha of .83 for attitudinal loyalty, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency in both two dimensions. Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2012) studies provide empirical evidence indicating that when product-level and brand-level variables are controlled for, brand trust and brand affect combine to determine purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty ($p < .05$); furthermore, purchase loyalty, in turn, results in a larger market share, whereas attitudinal loyalty produces a higher relative price for the brand ($p < .05$).

Following Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2012) studies, other studies also use Jacoby and Chestnut's two-dimensional brand loyalty scale to investigate the relationships between brand loyalty and other constructs in marketing research. For example, with an effective data sample of 808 responses collected on a Finnish confectionery company's Facebook wall, Kuikka and Laukkanen's (2012) empirical results reveal an adequate internal consistency of the construct of behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, with Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.57 and 0.66,

respectively. According to Hair (2009), alpha levels greater than 0.7 indicate high internal consistency, whereas levels of 0.5–0.6 are considered adequate (Price, 2016).

In terms of discriminant validity, it has been suggested that only if the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than the correlation between every construct, the constructs can be considered as unrelated (Hair, 2009). Hence, the results of Kuikka and Laukkanen's (2012; p. 531) study indicate that "the discriminant validity is not supported between behavioral and attitudinal loyalty as the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) in behavioral loyalty and the correlation between behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty yielded an equal value of 0.67." This result implies that behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty are likely to overlap with each other. Operationally, respondents may also experience difficulty in differentiating between these two constructs. However, considering that the brand literature clearly distinguishes between the two, Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012) constantly treat behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty as separate constructs. Kuikka and Laukkanen's (2012) analysis results suggest that brand satisfaction has positive effects on both behavioral brand loyalty ($p < .001$) and attitudinal brand loyalty ($p < .01$); brand equity strongly affects attitudinal brand loyalty ($p < .001$); brand value has positive effects on both behavioral loyalty ($p < .01$) and attitudinal loyalty ($p < .001$); and brand trust has a positive effect on attitudinal loyalty ($p < .05$).

Drawn from previous research, in this thesis, we assess how the renter may develop loyalty toward the brand of rented items by considering both the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of brand loyalty. We simultaneously consider the model fit when deciding whether to treat the two aspects of behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty into one construct or two separate constructs.

In our questionnaire (see *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5*), Question 8 aims to measure the renters' loyalty toward the brands of rented items.

Items in Measuring the Renter's Loyalty towards the Brand of Rented Items (1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree")	
1	I will <i>use</i> the same brand the next time I have to <i>use</i> a product from this category.
2	I intend to keep <i>using</i> this brand.
3	I am committed to this brand.
4	I would be willing to pay a higher price <i>to use</i> this brand rather than <i>to use</i> other brands.

Table 15: Items for Measuring a Renter's Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items in This Thesis

Synthesis for Chapter 5

In the Chapter 5, we have introduced our quantitative research method based on a questionnaire survey and delineated the sampling process. We have also presented the chosen scales for measuring each of the variables in the proposed conceptual model that we aim to test in this thesis. *Table 16* provides an overview of these measurements as well as the main references on which we rely. *Appendix 4* and *Appendix 5* present the completed questionnaire that we designed to collect the data in this thesis.

Variable	Chosen Items	Scales	References
Materialism	I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.	1="strongly disagree"; 5="strongly agree"	Richins and Dawson's (1992) Materialism Value Scale
	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.		
	I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.*		
	The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.		
	I like to own things that impress people.		
	I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own*		
	I usually only buy the things I need.*		
	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*		
	The things I own aren't all that important to me.*		
	I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.		
	Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.		
	I like a lot of luxury in my life.		
	I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.*		
	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*		
	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.		
I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.*			
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.			
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.			
Variety Seeking	I am constantly seeking new ideas and experiences.	1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree"	Olsen, Tudoran, Honhanen et Verplanken's (2016) original Variety Seeking Tendency (VST) Scale
	I dislike change and variety in daily routines*		
	I like continually changing activities.		
	I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change*		
	I like to experience novelty and change in daily routine.		
Frugality	If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run	1="strongly disagree"; 6="strongly agree"	Chosen from Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Shaw Hughner and Kuntze's (1999) Frugality Scale
	There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful		
	Making better use of my resources makes me feel good		
	If I can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new		
	I believe in being careful in how I spend my money		
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	I have a special bond with the brands that I like.	1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"	Sprott, Czellar and Spangerberg's (2009) original Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC) Scale
	I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.		
	I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.		
	Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.		
	I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.		
	I can identify with important brands in my life.		
Perceived Functional Values in the choice of Renting over Buying	There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.	1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree"	Borrowed from Hennig-Thuraru, Henning, and Sattler's (2007) Specific Utility of the Illegal Copy and Lamberton and Rose's (2012) Sources of Overall Sharing Utility
	My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.		
	I feel that renting clothes products offers significant cost saving relative to ownership.		
	I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying service is a good deal.		
	I believe renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go.		
	Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs.		
Perceived Social Values in the choice of Renting over Buying	Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of product virtually anywhere, anytime I want.	1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree"	Borrowed from Hennig-Thuraru, Henning, and Sattler's (2007) Specific Utility of the Illegal Copy and Lamberton and Rose's (2012) Sources of Overall Sharing Utility
	Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming.		
	Renting instead of owning them reduces our usage of natural resources.		
	I often use sharing services with my friends.		
Renter's Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items	I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends.	1="describes poorly"; 7="describes very well"	Thomson, Macinnis and Park's (2005) original Emotional Attachment to Brands scale
	I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people.		
	Meeting and socializing with other people are an important advantage of using sharing services.		
	Affectionate		
	Friendly		
	Loved		
	Peaceful		
	Passionate		
Delighted			
Renter's Loyalty towards the Brand of Rented Items	Captivated	1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree"	Borrowed from Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale
	Connected		
	Bonded		
	Attached		
Renter's Loyalty towards the Brand of Rented Items	I will use this brand the next time I use a product from this category.	1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree"	Borrowed from Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale
	I intend to keep using this brand.		
	I am committed to this brand.		
	I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.		

Table 16: Summary of the Chosen Measurements in This Thesis

Chapter 6 - Data Analysis

Following the methodology approaches proposed in the previous chapter, Chapter 6 introduces our data analysis approach and the analysis results. This chapter comprises four parts:

- First, we describe the preprocessing data stage in which we follow three preliminary analytical steps of coding, data cleaning, and management of outliers (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018) to process the collected data.
- Second, we describe how we conduct the preliminary statistical assessment aiming to select the scale items eventually used in our data analysis based on exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests.
- Third, we provide an interpretation of the descriptive statistics to understand consumers' renting behaviors and demographic profiles.
- Fourth, we present the approach we used for testing the hypotheses of our conceptual framework. More specifically, we explain our statistical approach for structural equation modeling approach, regression analysis, and model fit assessment and discuss the results of our study and the consequences in terms of hypothesis confirmation or disconfirmation.

1. Preprocessing Data

In the preprocessing data stage, we examine the collected data sample following three preliminary analytical steps, namely coding process, data cleaning, and management of outliers, as introduced by Iacobucci and Churchill (2018).

1.1. Coding Process

Coding refers to assigning answers to response categories if open-ended questions are used (Van Herk, Poortinga and Theo, 2005). In particular, “coding is the technical procedure, by which raw data are transformed into symbols” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p. 317). As shown in *Appendix 11*, this thesis uses numbers rather than letters to code the respondents’ answers because numbers are the only acceptable form for the data analysis by computer with the statistical software SPSS and Amos. In the questionnaire designed for this thesis, we coded the answers for Question 6, Question 9, Question 10, and Question 16 (see *Appendix 11* for the coding summary). Specifically, Question 6 asks respondents to write the name of “the brand” that they recently rented. Based on the responses, we code “don’t know/forgot/not sure/don’t care” as 1, “many different brands/any brand/no particular brand” as 2, “YCloset (the renting service platform’s name)” as 6; the four specific brands “Elitime,” “Komiline,” “Tai Ping Niao,” and “Komello” that are most mentioned by the respondents are coded as 3, 4, 5, and 7, respectively; and all the other mentioned brands are coded as 8. In addition, as shown in *Appendix 11*, the answers to Question 9, Question 10, and Question 16 asking about consumers’ renting behaviors are denoted by 1, 2, 3, and 4.

1.2. Data Cleaning

Data cleaning or editing refers to correcting inconsistent answers in the questionnaires (Van Herk, Poortinga and Theo, 2005). The basic purpose of editing is to impose some minimum quality standards on the raw data” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p316). Two stages for inspection and correction are involved in this thesis: the field edit is the preliminary edit, followed by the central office edit. Iacobucci and Churchill (2018; p. 316) define field edit as “a preliminary edit, designed to detect the most glaring omission and inaccuracies in the data.” Based on the field edit, the respondents completed their questionnaires by answering all the questions. Hence, no omission is detected in the data sample. Although Iacobucci and Churchill (2018; p317) suggest that “it rarely happens that a study has all the returned questionnaires filled out,” the high rate of completing the questionnaires in this thesis can be due to the fact that the survey tool used in this thesis requires respondents to reply to all the questions. The respondents’ questionnaires can be submitted to the system only by completely replying to all the questions.

Regarding the central office edit, Iacobucci and Churchill (2018; p. 316) indicate that it “involves more detailed scrutiny and correction of the completed returns.” In this thesis, when manually reviewing each answer in Excel, we determined that consumers who answered “YCloset (the renting service platform’s name)” to the question about their recently rented brand might not have sufficiently understood the question. As the number of respondents who answered “YCloset” was limited (N = 14), and understanding the relationships between renters and the renting platform is not the research objective, these answers were treated as incorrect. Hence, these answers were eliminated from the final data sample. In addition, as suggested in Iacobucci and Churchill (2018), we also reviewed each respondent’s answers and did not find anyone who showed a constant lack of interest in the subject. For example, we checked whether any respondent had circled all the highest or lowest points of each scale for the entire survey.

1.3. Management of Outliers

In the third preliminary analytical step, we managed outliers in the data sample. Rather than an error, an outlier is an observation so different in magnitude from the rest of the data (Huber, 2004). To ensure consistency during the data preprocessing stage, Iacobucci and Churchill (2018; p. 316) suggested that “it is best if one individual handles all completed instruments.” Thus, as the sole data analyst, I calculated the response time spent by each respondent. The respondents spent about 2 minutes to 10 hours to complete the questionnaire, with mean response time (M) equal to 9 minutes and 7 seconds and standard deviation (SD) equal to 9 minutes and 14 seconds. The screenshots of the summary of completion rates and average response time for each region, automatically generated by Tencent Analysis, are shown in *Appendix 3*.

However, to my best knowledge, given the lack of literature precising the threshold for the answering time and that respondents reply on mobiles to this questionnaire, the issue of whether short or long time spent on completing the questionnaire implies the accuracy of the answers is difficult to predict. Specifically, long hours could result from a technology issue. For example, the respondent forgot to submit the questionnaire after a long reflection. By contrast, respondents who spent a short time on answering the questionnaire could indicate that they are tech-savvy and quick thinkers. Therefore, although these responses took much more time than the rest of the data, we kept these responses in the final data sample. In sum, by eliminating from the raw data sample the 14 incorrect answers to the main question on the specific rented brand, the final selected data sample for further analysis consisted of 321 answers ($N = 321$), thereby satisfying the minimum requirement ($N > 306$) for the data sample as calculated in the previous chapter.

In addition, based on how rapidly the respondents finished the questionnaire, we compared the ANOVA of all the variables for the first 25% of respondents versus the last 25% of respondents.

In *Table 17*, the ANOVA analysis results of majority variables show that there are no significant differences between these two groups of respondents ($p > 0.02$).

Variables	First 25% Respondents	Last 25% Respondents	Significance
Terminal Materialism	-0.002	-0.072	0.253
Instrumental Materialism	0.250	-0.113	0.026
Frugality	-0.098	0.116	0.095
Variety Seeking	-0.296	0.099	0.008
BESC	0.129	-0.083	0.261
Perceived Functional Values	-0.235	0.125	0.027
Perceived Social Values	0.301	-0.141	0.004
Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items	0.197	-0.101	0.085
Brand Loyalty	0.179	-0.140	0.030
Age	29.990	32.360	0.005
Lifestyle	2.290	2.680	0.081

Table 17: ANOVA Analysis Comparing the First 25% of Respondents Versus the Last 25% of Respondents in the Selected Data Sample

2. Preliminary Statistical Assessment

After preprocessing data, we conducted the preliminary statistical assessment. First, for each variable, we performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to investigate, reassess, and identify potential factors and dimensions in the chosen variables. Theoretically, EFA is a data-driven approach, such that no specifications are made regarding the number of common factors (initially) or the pattern of relationships between the common factors and the indicators (i.e., factor loadings) (Brown and Moore, 2012). The goal of EFA used in preliminary factor analysis is twofold: to identify factors based on data and to maximize the amount of variance explained (Suhr, 2006). Based on our sample size, any factor loading greater than 0.5 is assumed to have practical significance (Hair, 1995). The default in most statistical software packages is to retain all the factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (Costello and Osborne, 2005).

Aside from factor analysis, we alternatively calculated the sum of the chosen items of each construct based on reliability assessment results. However, we did not choose the results for further analysis considering the potential shortcomings of sum scores. As McNeish and Gordon Wolf (2020) assert, the sum-and-alpha approach overlooks internal structure and causes difficulty in discerning the boundaries of subscales or the particular items that are reasonable to sum. Hence, sum scores could yield undesirable outcomes such as model fit issues. In this thesis, we aim to focus on the assessment of the specific dimension(s) of a certain variables (e.g., materialism and frugality); thus, verifying the factor loadings of chosen items is essential. Therefore, we choose the factor analysis for further analysis in this thesis.

Second, we conducted reliability assessment to ensure the construct validity. Reliability is conceptually defined as “the degree to which measures are free from error and yield consistent results” (Peter, 1979; p. 6). Establishing measurement reliability “is important in both applied and theoretical research because reliability constitutes a necessary first step toward ensuring construct validity” (Iacobucci and Duhachek, 2003; p. 478). In this thesis, following Nunnally’s (1978; pp. 245-246) recommendations for minimally acceptable reliability levels for preliminary research, an alpha coefficient of .70 or greater is considered acceptable. By far the most frequently reported reliability index is Cronbach’s coefficient alpha (Hogan, Benjamin & Brezinski, 2000; Peterson, 1994). The statistical software SPSS Statistics Version 27.0 for Mac OS X was used for computing Cronbach’s coefficient alpha in the current research. In case the alpha result is lower than the recommended cutoff value, we calculated the intercorrelation between items of each construct or each dimension of the construct because better intercorrelation may increase the measurement reliability (Iacobucci and Duhachek, 2003).

In the next subsections, we present the results of the EFA and the reliability assessment for each variable based on the sample data collected in this survey (n = 321).

2.1. Factor and Reliability Assessment for Materialism Measurement

2.1.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Materialism Measurement

As shown in **Table 18**, the EFA based on total variance results show that there are five component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the materialism scale. Specifically, the component matrix in **Table 19** shows how the eighteen items in the original materialism scale load on these five components. This result is different from Richins and Dawson's (1992) original studies suggesting that there are three dimensions in the material values scale (MVS). Further, we ran the parallel analysis (O'Connor, 2000) and compared the random data eigenvalues to the real-data eigenvalues that are obtained from the common factor analysis, in which the number of components extracted equals the number of variables/items, and the number of iterations is fixed at zero. The results show that only the first two factors (component 1 and component 2, as shown in the **Table 18**) have higher real-data eigenvalues than the random data eigenvalues. Therefore, we only retain these two factors in the further analysis. Specifically, the items that load highly on Factor 1 reflect how consumers appreciate the values derived from excessive possessions in one's life, such as social status, hedonic pleasure, and happiness. Therefore, we label this factor as "instrumental materialism" for further assessment. The items that highly load on Factor 2 reflect how consumers perceive the acquisition of possessions as their ultimate goal for shopping. Therefore, we label this factor as "terminal materialism" for further assessment. **Table 20** presents a summary of the chosen items in each of the two dimensions of instrumental materialism and terminal materialism for further assessment.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.77	26.5	26.5	4.77	26.5	26.5
2	2.04	11.331	37.831	2.04	11.331	37.831
3	1.624	9.024	46.856	1.624	9.024	46.856
4	1.159	6.441	53.296	1.159	6.441	53.296
5	1.042	5.79	59.086	1.042	5.79	59.086
6	0.852	4.732	63.818			
7	0.82	4.558	68.376			
8	0.776	4.309	72.685			
9	0.726	4.036	76.72			
10	0.677	3.761	80.481			
11	0.633	3.517	83.998			
12	0.567	3.149	87.147			
13	0.49	2.72	89.867			
14	0.452	2.51	92.377			
15	0.387	2.151	94.529			
16	0.366	2.035	96.564			
17	0.327	1.817	98.38			
18	0.292	1.62	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 18: Total Variance Explained for the Materialism Scale

Items	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
I like a lot of luxury in my life.	0.745	-0.029	0.26	-0.149	-0.154
I like to own things that impress people.	0.737	0.154	-0.015	-0.001	-0.143
I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.	0.728	0.175	-0.108	0.054	-0.143
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	0.723	0.171	-0.016	0.038	0.338
Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	0.676	0.296	-0.152	0.077	-0.014
My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	0.605	0.161	-0.018	-0.097	0.368
The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	0.602	0.201	-0.019	0.347	-0.213
Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	0.564	0.05	0.259	0.313	0.005
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	0.497	0.153	0.112	-0.27	0.418
I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*	-0.135	0.724	-0.366	-0.152	0.023
I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*	-0.382	0.711	-0.282	-0.124	-0.057
I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.	0.315	0.63	-0.288	-0.092	-0.072
I usually only buy the things I need.*	-0.055	0.413	0.19	0.481	-0.4
I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.*	-0.399	0.309	0.376	0.268	0.353
I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own*	-0.388	0.291	0.378	0.385	0.38
The things I own aren't all that important to me.*	-0.296	0.353	0.452	-0.355	-0.115
I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.*	0.247	0.303	0.335	-0.433	-0.169
I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.*	-0.378	0.306	0.44	-0.121	-0.167

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

5 components extracted.

Table 19: Component Matrix for the Materialism Scale

Factors	Items
Instrumental Materialism (Factor 1)	I like a lot of luxury in my life.
	I like to own things that impress people.
	I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.
	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
	The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
	Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
	It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.
Terminal Materialism (Factor 2)	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*
	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*
	I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.
	I usually only buy the things I need.*

Table 20: Two Factors of Materialism: Instrumental and Terminal Materialism

2.1.2. Reliability Assessment for Materialism Measurement

As shown in the EFA results, we find two factors in the materialism variable, namely “instrumental materialism” and “terminal materialism.” To assess the construct validity for each factor, we conducted the reliability assessment for each of the factors based on the collected data sample in this thesis. For the factor of terminal materialism, after eliminating the item “I have all the things I really need to enjoy life”, the coefficient alpha for the rest of three items augments and reaches .92. This result signifies high consistency among items in the sub-dimension of terminal materialism. For the factor of instrumental materialism, the nine-item instrumental materialism sub-dimension’s alpha is .72, suggesting acceptable reliability between the chosen items in instrumental materialism.

In terms of the measurement scales, we borrow Richins and Dawson’s (1992) original Likert scale format for all the items with response categories of “strongly disagree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” and “strongly agree” (all anchored by 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”). Therefore, we use all 12 chosen items to further assess this construct. **Table 21** presents a summary of its articles and their coefficient alpha results.

Scale	Constructs / Factors	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992)	Instrumental Materialism (Factor 1)	I like a lot of luxury in my life.	0.72	9
		I like to own things that impress people.		
		I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.		
		I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.		
		Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.		
		My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.		
		The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.		
		Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.		
		It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.		
	Terminal Materialism (Factor 2)	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*	0.92	3
		I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*		
		I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.		
		I usually only buy the things I need.*		

Table 21: Reliability Analysis Results for Materialism Scales

2.2. Factor and Reliability Assessment for Variety-seeking Measurement

2.2.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Variety-seeking Measurement

Similar to Olsen et al.’s (2016) EFA results for the variable of variety seeking, our EFA shows only one factor with five items in this variable. This result also reflects Olsen et al.’s (2016) conceptualization of the variety-seeking trait, which represents an individual’s (internal) tendency to seek variety in daily routines and activities. The following tables provide detailed EFA results for the variety-seeking scale. Specifically, in **Table 22**, the total variance results show that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variable of variety seeking; in **Table 23**,

the component matrix shows how the five items in the variety-seeking scale load on the unique factor.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.326	66.517	66.517	3.326	66.517	66.517
2	0.647	12.939	79.456			
3	0.374	7.472	86.928			
4	0.364	7.29	94.217			
5	0.289	5.783	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 22: Total Variance Explained for the Variety-seeking Scale

Items	Component
	1
I like continually changing activities.	0.847
I like to experience novelty and change in daily routine.	0.834
I am constantly seeking new ideas and experiences.	0.826
I dislike change and variety in daily routines*	0.803
I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change*	0.766

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 component extracted.

Table 23: Component Matrix for the Variety-seeking Scale

2.2.2. Reliability Assessment for Variety-seeking Measurement

In Chapter 5 (Section 3.3), we explain our use of Olsen et al.’s (2016) variety-seeking scales for measuring the renters’ variety-seeking tendency in this thesis. Two items, “I dislike change and variety in daily routines” and “I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change,” are reverse-coded. Our data demonstrate that the Cronbach’s alpha of the five-item variable variety seeking reaches .874, indicating acceptable reliability between the items (all

anchored by 1 = “very strongly disagree” and 7 = “very strongly agree”). Therefore, we use all five items for further assessment in this thesis. **Table 24** provides a summary of the items for measuring the variety-seeking construct and the coefficient alpha result.

Scale	Construct / Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Variety Seeking (Olsen, Tudoran, Honkanen and Verplanken, 2016)	Variety Seeking	I am constantly seeking new ideas and experiences.	0.874	5
		I dislike change and variety in daily routines.*		
		I like continually changing activities.		
		I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change.*		
		I like to experience novelty and change in daily routine.		

Table 24: Reliability Analysis Results for the Variety-seeking Scale

2.3. Factor and Reliability Assessment for Frugality Measurement

2.3.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Frugality Measurement

Our EFA shows one factor with the five items in the variable frugality. This result is aligned with our previous analysis in Section 3.3 of Chapter 2, as these five chosen items from Lastovicka et al.’s (1999) frugality orientation reflect how consumers voluntarily adopt a frugal lifestyle. The following tables provide detailed EFA results for the frugality scale. Specifically, in **Table 25**, the total variance results show that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variable frugality; in **Table 26**, the component matrix shows how the five items in the frugality scale load on the unique factor.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.152	43.043	43.043	2.152	43.043	43.043
2	0.947	18.934	61.977			
3	0.79	15.793	77.77			
4	0.623	12.452	90.223			
5	0.489	9.777	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 25: Total Variance Explained for the Frugality Scale

Items	Component
	1
If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run.	0.639
There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful.	0.348
Making better use of my resources makes me feel good.	0.731
If I can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new.	0.682
I believe in being careful in how I spend my money.	0.79

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
1 components extracted.

Table 26: Component Matrix for the Frugality Scale

2.3.2. Reliability Assessment for Frugality Measurement

As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 3.4), we measure the renters' voluntary frugal lifestyle with Lastovicka et al.'s (1999) frugality lifestyle scales in this thesis. Based on the data sample in this thesis, Cronbach's alpha for the chosen five items reaches .781, indicating acceptable reliability among all the selected items (all anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"). Therefore, we use all five items for further assessment in this thesis. A summary of the chosen items and their coefficient alpha result is presented in *Table 27*.

Scale	Construct / Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Frugality (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner and Kuntze, 1999)	Volutnaty Frugality	If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run	0.781	5
		There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful		
		Making better use of my resources makes me feel good		
		If I can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new		
		I believe in being careful in how I spend my money		

Table 27: Reliability Analysis Results for the Frugality Scale

2.4. Factor and Reliability Assessment for Brand Engagement in Self-concept Measurement

2.4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Brand Engagement in Self-concept Measurement

Our EFA confirms the presence of a single factor with the eight items in the variable BESC, which reflects a consumer's generalized tendency to include brands rather than a particular brand as a part of self-concept. This finding aligns with Sprott's (2009) conceptualization of BESC, as we introduced in Section 4 of Chapter 2. Specifically, in **Table 28**, the total variance results show that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variable BESC; in **Table 29**, the component matrix shows how the eight items in the BESC scale load on the unique factor.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.933	74.157	74.157	5.933	74.157	74.157
2	0.69	8.628	82.785			
3	0.48	6.004	88.789			
4	0.266	3.33	92.119			
5	0.198	2.472	94.591			
6	0.166	2.076	96.667			
7	0.161	2.007	98.674			
8	0.106	1.326	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 28: Total Variance Explained for the BESC

Items	Component
	1
I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.	0.919
I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.	0.912
There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.	0.871
Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.	0.87
I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.	0.868
I can identify with important brands in my life.	0.848
My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.	0.823
I have a special bond with the brands that I like.	0.769
<i>Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.</i>	
<i>1 components extracted.</i>	

Table 29: Component Matrix for the BESC

2.4.2. Reliability Assessment for Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC) Measurement

As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 3.5), we measure how the renters may link one’s self-concept with the brand with Sprott et al.’s (2009) BESC scale in this thesis. Based on the data sample in this thesis, Cronbach’s alpha for the eight-item variable BESC reaches .950, indicating acceptable reliability between the adopted items. Therefore, we use all eight items for further assessment in this thesis. *Table 30* summarizes the items and the coefficient alpha result.

Scale	Construct / Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC) (Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg, 2009)	Brand Engagement in Self-Concept	I have a special bond with the brands that I like.	0.95	8
		I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.		
		I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.		
		Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.		
		I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.		
		I can identify with important brands in my life.		
		There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.		
		My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.		

Table 30: Reliability Analysis Results for the BESC Scale

2.5. Factor and Reliability Assessment for a Renter’s Perceived Values in the Choice of Renting Over Buying Measurement

2.5.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Renter’s Perceived Values in the Choice of Renting Over Buying Measurement

We conducted EFA for each of the perceived utilities. For what we named as “perceived functional value” variable, the results show three factors that respectively represent the dimensions of “perceived transaction utility,” “perceived flexibility utility,” and “perceived pro-social utility.” The results further reveal one factor in the dimension of perceived transaction utility with the two chosen items, one factor in the perceived flexibility utility with four items, and one item in the dimension perceived pro-social utility. For another main variable of “perceived social value,” the EFA results similar show one factor with four items. This result aligns with our propositions of dimensions in measuring the main variables of perceived functional value and perceived social value, in which we borrow items from Oyedele and Simpson (2018) and Lamberton and Rose’s (2012) sharing utility scales. Specifically, in the *Table 31*, *Table 33*, and *Table 35*, the total variance results show respectively that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variables of perceived transactional utility, perceived flexibility utility, and perceived social utility; in *Table 32*, *Table 34*, and *Table 36*, the component matrix show how the items in each of these perceived values in renting load on the specific factors.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.485	82.84	82.84	2.485	82.84	82.84
2	0.329	10.962	93.803			
3	0.186	6.197	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 31: Total Variance Explained for the Perceived Transactional Utilities

Items	Component
	1
I feel that using renting service offers significant cost saving relative to ownership.	0.935
I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying service is a good deal.	0.911
I feel that renting clothes products offers significant cost saving relative to ownership.	0.884
<i>Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.</i>	
<i>1 components extracted.</i>	

Table 32: Component Matrix for the Perceived Transactional Utilities

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.994	79.872	79.872	3.994	79.872	79.872
2	0.39	7.794	87.666			
3	0.291	5.821	93.487			
4	0.174	3.484	96.971			
5	0.151	3.029	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 33: Total Variance Explained for the Perceived Flexibility Utilities

Items	Component
	1
Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs.	0.923
Using rental service is better than owning a product because I can choose among numerous product options for different purposes.	0.921
Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of product virtually anywhere, anytime I want.	0.909
I believe renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go.	0.887
Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming.	0.825

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 components extracted.

Table 34: Component Matrix for the Perceived Flexibility Utilities

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.127	78.165	78.165	3.127	78.165	78.165
2	0.583	14.585	92.75			
3	0.15	3.75	96.5			
4	0.14	3.5	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 35: Total Variance Explained for the Perceived Social Utilities

Items	Component
	1
I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends.	0.911
I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people.	0.9
Meeting and socializing with other people are an important advantage of using sharing services.	0.871
I often use sharing services with my friends.	0.853

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 components extracted.

Table 36: Component Matrix for the Perceived Social Utilities

2.5.2. Reliability Assessment for a Renter's Perceived Values in the Choice of Renting Over Buying Measurement

To measure what we denote as a renter's perceived functional value, we respectively borrow two items and four items from Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) sharing utility scale for measuring transaction utility and flexibility utility in this thesis; we also borrow one item from Lamberton and Rose's (2012) pro-social utility scale for measuring a renter's perceived pro-social utility as one part of perceived functional value. To measure the renter's perceived social value in this thesis, we borrow four items from Lamberton and Rose's (2012) social utility scale. We also adapt these items to the fashion rental context in this thesis. Based on the data sample in this thesis, Cronbach's alpha for the seven-item sub-dimension of perceived functional utility is .917, indicating acceptable reliability between the chosen items. The Cronbach's alpha for the four-item sub-dimension of perceived social value reaches .906. All these results indicate the acceptable reliability (>.70) of the measurement for the main variable. Therefore, we use all 11 items for further assessment in this thesis. **Table 37** is a summary of the chosen items for measuring the two sub-dimensions of the main variable and their coefficient alpha results. We borrow Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) original Likert scale format for all items (all anchored by 1 = "very strongly disagree" and 7 = "very strongly agree").

Scale References	Sub-Dimensions	Utilities	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items		
Sharing Utility (Oyedele and Simpson, 2018; Lamberton and Rose, 2012)	Perceived Functional Value	Transaction Utility	I feel that renting clothes products offers significant cost saving relative to ownership	0.917	7		
			I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying service is a good deal				
		Flexibility Utility	I believe renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go				
			Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs				
	Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of product virtually anywhere, anytime I want						
	Perceived Social Value	Social Utility	Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming			0.906	4
			Prosocial Utility				
Social Utility			I often use sharing services with my friends.				
	I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends						
			I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people				
			Meeting and socializing with other people are an important advantage of using sharing services				

Table 37: Reliability Analysis Results for the Scales of the Main Variable of Perceived Values in Renting

2.6. Factor and Reliability Assessment for a Renter’s Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items Measurement

2.6.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Renter’s Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items Measurement

Our EFA confirms the presence of a single factor with the 10 items in the variable of emotional attachment to a brand, which all represent the warm feelings that a consumer develops in the renting process. This finding aligns with Thomson et al.’s (2005) conceptualization of emotional attachment to a brand, indicating an emotion-laden bond between a person and a specific brand, as we introduced in the first section of Chapter 3. Specifically, in **Table 38**, the total variance results show that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variable of emotional attachment to the brand of rented items; in **Table 39**, the component matrix shows how the ten items in the emotional attachment scale load on the unique factor.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.044	70.435	70.435	7.044	70.435	70.435
2	0.991	9.912	80.347			
3	0.517	5.171	85.518			
4	0.314	3.145	88.663			
5	0.249	2.486	91.149			
6	0.219	2.194	93.343			
7	0.213	2.126	95.469			
8	0.172	1.717	97.186			
9	0.156	1.562	98.748			
10	0.125	1.252	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 38: Total Variance Explained for the Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

Items	Component 1
Loved	0.886
Delighted	0.863
Connected	0.851
Affectionate	0.85
Bonded	0.847
Passionate	0.845
Captivated	0.842
Friendly	0.819
Peaceful	0.796
Attached	0.789

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 components extracted.

Table 39: Component Matrix for the Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

2.6.2. Reliability Assessment for Renter’s Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items Measurement

As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 3.7), we measure the consumers’ emotional attachment to the brand of rented items with Thomson et al.’s (2005) scale of emotional attachment to brands in this thesis. Based on the collected data sample in this thesis, Cronbach’s alpha for the 10-item variable emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item reaches .952, indicating the acceptable reliability of this measurement. Therefore, we use all 10 items for further assessment in this thesis.

Table 40 summarizes the items and their coefficient alpha result.

Scale	Construct / Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands (Thomson, MacInnis and Whan Park, 2005)	Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items	Affectionate	0.952	10
		Friendly		
		Loved		
		Peaceful		
		Passionate		
		Delighted		
		Captivated		
		Connected		
		Bonded		
		Attached		

Table 40: Reliability Analysis Results for the Scale of the Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

2.7. Factor and Reliability Assessment for Renter’s Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items Measurement

2.7.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Renter’s Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items Measurement

Our EFA shows the presence of a single factor with the four items in the variable of brand loyalty. This finding suggests a close relationship between both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty. In this manner, rather than test how renters may develop behavioral versus

attitudinal aspects of loyalty, as how previous research has often used Jacoby and Chestnut’s brand loyalty measurement for, we measure the variable of brand loyalty as a single variable in this thesis. Combining these four items could provide a more holistic understanding of how consumers may develop loyalty toward the brands of rented items. Specifically, in **Table 41**, the total variance results show that there is only one component with the eigenvalue above 1 in the variable of brand loyalty towards the brand of rented items; in **Table 42**, the component matrix shows how the ten items in the brand loyalty scale load on the unique factor.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.812	70.295	70.295	2.812	70.295	70.295
2	0.681	17.024	87.318			
3	0.269	6.731	94.049			
4	0.238	5.951	100			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 41: Total Variance Explained for the Brand Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

Items	Component
	1
I am committed to this brand.	0.906
I will use this brand the next time I use product name.	0.865
I intend to keep using this brand.	0.859
I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.	0.71

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 components extracted.

Table 42: Component Matrix for the Brand Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

2.7.2. Reliability Assessment for Loyalty Toward the Brand of a Rented Item Measurement

As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 3.8), we measure the consumers' loyalty toward the brand of a rented item with Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) brand loyalty scale in this thesis. Based on the collected data sample in this thesis, Cronbach's alpha for the four-item construct of consumers' loyalty toward the brand of a rented item reaches .851, indicating an acceptable reliability for this measurement. Therefore, we use all four items for further assessment in this thesis. **Table 43** presents a summary of the items and their coefficient alpha result.

Scale	Construct / Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Brand Loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978)	User's Loyalty towards the Brand of Rented Items	I will use this brand the next time I use product name.	0.851	4
		I intend to keep using this brand.		
		I am committed to this brand.		
		I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.		

Table 43: Reliability Analysis Results for the Scale of User's Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

3. Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics

3.1. Renting Behaviors Through the Digital Platform

The research objective of this thesis is to understand the consumers' tendency to participate in renting consumption rather than the occasional usage of the platform; hence, we designed four questions to measure the frequency of participation, the quantity, and duration of each renting consumption, as well as the brand that a consumer recently rented. Doing so helps us to improve the understanding of consumers' renting behaviors on the platform and make sure that the collected data are aligned with the research purpose. Specifically, based on the collected data sample, the results indicate that most respondents (95%) are frequent renters who have rented more than twice on the rental platform. Regarding the duration of each rental, most respondents (96%) kept the

items for less than one month. Therefore, these results suggest that our collected data sample is likely to represent consumers who participate in renting consumption on a frequent and repetitive basis.

As mentioned in the previous section, the questionnaire asked the respondents to write down a brand name of the brand that a consumer recently rented. The histogram (see Figure 6-1) shows that the answers are well distributed in diverse brands. The distribution of a variable can be visualized through a histogram, “a form of bar chart in which successive values of the variable are placed along the x-axis (abscissa), and the absolute frequency or relative frequency of occurrence of the values is indicated along the y-axis (ordinate)” (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018; p323). Hence, the histogram demonstrates the variety of brands that consumers rent on the renting platform: apart from the most popular brands Elite (15%), Komiline (3%), Tai Ping Niao (5%), and Komello (4%), 45% of respondents choose other diverse brands to rent recently. It satisfies the need of the thesis to explore the renting behavior of various brands in general rather than to focus on a specific brand. Notably, 21% of respondents in total answered that they “don’t know,” “forgot,” “are not sure,” or “don’t care about” the rented brands. Such results may suggest that this group of consumers does not develop an emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. Thus, the data sample implies diverse renting behaviors and consumers’ attitudes toward the brands of rented items. It corresponds to the research objective in this thesis, aiming to provide more empirical evidence to understand how customers’ psychological traits may impact their relationship with the brands of rented items.

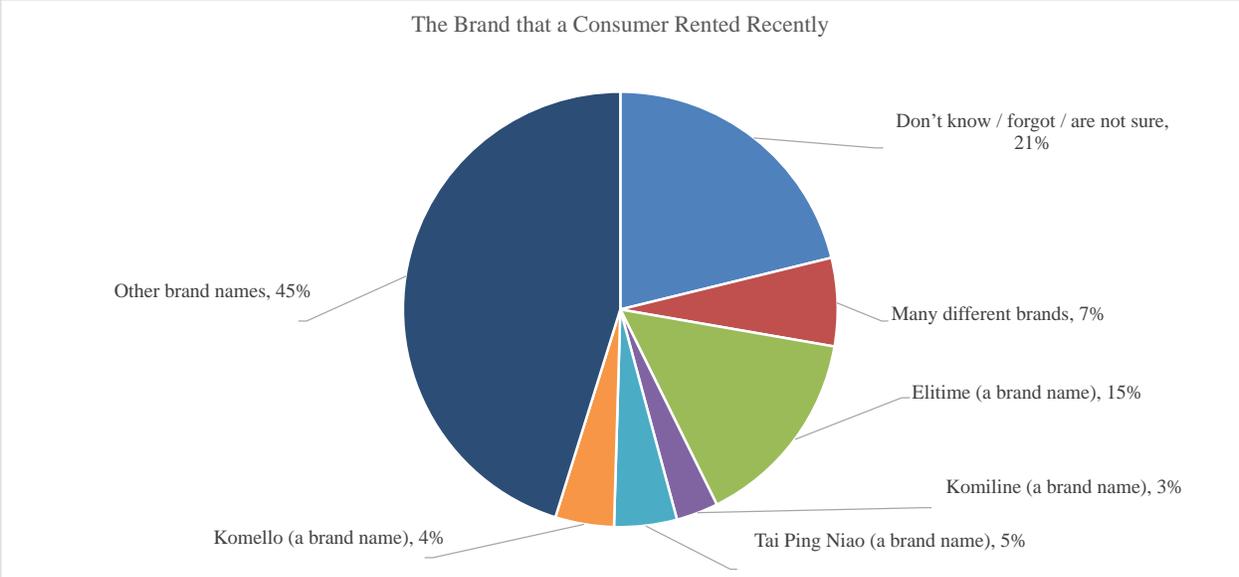


Figure 6-1: Brands That Consumers Recently Rented

3.2. Demographics

The questionnaire includes questions about the age and marital status of the respondents to improve the understanding of their profiles. Both variables satisfy identifiability, substantiality, accessibility, and actionability (Wedel and Kamakura, 1999). Furthermore, these variables could help identify the lifestyles and life stages of renters.

First, by asking about the generation of renters, we find that the majority of the respondents in the sample data are millennials. As illustrated in *Figure 6-2*, the average age of respondents was 32 in 2020 when the data were collected. Their ages range from 19 to 51. Most respondents are millennials, representing 88.4% of the total data sample. Nine percent of the respondents belong to Generation X and 2.7% to Generation Z. According to the latest report by Pew Research Center

(2019),¹² Generation X is the cohort comprising individuals born between 1965 and 1980; millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation (i.e., Generation Z).

Second, by exploring whether renters are married or/and have children, we hope to understand whether the lifestyle and life stage of these renters are “liquid.” As depicted in *Figure 6-3*, 38% of the users in the sample data are single without children, 34% of them are married with children, 24% of them are non-single without children, and only 4% are single with children. The examination of the marital status indicates correspondence for the most part to the Chinese census figures. As of June 2021, approximately 39% of women in China are single.¹³ From another perspective, 58% of them are in couples, representing a slightly higher ratio than 42% of those who are single. A conclusion that could be drawn from these results is that for users who are in a couple, renting dresses may be for their personal pleasure. In addition, 62% of them are without children, and 38% are with children. Such results correspond to the phenomenon described in the Introduction as “liquid life,” in which modern nomads highlight liberty. One explanation may be that people without children may enjoy more freedom and eventually more social experiences for themselves compared to those with children. Hence, the former may have more time, stronger desire, and higher need to rent diverse clothes than the latter. Nonetheless, this inference does not imply that consumers with children are excluded from such renting consumption. Instead, they represent more than a third of the total users in the sample data.

Income and education are two other demographic variables that satisfy the segmentation criteria in Wedel and Kamakura’s (1999) study. However, we did not choose to ask about the

¹² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

¹³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1258197/china-share-of-singles-by-gender/>

renters' income because of the gaps in the per capita GDP between different provinces in China.¹⁴ With regard to education, we deem it to be irrelevant to the understanding of renters' lifestyles or life stages.

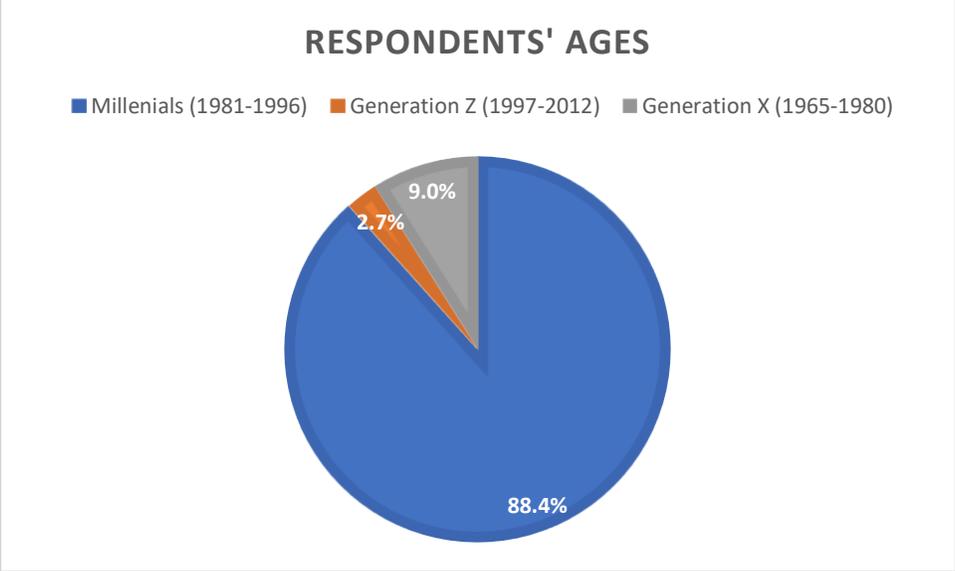


Figure 6-2: Respondents' Ages

¹⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1093666/china-per-capita-gross-domestic-product-gdp-by-province/>

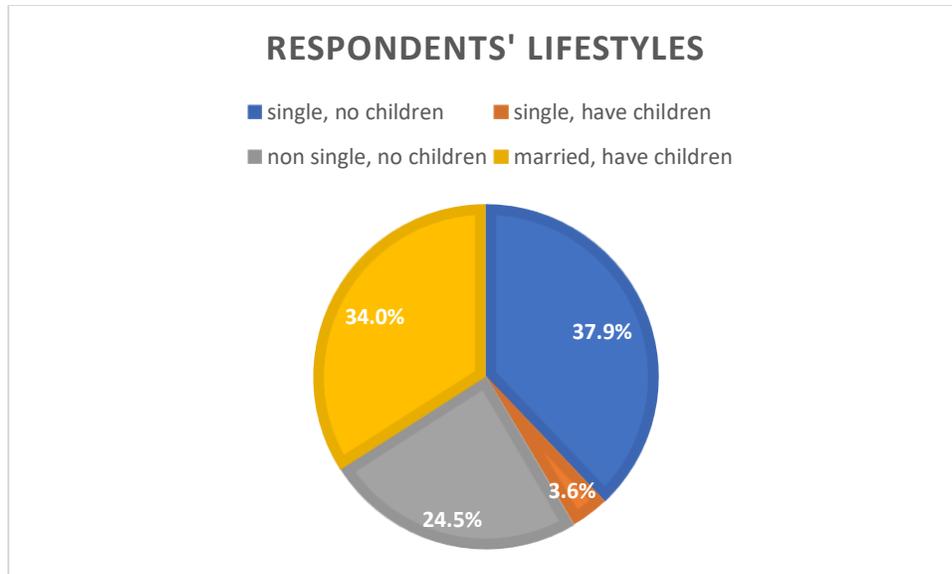


Figure 6-3: Respondents' Lifestyles

4. Test of Our Conceptual Model Structure

We employed structural equation modeling (SEM; Kaplan, 2012; Ullman & Bentler, 2003) to test the proposed hypotheses on multiple relationships between the variables of antecedents, main topic of interest, and outcomes, as posited in Chapter 4. SEM is a powerful multivariate analysis technique that is extensively used in social science (Gonzalez, de Boeck et Tuerlinckx, 2008). SEM provides a flexible framework for developing and analyzing the complex relationship among multiple variables, thereby allowing researchers to test the validity of the theory using empirical models (Beran and Violato, 2010). The most significant advantage of SEM is the simultaneous management of measurement error, which is one of the key limitations of most studies that examine linear causal relationships among variables. In this thesis, several integrated analytics were performed to determine the adequacy of model fit to the data. With path analysis (regression analysis), equations representing the effect of one or more variables on others can be

solved to estimate their relationships. Therefore, the statistics software AMOS is used for performing the path analysis with previously computed variables registered in SPSS and for testing the model fit of different scenarios.

We tested the conceptual model (as shown in *Appendix 12* in Amos) by using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 27.0 for Max X) and AMOS software (64-bit version 27.0 for Mac OS). Considering the multivariate non-normality estimate, the model was tested using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). To assess the model fit, the indexes used include Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-square (S-B χ^2), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and comparative fit index (CFI). RMSEA values less than .08 and CFI values greater than .90 indicate an acceptable model fit (Schweizer, 2010). As shown in *Table 44*, the results of the critical model techniques within SEM, including path analysis (regression analysis), are statistics sufficient to suggest that the chosen model is acceptable. We also calculated the correlation matrix between the variables in the conceptual model (see *Table 45*). We consequently refined it as the proposed theoretical framework (*Figure 6-4*).

Model Fit Indices	Results	Recommended Value	Sources
Chi-Square	26.209		
Degree of Freedom (df)	9		
Probability Level (p)	0.002	<.01	Bagozzi and Yi (1988)
CMIN/df	2.912	<5	Schumacker & Lomax (2004)
CFI	0.970	>.90	Bentler (1990)
RMSEA	0.076	<.08	Hu and Bentler (1998)
GFI	0.983	>.90	Hair et al. (2010)
NFI	0.957	>.90	Lohmoller (1989)

Table 44: Model Fit Assessment Index

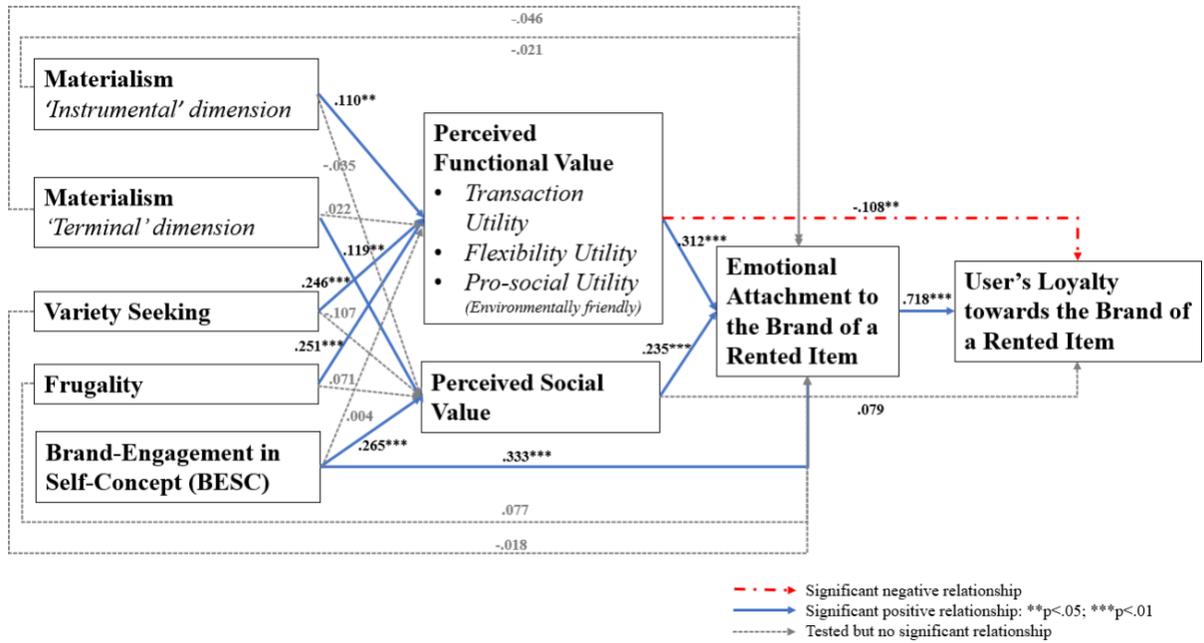


Figure 6-4: Proposed Theoretical Framework, Antecedents, and Outcomes of a Consumer's Choice of Renting Over Buying

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Terminal Materialism									
2 Instrumental Materialism	.								
3 Variety Seeking	.17**	-.05							
4 Frugality	.13*	-.32**	.21**						
5 Brand-Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	.27**	-.01	.18**	.21**					
6 Perceived Functional Value	.18**	-.07	.32**	.31**	.12*				
7 Perceived Social Value	.03	.1	-.06	.06	.25**	.			
8 Loyalty	.11*	-.05	.04	.13*	.47**	.16**	.31**		
9 Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items	.14*	-.07	.14*	.27**	.44**	.37**	.32**	.70**	

Note. $N = 321$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 45: Correlation Among Variables

The main reasons for selecting this model are twofold. First, it satisfies the conventional model fit requirement as listed above. Second, it is the most comprehensive model, as it covers all

four proposed dimensions of the main variable. For the main variable on consumers' choices of renting over buying, confirmatory factor analysis is used to re-assess and compare different scenarios of the compositions of four dimensions in consumers' perceived values in renting over buying. To achieve the best model fit result, transaction utility, flexibility utility, and pro-social utility are grouped into one factor that we denote as "perceived functional value," and the social utility alone comprises another factor that we refer to as "perceived social value," as shown in the proposed framework. In addition, the item "I feel that using renting service offers significant cost savings relative to ownership" in "transaction utility" and the item "Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming" in "flexibility utility" are eliminated to reach the highest scores for the model fit. Consequently, these two factors corroborate our propositions on how the main variable can be measured with two dimensions of consumers' perceived values in renting, namely "perceived functional value in renting" and "perceived social value in renting," as we coin in this thesis.

5. Analysis Results of Hypotheses

In this subsection, we introduce the outcomes of the direct effects of each variable and the relevant two-tailed significance degrees. The standardized path coefficient Beta (β) represents the immediate effect of the independent value on the dependent value. In this thesis, two-tailed testing rather than one-tailed testing is used for testing the significance α because it allows researchers to subsequently utilize a larger magnitude of the critical value and conduct a more conservative, rigorous test (Cho and Abe, 2013). In particular, we use Fisher's (1925) .05 criterion for statistical significance, which is a widely accepted conventional level for the rejection of the hypothesis of

chance in the psychology discipline (Cowles and Davis, 1982). If the two-tailed p value is inferior to .05, then we consider it a significant effect in this thesis.

5.1. Test of the Impact of Materialism

With regard to the impact of materialism on the main variable, the results shown in *Table 46* suggest that terminal materialism has a positive effect on perceived social value ($p < .05$), whereas instrumental materialism has a positive effect on perceived functional value ($p < .05$). Neither terminal materialism nor instrumental materialism has a significant impact on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item ($p > .10$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 are partly supported, whereas Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of terminal materialism on perceived social value	0.119	0.043
Impact of terminal materialism on perceived functional value	0.022	0.729
Impact of terminal materialism on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	-0.046	0.370
Impact of instrumental materialism on perceived social value	-0.035	0.656
Impact of instrumental materialism on perceived functional value	0.110	0.043
Impact of instrumental materialism on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	-0.021	0.599

Table 46: Analysis Results of the Impact of Materialism

5.2. Test of the Impact of Variety Seeking

As to the impact of the antecedent of variety seeking on the main variable, the results shown in *Table 47* indicate that variety seeking positively affects perceived functional value ($p < .05$). However, contrary to Hypothesis 8 proposing the positive effect of variety seeking on perceived social value, the result reveals a negative effect on perceived social value, although not a

significant one ($p > .05$). In addition, variety seeking has no significant impact on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item ($p > .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported, whereas Hypotheses 5 and 6 are rejected.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of variety seeking on perceived social value	-0.107	0.067
Impact of variety seeking on perceived functional value	0.246	0.010
Impact of variety seeking on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	-0.018	0.778

Table 47: Analysis Results of the Impact of Variety Seeking

5.3. Test of the Impact of Frugality

Concerning the impact of the antecedent of frugality on the main variable, the results shown in **Table 48** denote that frugality has a positive effect on perceived functional value ($p \leq .01$). However, frugality has no significant effect on perceived social value ($p > .10$). In addition, frugality has no significant effect on emotional attachment to the brand of rented items ($p > .10$). Thus, Hypothesis 7 is supported, whereas Hypotheses 8 and 9 are rejected.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of usage frugality on perceived social value	0.071	0.204
Impact of usage frugality on perceived functional value	0.251	0.010
Impact of usage frugality on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	0.077	0.256

Table 48: Analysis Results of the Impact of Frugality

5.4. Test of the Impact of Brand Engagement in Self-concept

Concerning the impact of the antecedent of BESC on the main variable, the results shown in **Table 49** suggest that BESC has a positive effect on perceived social value ($p \leq .01$). Although the results show a negative effect of BESC on perceived functional value ($\beta = -.004$), its significance value is not acceptable ($p > .10$). In addition, BESC has a significant effect on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item ($p \leq .01$). Thus, Hypotheses 10–12 are rejected.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of brand-engagement in self-concept on perceived social value	0.265	0.010
Impact of brand-engagement in self-concept on perceived functional value	-0.004	0.875
Impact of brand-engagement in self-concept on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	0.333	0.010

Table 49: Analysis Results of the Impact of Brand Engagement in Self-concept

5.5. Test of the Impact of Perceived Values in Renting

With regard to the impact of the main variable on the outcomes, the results shown in **Table 50** indicate that the construct of perceived social value has a positive effect on emotional attachment to the brand of rented items ($p \leq .01$). However, the result implies that perceived social value does not significantly affect the user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($p = .095$). Concerning the impact of the construct of perceived functional value, the result suggests a positive effect on emotional attachment to the brand of rented items ($p \leq .01$) but a negative effect on user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($p \leq .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 13 and 15 are supported, whereas Hypotheses 14 and 16 are rejected.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of perceived social value on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	0.235	0.010
Impact of perceived social value on the user's loyalty towards a brand of a rented item	0.079	0.095
Impact of perceived functional value on emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item	0.312	0.010
Impact of perceived functional value on the user's loyalty towards a brand of a rented item	-0.108	0.018

Table 50: Analysis Results of the Impact of Perceived Values in Renting

To improve the understanding of the effects of perceived values on the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items, we separately ran regression analyses with each of the four perceived utilities in the choice of renting over buying. The results show that perceived social value has a significant positive effect on the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($p < .001$, $\beta = .279$); however, none of the functional values have significant effects on brand loyalty. Nonetheless, if we include these four values as independent variables and the user's brand loyalty in the same model, based on the path analysis, the model fit indices do not show sufficient support for the validity of this scenario model. Specifically, the chi-square value equals to 102.806, with the degree of freedom equals to 2. The CFI value is .786, which is lower than the threshold .90. NFI is also reduced below .90.

Alternatively, if we regard the perceived functional values (i.e., transaction utility, flexibility utility, and environmentally friendly utility) as independent variables and the perceived social value as another variable, the regression analysis results show that they both have significant positive effects on the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Specifically, the direct effect of perceived functional value on the user's brand loyalty is .158 ($p = .002$) and the direct effect of perceived social value on the user's brand loyalty is .308 ($p < .001$). However, similar to the previous scenario, the model fit indices do not support the validity of this latter model. Hence, these results suggest that the negative impact of perceived functional values on the user's loyalty

toward the brand of a rented item, as shown in our proposed theoretical model, considers the influences by the individual’s specific traits.

In addition, we separately tested whether the renters’ ages and life stages may moderate the impacts of the perceived values in renting on the user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items. The reason is that previous empirical studies suggest that personal characteristic can be moderators of the relationship between consumption experience and loyalty. For example, Homburg and Giering’s (2000) empirical findings reveal that age is an important moderator of the satisfaction–loyalty relationship. However, the results do not show significant moderation effects of age or life stage on the relationship between the main variables and the outcomes. Specifically, when including age or life stage as a moderator factor in the model, the value for the adjusted R square for the model becomes lower than the original value.

5.6. Test of the Impact of Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items on User’s Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

Regarding the impact of emotional attachment to the brand of rented items on the user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items, the results shown in *Table 51* reveal that emotional attachment to the brand of rented items has a positive effect on the user’s loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($p \leq .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 17 is supported.

Analysis Results	Direct Effects (Standardized Path Coefficient)	Two Tailed Significance
Impact of emotional attachment towards a brand of rented items on the user’s loyalty towards the brand of a rented item	0.718	0.010

Table 51: Analysis Results of the Impact of Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

Synthesis for Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, we have introduced our data analysis process, including coding, data cleaning, and outliers' management. We have also conducted a preliminary statistical assessment. The results suggest that the chosen scales possess acceptable reliability. Additionally, we have successfully used the preliminary scale validity assessment for measuring the selected variables in the proposed conceptual framework. We have explained our statistical approach for the structural equation modeling approach and conducted regression analysis and model fit assessment. Based on the results of the regression analyses, we have derived the analysis results of our hypotheses (an overview of these analysis results is provided in *Table 52*). Accordingly, we have proposed a theoretical framework with the chosen antecedents and outcomes of a consumer's choice of renting over buying.

Hypothesis	Analysis Results
H1 Materialism positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.	Partly Supported
H2 Materialism positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.	Partly Supported
H3 Materialism negatively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.	Rejected
H4 Variety Seeking positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.	Supported
H5 Variety Seeking positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.	Rejected
H6 Variety Seeking negatively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.	Rejected
H7 Frugality positively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.	Supported
H8 Frugality positively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.	Rejected
H9 Frugality positively affects the user's emotional attachment to the brand of a rented item.	Rejected
H10 BESC negatively affects the user's perceived functional value in renting over buying.	Rejected
H11 BESC negatively affects the user's perceived social value in renting over buying.	Rejected
H12 BESC negatively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.	Rejected
H13 Perceived functional value positively affects the user's emotional attachments to rented brands.	Supported
H14 Perceived functional value positively affects the user's loyalty towards the brand of a rented item.	Rejected
H15 Perceived social value positively affects the user's emotional attachments to the brand of a rented item.	Supported
H16 Perceived social value positively affects the user's loyalty towards a brand of rented items.	Rejected
H17 Emotional attachment to a brand of rented items positively affects the user's loyalty towards the brand of a rented item.	Supported

Table 52: Summary of the Analysis Results of the Hypotheses

Chapter 7 - General Discussion

Based on the data analysis results of the hypotheses in Chapter 6, we discuss these findings in Chapter 7. This chapter consists of four parts:

- First, we discuss the empirical results based on the data analysis in the previous chapter. This section highlights three subsections: the impacts of consumers' choices of renting over buying on consumer relationships with the brand of rented items, the effects of antecedents on consumer preferences of renting over buying, and the impacts of antecedents on consumer relationships with the brand of rented items.
- Second, we describe the secondary elements in this thesis, including regular visits to the renting service platform, millennials as comprising the majority of the data sample, and specific research contexts in the fashion industry and in the Chinese market. We also explain the emergence of the new renting by proposing an innovation framework to understand the background of the rise of renting consumption in the digital age. In addition, we tackle the issue of whether and how renting consumption and the rental business model contribute to sustainable development.
- Third, we summarize the theoretical implications and propose the managerial implications of the findings of this thesis.
- Fourth, we outline the limitations and present a research agenda for future studies.

1. Discussion of Results

1.1. Impact of a Consumer's Choice of Renting Over Buying on the Consumer

Relationship with the Brand of Rented Items

1.1.1. Both the Users' Perceived Functional Value and Perceived Social Value in Renting Positively Affect Their Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

The empirical results of this thesis support Hypotheses 16 and 18 by showing that users' perceived functional value positively affects their emotional attachment to the brand of rented items ($\beta = 0.312$; $p = 0.010$), and that their perceived social value also positively affects their emotional attachment to the brand of rented items ($\beta = 0.235$; $p = 0.010$). These findings respond to Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2017) query on whether relationship constructs such as emotional attachment to brands, loyalty, or commitment could be significant in the conditions of liquid consumption. As Bardhi and Eckhardt (2016, 2017) assert, in conditions of liquid consumption, consumers can become more transactional and may not prefer committed relationships, or emotional attachment and relationships may be increasingly based on instrumentality and market logic, thereby causing bonds to become looser and disposable. They further argue that such situation contrasts with the "conditions of solid consumption, where value is placed on enduring relationships with partners that are reliable, trustworthy, durable, time resistant, and secure" and that "these solid relationships can become a burden in liquid consumption" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; p. 590). However, the results of this thesis challenge Bardhi and Eckhardt's arguments, providing evidence to show the positive effects of the renting consumption on the emotional attachment to brands. Consequently, this thesis suggests that whether in the context of ownership

or non-ownership, perceived functional value and perceived social value can have positive effects on the emotional attachment to brands.

1.1.2. Users' Perceived Functional Value in Renting Negatively Affects Their Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

The empirical results of this thesis support Hypothesis 17 suggesting that the users' perceived functional value negatively affects their loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($\beta = -0.108$; $p = 0.018$). However, the results do not support Hypothesis 19 suggesting that perceived social value positively affects user loyalty toward the brand of rented items ($\beta = 0.079$; $p = 0.095$). These results contribute to the literature in two main aspects. First, they corroborate that access-based consumption may deter the commitment to a specific brand (e.g., Lawson et al., 2016) or that the relationship between brand loyalty and access-based consumption could be negative (e.g., Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Specifically, Lawson et al. (2016; p2617) argue that in contrast to the long-term commitment in the owning context, "access-based consumption allows individuals to experience the newest trends and products without the burdens of ownership or commitment to a specific style or brand (e.g., Rent the Runway, Borrowed Bling, and Bag, Borrow or Steal)." Bendapudi and Berry (1997) also underscore that product or brand loyalty could deter consumers from participating in access-based consumption, given that consumers tend to consistently choose products that they have had good experiences with in the past.

With regard to the relationship between perceived social value and brand loyalty, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos' (2004) empirical studies with whiskey buyers indicate that both premium loyalty and covetous loyalty are strongly and positively related to social influences ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$ and $\beta = 0.79$, $p = 0.01$, respectively); however, a strong negative relationship was established between social influences and inertia loyalty ($\beta = -0.73$, $p = 0.01$), whereas no statistically

significant relationship was recorded with no loyalty. Specifically, as shown in *Figure 7-1* (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004), “premium loyalty” represents a high degree of relative attachment to the brand and a high instance of repeat purchases; “covetous loyalty” implies no purchase but a very high level of relative attachment to the brand; “inertia loyalty” denotes purchasing the brand for some specific reason, but out of one’s habit or convenience; and “no loyalty” indicates no purchase at all and a complete lack of attachment to the brand. However, in the renting context, the empirical results of this thesis suggest that the perceived social value in the renting context does not show a strong effect on the loyalty toward the brand of rented items. As the items in the loyalty construct illustrate, user loyalty in this thesis implies a comprehensive measurement in understanding both the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of loyalty, that is, the user’s likelihood to reuse the same brand of a rented item. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous subsection, a user’s perceived social value shows a positive effect on emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. Thus, these results signify that even if a renter exhibits a very high level of emotional attachment to the brand, which is developed from the perceived social values in renting experience, the reuse of the same brand of rented items may not be evident for certain reasons. These reasons may include economic restraints or other external factors beyond the consumer’s control.

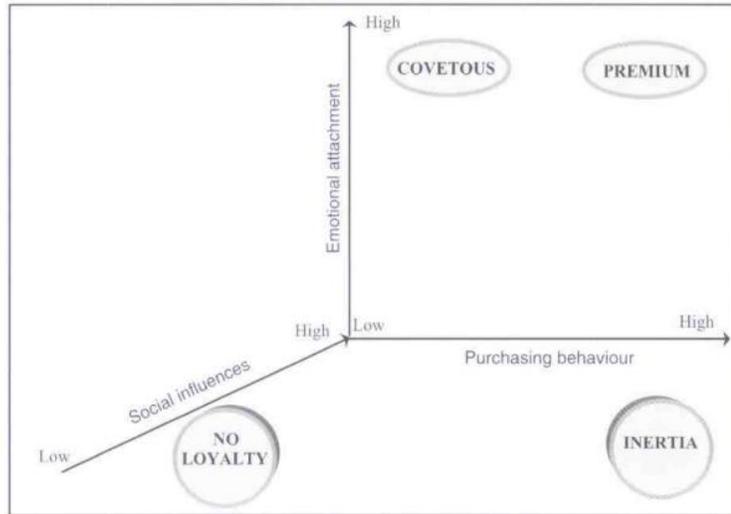


Figure 7-1: Conceptualization of Loyalty Based on Purchasing Behavior, Emotional Attachment, and Social Influences (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004)

Second, the scope of definitions and measurement of the construct of brand loyalty mainly in the context of ownership are limited in the existing literature. In the research stream on access-based consumption, the construct of brand loyalty is measured as an antecedent (i.e., one of the motivations impacting access-based consumption) in previous studies (e.g., Lawson et al., 2016). To date, no empirical studies have assessed brand loyalty as an outcome of usage of products in the context of access-based consumption. However, both contexts of buying and renting are important to consider not only to help brands or retailers to improve their understanding consumers' brand loyalty during the purchase phase but also to obtain insights into the renting service company and the brand to better comprehend their users or potential customers' usage loyalty and attitudinal loyalty toward the rented brands in the usage phase, which can result in the repurchase of the brand. From this perspective, this thesis extends the scope to define and measure the construct of brand loyalty as an outcome of the renting behavior. In particular, the results of this thesis reveal the negative effect of perceived function value and the non-significant effect of perceived social value

on the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items. These results enhance the understanding of why and how the users' actual renting consumption could impact their loyalty toward the brand of rented items.

1.1.3. Users' Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items Positively Affects Their Loyalty Toward the Brand of Rented Items

The empirical results of this thesis support Hypothesis 20 suggesting that users' emotional attachment to the brand of rented items positively affects their loyalty toward the brand of rented items. This finding echoes previous research indicating the positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Several empirical studies in automotive, electronic, food, personal care items, painkillers, social media brands, and lodging industry have investigated the outcomes of brand love. The results suggest that brand love positively predicts the consumers' brand loyalty (e.g., Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Loureiro, Ruediger, and Demetris, 2012). Sajtos et al.'s (2021) cross-cultural studies comparing six cultural countries, including Australia, China, France, UK, and the US, underline the lack of influence of culture on the impact of brand love on brand loyalty.

Particularly in the research stream on access-based consumption, Mody and Hanks' (2020) empirical studies on the case of Airbnb suggest a positive effect of brand love on brand loyalty. Theoretically, positive emotional connection is identified as one of seven core dimensions of the brand love construct, which includes consumers' feelings of *intuitive fit* when using the loved brand, a sense of *emotional attachment* to the loved brand that reinforces the consumer-brand connection, and the *positive affect* of the loved brand (Batra et al., 2012; Kwon & Mattila, 2015; Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). Accordingly, in the renting context, renters who exhibit different degrees of positive emotional attachment to rented brands can be one of the references for

understanding how they love the brand. For example, as suggested by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), in the experiential paradigm, consumer behavior pursues the more subjective, emotional, and symbolic aspects of consumption. Accordingly, the fashion renting consumption can provide symbolic benefits such as the creation or enhancement of the renters' social identity. Hence, such experience is likely to encourage a great potential for a positive brand effect. Therefore, the positive effect of emotional attachment to the brand of rented items on brand loyalty indicates that when the emotional elements of pleasure are positive for the renting as well as using experience, consumers can develop both attitudinal commitments to and further repetitive usage of a specific brand of the rented items.

1.2. Impacts of the Antecedents on the Consumers' Choice of Renting Over Buying

1.2.1. Impacts of Materialism on the Consumers' Choice of Renting Over Buying

(1) New Perspective on the Assessment of How Instrumental Materialism Versus Terminal Materialism May Differently Affect the Consumers' Choice of Renting Over Buying

The analysis results of this thesis show that instrumental materialism positively affects perceived functional value in renting consumption, but it does not show an effect on perceived social value in renting consumption. On the contrary, the results indicate that terminal materialism positively affects perceived social value in renting consumption, but does not reveal an effect on perceived function value in renting consumption. These results offer original empirical evidence for the improved understanding of how materialism may positively affect the consumers' participation in liquid consumption or access-based consumption. Previous research provides conflicting arguments and evidence about the relationship between materialism and consumers'

intention to participate in access-based consumption practices (e.g., Lawson et al., 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010), in liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017) or collaborative consumption (e.g., Davidson, Habibi, and Laroche, 2018; Lindblom, Lindblom, et Wechtler, 2018), or consumer attitude toward collaborative consumption (e.g., Ni, 2021).

By contrast, some researchers find a negative relationship between materialism and access-based consumption, given the importance that materialists place on possessions (e.g., sharing by Belk, 2010; Lawson et al., 2016). For example, empirical research suggests that materialism is the dominant inhibitor of fashion rental (Akbar et al., 2016). Other studies in the existing literature similarly indicate that materialism is negatively related to clothing renting (Johnson et al., 2016; Lang and Armstrong, 2018). A liquid consumption denotes a fast-paced circulation of consumption without a long-term commitment to products. However, Richins and Dawson's (1992) advanced value orientation definition of materialism highlights the importance of acquisitions and possessions, representing a long-term commitment and relationship between the consumer and products. Furthermore, possessiveness (Belk 1985) and feelings of mastery and control of possessions (Kleine and Baker 2004) are aspects of object attachment and materialism, which threaten access-based consumption and sharing (Belk, 2010). On the contrary, renting, as a form of access-based consumption, encourages consumers to focus on using rather than owning products (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2010; 2012). Specifically, the absence of permanent ownership may conflict with the centrality of possessiveness of a high level of materialism. Hence, relinquishing ownership of the valued garments may challenge the materialistic consumers' tendency to choose to rent over to buy.

Meanwhile, Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) empirical research on car sharing shows that materialism promotes the adoption of access-based services because such services enable consumers to afford a luxury consumer lifestyle, which they could not experience otherwise due

to financial reasons. Bardhi and Eckardt (2017; p. 590) also counterargue that “liquid consumption could be more associated with materialism than solid consumption.” Practices associated with liquid consumption (i.e., access), which result in the rapid accumulation and circulation of possessions, can be materialistic (Holt, 1995). Davidson et al.’s (2018) empirical research reveals that American materialists engage in collaborative consumption because they expect to experience transformations in themselves, their relationships, their pleasure, and their efficacy in daily life. Ni’s (2021) empirical research using an online survey with 600 data samples demonstrates that materialists in China tend to have positive attitudes and images toward collaborative consumption ($\beta = .25; p < .001$).

These conflicting arguments could be due to the researchers’ dissimilar translations of the conceptualizations of materialism and varied ways of highlighting the different aspects of materialism. Specifically, Belk’s (2010) arguments are likely to be based on the terminal materialism aspect, which underscores the goal of possessiveness. On the contrary, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012; 2017) and Davidson et al.’s (2018) arguments are likely to be based on the instrumental materialism aspect, which accentuates the derived meanings of the acquisition of possessions. Therefore, this thesis reassesses these two aspects of materialism on a consumer’s choice of renting over buying in response to such debate. To summarize, these findings suggest that depending on various dimensions or factors of materialism, consumers could perceive different values in renting consumption.

(2) Instrumental Materialism Positively Affects the Consumers’ Perceived Functional Value in Renting Consumption

According to the data analysis in the previous chapter, the results indicate that instrumental materialism positively affects the users’ perceived functional value in renting over buying ($\beta =$

0.110; $p = 0.043$). This finding can be due to the idea that instrumental materialists are likely to perceive more utilitarian values of “possessions” through renting than buying. We can explain this inference from three main perspectives.

First, for instrumental materialists, the derived values of possessions and acquisitions can include adaptive evolutionary functions of the property rights in response to resource scarcity and output contestability (Eswaran and Neary, 2014) or owned products’ symbolic value for self-extension (Belk, 1988), such as status signaling through owned luxury brands and conspicuous luxury consumption (Han, Nunes and Dreze, 2010). According to Richins (1994a, 1994b), materialistic individuals are strongly influenced by the perceptions of others when selecting products, and they prefer possessions that are publicly visible and highly prestigious. Based on the literature on psychological ownership (e.g., Morewedge et al., 2021; Fritze et al., 2020), instrumental materialists may psychologically regard the rented items and brands as their possessions during the renting process, despite the temporary relationship during a limited period. Thus, instrumental materialists can obtain more symbolic value using more products with the less financial burden, more flexibility, and more pro-social benefits than with the ownership of possessions. This explanation reflects Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) suggestion that materialism promotes the adoption of access-based services because such services enable consumers to afford a luxury consumer lifestyle that they could not afford otherwise. Therefore, instrumental materialists can regard renting as a more affordable, flexible, and sustainable way than buying fashion apparel.

Second, from another perspective, beyond the derived values of the psychologically owned objects, instrumental materialists are likely to perceive the renting experience itself as an alternative means of constructing their new identity as consumers. As Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020; p98) suggest, “different from conspicuous consumption in solid consumption, the new logic of

distinction has the flexibility to embrace and adopt new identity positions, projects, and possibilities the ability to attract attention.” Instrumental materialists can consider renting consumption as a new means of conspicuously signaling their social statuses and tastes, relying upon what is described as “inconspicuousness” (Eckhardt and Bardi, 2020) and non-ownership experiences, which are difficult to emulate. Furthermore, suppose these renters’ life highlights mobility and flexibility. In that case, their lifestyles are similar to those of “global nomads,” as described in Bardhi et al.’s (2012) empirical studies, suggesting that possessions are appreciated for their instrumental use-value in global nomadism. Bardhi et al. (2012, p 890) further explain that “use-value can in and of itself gain symbolic value in liquid modernity.” In this manner, renting consumption facilitates the nomadic mobility of instrumental materialists without the commitments invoked by solid possessions. In particular, instrumental materialists are likely to value the “situational value” of these psychologically perceived possessions. According to Bardhi et al. (2012), situational value depicts flexible, liquid consumer-object relationships. As renters, similar to global nomads described by Bauman, focus on reterritorializing themselves in each locale, things carried with them often become irrelevant in the new context. Thus, they are likely to value the rented products in each area rather than forming an enduring attachment over time and space. Instrumental materialists are therefore likely to embrace such new logic of distinction and perceive the advantaged values in transaction utility, flexibility utility, and pro-social utility in renting consumption compared to the ownership.

Third, as Lamberton and Rose (2012) suggest, explaining behavior in the commercial sharing domain requires consideration of the perceived product scarcity risk due to rivalry for the shared product. The positive effect of instrumental materialism on perceived functional value can also indicate that instrumental materialists may consider renting as an additional option with good functional value to extend their property rights to the shared products besides their owned property.

Although such property rights are transferred with other users, and these instrumental materialists may also perceive scarcity risk in renting, they still tend to take the opportunity.

In addition, as pro-social utility is one of the dimensions of perceived functional value, the positive effect of instrumental materialism on perceived functional value provides evidence to support the conclusion that materialists are likely to adopt sustainable behaviors. Such behaviors may be explained by the consumers' desire to gain status and approval from others (Kasser, 2016). Engaging in pro-social activities corresponds to the increasingly socially desirable sustainable consumption (Evans, 2011). Shrum et al. (2014) also assert that materialistic consumers purchase and display products to signal desirable attributes, including altruism and social concern. More specifically, in their study, the authors argue that materialistic motivations can promote altruistic acts, especially the ones performed in public, to signal self-sacrifice and the ability (financial, resources, and time) to incur this self-sacrifice (Shrum et al., 2014). Evers et al.'s (2018) empirical studies support these early research efforts by demonstrating that materialism can have positive consumer and societal effects through end-user behaviors such as moving away from excessively wasteful consumption. Together with the research stream, this study also challenges the long-history study of materialism in marketing with a pronounced focus on adverse outcomes. For instance, materialism is presumed to be pervasive in industrialized societies, resulting in the over-consumption of finite resources (Scott et al., 2014). It is associated with several negative consumer tendencies such as possessiveness, selfishness, and envy (Belk, 1985).

(3) Terminal Materialism Positively Affects the Consumers' Perceived Social Value in Renting Consumption

For terminal materialists who highly value the possessiveness itself and luxury consumption for personal gratification, this thesis suggests that they are likely to perceive social

value in renting ($\beta = 0.119$; $p = 0.043$). Hence, this result rejects Hypothesis 2, which proposes a negative effect of materialism on the users' perceived social value in renting consumption. This result implies that the social value in renting consumption may correspond to the hedonic need of terminal materialists. As Scott (2009; p61) states, "terminal materialism is proposed to be valuing a product just for owning it because of the image or status it provides." Concerning the hedonic feature of social value, drawn from Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) advocate research on the experiential aspects of human consumption, this finding provides evidence to conclude that the perceived social value represents the experiential benefits of renting consumption in which emotions and feelings of enjoyment or pleasure are key outcomes. Consequently, we conclude that for members of the fashion rental platform, by connecting with other members on the social media (e.g., WeChat group in our case), terminal materialists may perceive hedonic feelings through such digital social interaction with new acquaintances.

Together with the previous finding denoting that instrumental materialists are likely to value utilitarian value in renting, these findings echo prior research measuring the hedonic versus utilitarian aspects of consumption, which concludes that these two aspects of hedonic and utilitarian value respectively correspond to the archetypal constructs of emotion and reason (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holdbrook, 2001). Following these arguments, this finding could also explain why the Hypotheses 1 and 2 are rejected, implying that instrumental materialism has no significant effect on social value ($\beta = -0.035$; $p = 0.656$) and terminal materialism has no significant impact on functional value in renting ($\beta = 0.022$; $p = 0.729$), respectively.

From another perspective, complex social relationships embed value creation in any market (Lusch and Vargo 2014; Vargo, Wieland, and Akaka, 2015). Virtual interaction with other members on the social media group created by the rental platform allows terminal materialists to build up networks and meet new acquaintances. Such virtual interaction with other members is an

example of “consociality” (Mai, Ketron, and Yang, 2020) and “network sociality” (Arvidsson and Calliandro, 2016). It also reflects consumers’ desires for sociality, which refers to people’s universal tendency to associate in groups and form cooperative relationships with others (Wittel 2001). Similar to Bardhi et al.’s (2012) empirical studies suggesting that objects are valued for immateriality in a liquid relationship, terminal materialists also perceive the “immaterial” social value in renting experience. Immateriality is expressed in “the preference for light and portable objects, which can easily tag along in mobility, or more importantly, because of the access they provide to networks, locales, or consumer roles” (Bardhi et al., 2012; p. 524). However, as Hypothesis 2 is rejected for instrumental materialists, it implies that instrumental materialists are likely to emphasize the identity value of the access objects rather than on the experience value. Hence, these findings challenge Chen’s (2009) general conclusion suggesting that the emphasis in access-based consumption is more on the experience value and less on the identity value of objects.

1.2.2. Impact of Variety Seeking on the Consumers’ Choice of Renting Over Buying

The analysis results of this thesis show that variety seeking positively affects the users’ perceived functional value in renting ($\beta = 0.246$; $p = 0.010$). Hence, Hypothesis 7 is supported. However, contrary to Hypothesis 8 suggesting that variety seeking may positively affect the users’ perceived social value in renting, the results reveal no significant impact of variety seeking on the users’ perceived social value in renting, although with a negative standardized path coefficient ($\beta = -.107$; $p = .067$). Hence, Hypothesis 8 is rejected.

The findings of the positive effect of variety seeking on the users’ perceived functional value in renting is consistent with the propositions in previous research. Prior research mainly proposes a positive relationship between variety seeking and consumer intention to participate in access-based consumption. For example, Lawson et al. (2016) find that motives for accessing can

include variety seeking. Lawson et al.'s (2016) empirical studies propose that the construct of variety seeking captures the traits of consumers who seek flexibility and product trial, the two key motivating factors identified in their study. Other researchers also conclude that access facilitates variety seeking, explaining that this phenomenon emerges when consumers choose to access a variety of car types and brands rather than commit to owning one car, for instance (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Lambert and Rose, 2012). Similarly, Irani and Hanzaee (2011) find a positive relationship between variety-seeking buying tendency and utilitarian value in the empirical study of the "Manto or Shirt" shopping case. They argue that greater product diversity helps shoppers to reduce time costs and increase shopping efficiency. Hence, the findings of this thesis also provide evidence in improving the understanding of the product-based mechanism underlying variety-seeking behavior. For example, this result is consistent with Baltas et al.'s (2017) findings indicating that variety-seeking behavior may derive from functional, non-sensory attributes, especially in utilitarian products. From this perspective, consumers value the functional and non-sensory attributes in rented fashion products that are designed for utilitarian daily usage (i.e., create different identities to adapt to the needs in different social contexts).

With regard to the rejected effect of variety seeking on the users' perceived social value in renting, such outcome could be due to the idea that consumers with higher variety-seeking orientation are likely to weigh more the functional utility in renting consumption and to neglect social value in the shopping process. Although not significant ($p = .067$), following Lamberton and Rose's (2012) typology of sharing (refer to **Table 53**), the negative standardized path coefficient ($\beta = -.107$) may also imply that a variety seeker may not intend to connect with other users because she may regard them as "competitors" to gain access to the limited varieties on the rental platform. In this thesis, fashion rental schemes can serve as an example for Quadrant 3 types of sharing, as shown in the typology chart in **Table 53**. Such context usually represents relatively

low exclusivity (low cost to participate), but rivalry for access to the fashion rental can be high. Therefore, one user’s usage depends on the previous user’s return of an item on time and in serviceable condition (Lamberton & Rose, 2012).

	Lower exclusivity	Higher exclusivity
Lower rivalry	QUADRANT 1	QUADRANT 2
	Public goods, e.g., public parks, open-source software	Club access, e.g., country clubs, gated communities
Higher rivalry	QUADRANT 3	QUADRANT 4
	Rental and reuse, e.g., tool banks, Freecycle, car sharing	Closed commercial, e.g., frequent flyer mile sharing schemes
	*Labeled as ‘open commercial goods’ by Lamberton and Rose (2012); but as Agyeman (2013) points out, this category encompasses much non-for-profit sharing.	

Table 53: Typology of Sharing (Lamberton and Rose, 2012)

1.2.3. Impact of Frugality on the Consumers’ Choice of Renting Over Buying

The empirical results support Hypothesis 10 that frugality has a positive effect on the users’ perceived functional value ($\beta = 0.251$; $p = 0.010$). As defined in our thesis, frugality indicates the manner by which consumers prudently use existing possessions or money to save resources for long-term use. This result corroborates prior research suggesting that value consciousness and price consciousness are positively related to frugality (Lastovicka et al., 1999). In addition, considering that one of the dimensions of perceived functional value is pro-social utility, in which consumers perceive renting consumption as a better way than buying products to protect the environment, this result also echoes Awais et al.’s (2020) studies proposing sustainable

consumption behavior as an outcome of frugality and a significant relationship between them. Hence, the positive effect of frugality on perceived functional value in renting consumption provides empirical evidence to illustrate the conceptualization of frugality focusing on the usage phase. Such concept of frugality refers to personality orientation and reflects a lifestyle that portrays individuals who are also likely to embrace socially conscious consumption (Pepper, Jackson and Uzzell, 2009) and green consumption (Pinto et al., 2011).

In addition, Evers et al.'s (2018) empirical studies show that frugality positively impacts creative end-use consumption behaviors and interacts with materialism to increase the likelihood of these behaviors. By contrast, some other researchers have reported a negative effect based on frugal consumers' (a) identity being based on the maximization of their economic resources (i.e., getting the most for their money; Lastovicka et al., 1999) rather than an attachment to their possessions, and (b) decreased susceptibility to social influences (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Clark, 2014). However, Evers et al.'s (2018) study indicates that these relationships are likely to be more complex. Based on their results, frugality does not appear to be opposed to materialism. The two variables are found to be unrelated, and frugal materialists exist in the study sample. As materialism and frugality are positively related to created end-user consumption behaviors, Evers et al. (2018) call for further research on the of frugal materialists with sustainability-related behaviors. In response to Evers et al.'s (2018) call, the findings of this thesis suggest that for frugal materialists who simultaneously exhibit instrumental materialism and frugality in the usage phase, they choose to rent instead of owning the products because of the perceived functional value in the renting consumption.

As the results do not support the significant positive effect of frugality on perceived social value ($\beta = 0.071; p = 0.204$), Hypothesis 11 is rejected. This result could be due to the independent and proactive nature of frugal consumers. Specifically, the items in the frugality construct reflect

a voluntary choice. Such voluntary behavior is contrary to a passive behavior due to external factors such as economic downturns (Egol et al., 2010), other economic circumstances (Birkner, 2013), or other external stimuli, including a culture that emphasizes the desirability of frugal behavior and a modest lifestyle (Albinsson et al., 2010). Voluntarily frugal consumers are likely to live a frugal lifestyle with intrinsic motivations and more rational reasons rather than value hedonic and social value in renting consumption.

In contrast to “terminal materialists” who value immaterial experience, “voluntarily frugal consumers” are unlikely to care about the intangible value in renting consumption. Therefore, based on social response theory (Nail, 1986), voluntary frugal consumers may merely disregard the social influence on their behavior. From this perspective, voluntary frugality represents “consumer independence,” which is defined as “an enduring consumer tendency to respond to social influences about product and brand choices and uses by giving minimal weight to the prescribed norms of consumer reference groups adhering instead to personal preferences and tastes despite the apparent deviation from the prescribed norms of consumer behavior absent the motivation to actively rebel against the existing norms” (Clark, 2006, p. 20). Hence, this group of individuals may be more independent from social influences because voluntary frugality is shown to link with lower levels of materialism, status seeking through consumption, and the need to use brands to express self-concept (Goldsmith et al., 2014).

According to Goldsmith et al. (2014; p. 176), given that frugality “means different things, researchers and others need to be precise in explaining what they mean by the term when they use it.” Rather than drawing a general conclusion on the relationship between frugality and consumption behaviors, this thesis focuses on assessing frugality in the usage phase and voluntary motivations when evaluating its relationship with renting consumption. Therefore, it proposes an original perspective and offers more precise insights to conduct the research related to this variable.

1.2.4. Impact of Brand Engagement in Self-concept on the Consumers' Choice of Renting Over Buying

The empirical findings show that brand engagement in self-concept positively affects the users' perceived social value in renting consumption ($\beta = 0.265$; $p = 0.010$). Hence, Hypothesis 14 is rejected. The BESC scale measures how brands play an essential role for individuals in their self-concepts (Sprott et al., 2009). Thus, the positive impact of BESC on perceived social value could be because social interactions among members of the rental platform could enhance the consumer's self-construal with the brand of rented items. From this perspective, this finding in the renting context expands the understanding of how a consumer may perceive the brand community in favor of one's self-construal. Specifically, prior research has demonstrated how social interactions can help enhance self-construal through the brand community in the owning context (Schau, Muniz, and Arnould, 2009). The three defining core elements of the brand community identified in prior research are consciousness of a kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

In the renting context, by interacting with other users, renters may share an implicit ritual by providing each other with feedback on the chosen outfit and sharing the discount coupons, for example. By interacting with each other frequently and repetitively, renters may feel pro-social responsibilities in the renting shopping experience. Altogether, these renters can build a brand community that represents responsible consumption and cares for one another by sharing the rented products and brands. Consumers with a higher degree of BESC are more likely to perceive positive sign values in such brand communities to enhance their self-identity of being "responsible consumers." At the same time, the perceived social value could also improve the brand value in terms of the self-defining role in a social context. Specifically, social interaction with other users

in the social media group managed by the renting platform could create delight and enthusiastic communication, creating hedonic value to enhance the users' brand engagement in the rented brands. As prior research demonstrates, the hedonic value exemplifies the entertainment aspect and emotional worth (Babin and Attaway, 2000). Hedonic attributes make people feel that the experience and characteristics of the service are valuable (Babin et al., 1994). Therefore, consumers regard the brand as personally significant and connect the brand with themselves through its provision of hedonic value (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). Socializing with other users on the platform could help redefine and construct new identities such as "responsible consumers," "conscious consumers," or "pro-social consumers" during the renting experience. Sprott et al.'s (2009) empirical studies show that BESC influences the important aspects of consumer brand knowledge, brand perceptions, and brand attitudes. Hence, renters are more likely to perceive the augmented brand value and brand equity while perceiving the social value in renting.

Following this explanation, the results echo Belk's (2010) work establishing the emergence of brand community in sharing. However, the results pose a challenge to Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) conclusion suggesting the deterrence of brand community in access-based consumption. Empirically, Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) studies on Zipcar users indicate no desire for community among users. However, compared to other more extreme sharing structures and modes whereby users barely have socialized communication and collaboration, such as online-borrowing programs on Netflix, Zipcar users seem to be like-minded people, and the act of access produces a "sign value" that could serve to unite them in a community. As Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012; p. 893) argue, "access rather than ownership is seen as a temporary state. Product usage among strangers, lack of symbolic value in accessed items, and negative reciprocity do not lend themselves to consumers wanting to invest identity-building resources into a community." Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) further state that rather than an inadequate or inappropriate means by Zipcar

to create community, the structures underpinning car sharing surface in their data, thereby driving the lack of brand community. Compared to cars, fashion products share standard product features in terms of social status, symbolic features, and utilitarian functionality. Fashion products have unique characteristics of being ephemeral, fast-changing, and more aesthetic to define user tastes and identities compared to what Zipcar could provide for its users. Hence, different from the lack of community in the car rental, the perceived social value in fashion rental consumption may also be due to the fashion apparel's unique product features.

In addition, Alden, Kelly, Youn, and Chen's (2016) empirical studies in the US, China, and South Korea reveal that susceptibility to normative influence (SNI; Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel, 1989) is one of the antecedents of BESC ($p \leq 0.001$ in US and South Korea, and $p \leq 0.01$ in China). SNI reflects a consumer's tendency to learn from others and conform to others' expectations regarding appropriate consumption to enhance self-image (Bearden et al., 1989). The SNI construct also indicates how consumers "identify with a group to enhance their self-image and ego" (Batra, Homer and Kahle, 2001, p. 116). Given the importance of brands as a self-concept enhancement vehicle, higher levels of BESC are associated with higher levels of SNI. From this perspective, the positive impact of BESC on perceived social value in renting may be because renters with a higher degree of BESC tendency are likely to value the brand of a rented item that adapts to their way of embedding brands in self-schemas, even though the brands are shared with others rather than privately owned. While interacting with other users on the social media group, the renter may also perceive a collective common identity, which enhances her self-image or ego as a renter of fashion products. From this perspective, this thesis provides original empirical evidence to illustrate how consumers could perceive the brand community in favor of one's self-construal in the context of renting.

In particular, as the data sample was collected in China, the positive relationship between BESC and perceived social value in renting may also reflect the “socially oriented achievement motives” of the construal of self. Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) self-construal theory states that the self is a concept that is intricately embedded within the cultural meaning system. The construal of self, which is “commonly believed to be the anchor of one’s world view, would provide meanings to the basic motives and direct the energizing efforts towards either the individually oriented (the independent self-construal) or the socially oriented (the interdependent self-construal) achievement motives” (Chang and Wong, 2008; p881). Yang and Bond (1986), who summarize several studies exploring the motive patterns of the Chinese, assert that those with interdependent selves will experience more of the social or interdependent motives. Bond finds that these motives reflect the collectivist or group-oriented tradition of the Chinese. Thus, such a social dimension of achievement may constitute an essential part of the goal orientation of the Chinese (Chang and Wong, 2008).

In sum, the discussion of the preceding findings on how materialism, variety seeking, frugality, and brand engagement in self-concept may impact the consumer’s choice of renting over buying underscores the importance of assessing personal orientation or trait or lifestyle in understanding consumers’ renting behaviors. Specifically, this thesis provides new insights to help explain the debatable conclusion on whether consumers perceive the social value in participating in the so-called “sharing economy” or access-based consumption. For example, as shown in Mohlmann’s (2015) empirical study comparing the peer-to-peer (C2C) accommodation sharing context Airbnb and the business-to-consumer (B2C) car-sharing context Car2Go, in contrast to the C2C sharing mode, the respondents in the B2C sharing context highlight that community belonging would positively influence the likelihood of choosing a sharing option again.

On the contrary, Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) empirical studies with Zipcar, a B2C car rental model, show that users do not have an interest in meeting and socializing with other users, and they disregard or resist Zipcar's efforts to build a community by deleting the newsletter and ignoring the other users in the parking lot, for example. Furthermore, based on their respondents' feedback, "fear of contagion and negative reciprocity reinforces self-boundaries rather than motivates or invites consumers to extend themselves through participation in a community of car sharing" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; p. 892). Their data likewise imply that the lack of a sense of caring or altruism associated with negative reciprocity among Zipcar users further inhibits motivations to relate to others. Such findings contrast with Giesler (2006), who find that music consumers who engage in C2C file sharing do indeed feel obligations and expectations that come along with sharing the same object (a music file), such as the obligation to contribute to the community, not simply take from the community. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) argue that such reciprocity norm is typical of gift-giving systems such as the one that Giesler's (2006) outlines, which is different from the negative reciprocity in car sharing. Nonetheless, all those studies neglect to analyze how other consumers' psychological traits may influence consumers' perceived social values, beyond the specific type of "sharing."

Meanwhile, the results of this thesis indicate that BESC and terminal materialism may enhance the social value in building a brand community. However, variety seeking may prompt users to perceive each other as competitors. These findings contribute additional insights into understanding the relationship between access-based consumption and brand community building. For instance, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012; p. 895) underscore that "motivations for engaging in car sharing are primarily utilitarian compared to identity enhancing. There is also a preference for surveillance and command controls rather than on trust and community." This thesis suggests that whether consumers perceive social value for identity enhancement through brand community

depends on their values, lifestyles, and personality traits. From this perspective, the findings of this thesis similarly challenge Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012; p895) conclusion, arguing that "in contrast to the altruistic model of sharing, the anonymous and market-mediated type of access does not produce a sense of joint or perceived ownership and is not prosocial but instead is primarily guided by self-serving and negative reciprocity toward the accessed object, firm, and other consumers." In the renting context, the results of this thesis imply that users with a higher degree of terminal materialism could psychologically perceive the rented items as the owned products. Consequently, users with a higher degree of BESC tendency are likely to highlight the brand of these psychologically owned items as a vehicle for constructing or enhancing their self-identity.

1.3. Brand Engagement in Self-concept Positively Affects the Users' Emotional Attachment to the Brand of Rented Items

The empirical results of this thesis indicate that the BESC tendency is the only antecedent that shows a significant (positive) effect on the users' emotional attachment to rented items ($\beta = 0.333$; $p = 0.010$). Previous research suggests that "involvement results when important values of the person's self-image are engaged or made salient by a decision situation, while commitment results when these values, self-images, or important attitudes become cognitively linked to a particular stand or choice alternative" (Beatty et al. 1988, p.155). Involvement has also been associated with brand commitment, which is described as an emotional attachment to a brand within a product category (Lastovicka and Gardner 1979). Sprott et al.'s (2009; p102) empirical studies reveal that "high-BESC consumers may fully appreciate and purchase the brand's products with overt brand identification; for low-BESC consumers, such products are likely to be less attractive." Drawing from this literature, the findings of this thesis provide original empirical

evidence suggesting that renters develop an emotional attachment to the brand of rented items because they may consider the choice of renting over buying as an alternative vehicle for enhancing the connection between self-identity and the brand of rented items.

In addition, together with the previously discussed results showing the positive effect of BESC on perceived social value as well as the positive impact of the perceived social value on emotional attachment to the brand of rented items, the results of this thesis denote the partial mediation role of the users' perceived social value in the relationship between BESC and their emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. A rationale for the relationship between the brand community and brand love is found in the existing literature. Specifically, Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) report that a sense of community has a significant and positive impact on the formation of brand love. They conclude that a purpose of belonging and interpersonal identification with other users of the brand strengthens the sense of brand love. Drennan et al.'s (2015) empirical studies of wine consumers find that brand love is an important mediator that directly influences brand loyalty.

Similarly, applying Sternberg's love theory to hotels, Alnawas and Altarifi (2016) reveal that the concept of brand love mediates the relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty. However, research has yet to assess such relationships in access-based consumption. Hence, this thesis provides original evidence in the renting context to comprehend the relationship between perceived social value in creating self and community identification, positive emotional attachment to the loved brand, and usage of and loyalty toward the rented brand.

2. Discussion of the Secondary Elements of This Thesis

2.1. Regular Renting Behaviors

As analyzed in Chapter 6 (Section 3.1), based on the collected data sample, the results show that most respondents (95%) are frequent renters who have rented more than twice on the rental platform. Regarding the duration of each rental, most respondents (96%) kept the items for less than one month. Therefore, these results denote that our collected data sample represents consumers who participate in renting consumption on a frequent and repetitive basis. These consumers are likely to choose to enroll in the monthly subscription program rather than occasionally rent piece by piece from the renting service platform. These regular visits can create valuable data for renting service providers to gain insights into the design of core projects and new product offerings. For example, Rent the Runway's introduction of a subscription-based option and the move into brick-and-mortar stores, in which customers can exchange rentals, are both driven by machine learning-enabled customer insights and are continually improved upon utilizing data.¹⁵

2.2. Millennials as the Majority of Renters

As analyzed in Chapter 6 (Section 3.2), we find that 88.4% of the respondents to the questionnaires are millennials. This result can relate to the company's marketing strategy targeting millennials as the main consumers. It is likely to reflect the economic recession: as Pike (2016) contends, such an alternative mode of renting consumption resonates with consumers' increasingly economically sensitive mindset. From the sociological perspective, this finding echoes Bardhi and

¹⁵ <https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-rctom/submission/rent-the-runway-wants-to-predict-your-fashion-choices-and-give-you-a-virtual-closet-will-you-let-them/>

Eckhardt (2016; p216) argument about the ubiquity of access-based lifestyle among the millennial generation: “access to objects, especially durable goods, and housing, which constitute the core of the individual property, is becoming ubiquitous in urban areas, global cities, and among the millennial generation.”

In addition, by exploring whether renters are married or/and have children, this question seeks to understand whether the lifestyle and life stage of these renters are “liquid,” that is, without commitment to a long-term marital relationship or a family lifestyle with children, for example. For millennials, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2016; p. 216) state that “a diamond may be forever, but in a generation that values impermanence, the one-time slogan of the century is looking more and more like an ancient mantra.” However, our dispersed results do not suggest a clear correlation between a liquid lifestyle and millennial renters. For example, only 38% of users in the sample data are single without children.

Furthermore, based on the moderation tests, the empirical findings do not indicate that the age or the life stage has important moderation effects on the strength of the relationship of renters’ perceived values in renting and loyalty. Such results can also be impacted by the undiversified nature of the collected data sample. Specifically, as shown in Appendix 12, 88.4% of the respondents to the questionnaires are millennials. Hence, to determine whether the strength of the relationship between renting behaviors and loyalty is strongly influenced by characteristics of the customer, future research can reassess such moderation effects based on a multiple-group causal analysis.

2.3. Cultural Context in China

Regarding the research context, the theoretical framework developed in this thesis is based on the collected data sample in China. As prior research demonstrates, an individual’s

psychological processes may be implicitly and explicitly shaped by the worlds, contexts, or sociocultural systems that people inhabit (Markus and Kitayama, 2010). Thus, the consumption culture in China could shape an individual's behavioral choice of renting over buying. Previous research likewise underscores that the consumption culture is unique in China, considering its multiple economic, cultural, and political revolutions during the contemporary time. Such culture represents a society embedding both collectivism and individualism (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand, 1995). Collectivism is considered pervasive in China compared to essence in Western countries, that is, social norms are influential in determining consumer behavior (Jin and Kang, 2010). In the collectivist culture, the self is defined more in group membership (Kim et al., 1994). In Chinese traditional culture, Confucian philosophy emphasizes solid social relations, which effectively obtain resources and reduce transactional costs (Chan & Suen, 2005; Fan, 2002). The term *guanxi* is used for describing such relation-building orientation. Hence, from this perspective, the chosen scales of the construct of perceived social value in the choice of renting over buying, which include items such as “to share or to use renting service with friends” or “to meet and to socialize with other people,” corresponds to the Chinese collectivism culture.

The other non-negligible features of China are its diverse regional cultural differences within its geography (Ling, Norton, et al., 2009) and the emergence of individualism during the social, political, and economic changes (e.g., Cao, 2009) in the past 30 years. Hence, assessing the individual's orientations or traits is consistent with the emerging individualism culture in the Chinese market.

In the access-based consumption research stream, previous studies on whether consumers perceive social values and sense of community are solely based on Western consumers' data (e.g., Bardhi and Eckhart, 2012; Albinsson and Yasanthi Perera, 2012). Therefore, this thesis provides original empirical evidence in understanding the relationships between the self, the brand, and the

community in the renting context, specifically among Chinese consumers. As frugal value has been highly appreciated in traditional Chinese culture (Zanasi, 2015), consumers in China may tend to voluntarily adopt a frugal lifestyle. Existing evidence suggests that those consumers who are associated with high frugality share collectivist values in Schwartz' value structure. In a society where frugal value is generally appreciated, pursuing a frugal lifestyle provides opportunities to consumers who intend to demonstrate their ability to efficiently use resources and consider it an achievement and an end goal to reach in life (Todd & Lawson, 2003). Such long-term goals are beneficial not only on an individual level but also on a societal level. From this perspective, frugality can also be considered a dimension of social behavior because frugal buying and prudent money management can reflect social standing and image (Goldsmith et al., 2014).

2.4. Research Context in Fashion

Such interpretation of results primed by collectivism and individualism culture also reflects the complex nature of fashion, including its unique features. According to the sociologist Georg Simmel (1957), "Fashion never is. It exists in a permanent state of becoming." People do not long for a sense of belonging to a group or an agglomeration, but they are driven by a desire to be distinct from the masses. As Zygmunt Bauman (2011, p20) describes in his book *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, such contradictions "come down to the conflict between a need to hold hands because of a longing for safety, and the need to let go because of a longing for freedom. Or, if we look at this conflict from another perspective: the fear of being different and losing individuality. Or of loneliness and solitude." To satisfy both contradictory desires and avoid fears, in common with the concept of *perpetuum mobile* (a self-perpetuating process that gathers energy while spending it in a "socialized world"), the eventuality of existing in a constant state of flux is not unthinkable in the case of fashion (Bauman, 2011).

This thesis suggests that although users perceive that functional value in renting fashion apparel could satisfy the demand for autonomy, a pursuit of uniqueness, or a dream of independence, such individualist motives with rational benefits negatively affect brand loyalty. Hence, the proposed framework in this thesis not only provides empirical evidence demonstrating how individualism and the collectivist consumption culture in China may prime an individual's choice of renting over buying but also partially reflects the cohabitation of safety to conform to society with freedom to distinguish oneself in the process to construct a "liquid identity" with rented rather than owned fashion apparel. Consequently, in response to Bardhi's (2012) call for research exploring the notion of liquidity in an access-based consumption context, this thesis provides a new lens and empirical evidence to understand liquidity consumption, specifically in the fashion apparel rental context.

In terms of the type of rented goods, fashion apparel has distinct characteristics: it touches the skin when one wears it and it creates a sensory experience for consumers. How fabrics feel against the skin can convey diverse information about fashion apparel to users. Some consumers may feel a connection with previous users, whereas others may feel disgust toward the use of a product that has had close physical contact with a stranger due to contamination concerns.

Huang and Fishbach (2021) believe that consumption of used products has the potential to symbolically connect present and previous users of these products. Their empirical findings further suggest that individual differences in loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic predicted interest in used products. From another perspective, following the law of contagion and consumer contamination effect theory, Kim and Jin (2020) find that consumers display greater intentions to shop in B2C (i.e., corporate-ownership) settings with no direct contact with the previous owners than in C2C (i.e., consumer-ownership) settings with a greater association with the previous owner and the shared items. They also contend that such inclination is more prevalent when purchasing

a shirt than a handbag, indicating that consumers feel more grossed out when the degree of physical contact with the shared item is greater. Furthermore, Clube and Tennant (2020) and Baek and Oh (2020) assert that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fashion rental businesses need to strategically respond to consumers with heightened contamination concerns. Baek and Oh's (2021) empirical studies find that contamination concerns moderate the relationships between functional, economic, and emotional values, attitudes, and adoption intentions to fashion rental service.

From the managerial perspective, Baek and Oh (2020) suggest that renting service companies can design the strategic communication of fashion rental services to effectively reach consumers depending on their contamination concerns. Clube and Tennant (2020) offer recommendations to mitigate and reduce contamination across the value chain. However, considering that trade-offs exist between product quality and commercial profitability, rental is likely to be a challenging business model. The issue of how contamination concerns may moderate the relationship between underlying psychological traits and consumers' actual choices of renting over buying is still lacking in investigation. Thus, further research can explore these potential effects.

2.5. Explanation for the Emergence of the “New Renting”

As explained in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3.2), renting consumption in the digital age has unique features that differentiate itself from traditional renting in a local brick-and-mortar renting boutique. This thesis refers to renting consumption as “new renting” in the digital age. To improve the understanding of the context of this research subject, we review the historical, economic, and societal backgrounds in which this consumption mode has been emerging.

Rent the Runway, the pioneering fashion rental business, was founded in 2009. Other firms have since emerged in different countries, allowing consumers to frequently rent fashion products

for a short term. The digital mobile application provides consumers with a seamless shopping experience online and offline. The fast-growing renting consumption represents a social and economic shift from the digital age of the late 1990s and early 2000s to an era of embedded connectivity, which is distinguished by the omni use and commonness of technological usage throughout society, thereby changing how consumers shop, service, and experience products or brands. Specifically, the third industrial revolution has brought humans into the digital age, also called the “age of information” (1950 until today). The fourth industrial revolution, which is often denoted as “Industry 4.0,” takes its source from “a range of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, quantum computing and nanotechnology that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds,” as the World Economic Forum describes. Hence, the combined effects of the third and fourth industrial revolutions on human life can be more powerful, more extensive, and more profound than the former three revolutions. With both digital technologies and intelligent logistics, renting companies can seamlessly deliver the value of their products and service in both the digital and physical worlds. For example, with digitalized drying machines intelligent systems, Rent the Runway has also become the largest dry-cleaning company in the US,¹⁶ which offers dry-cleaning services to thousands of rented clothes in its inventory.

In addition to the industrial revolution, the evolution or transformation of consumers’ ideology may also potentially influence the emergence of the renting consumption phenomenon, particularly in two aspects. First, one of the reasons for such behavioral choice of renting over buying may be that consumers change their perceptions on the definition of freedom. Renting services allow consumers to avoid the “burdens of ownership” such as risks and responsibilities

¹⁶ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3036876/inside-rent-the-runways-secret-dry-cleaning-empire>

with owning a product. As Rifkin (2015) explains, “freedom is measured more by access to others in networks than [the] ownership of property in markets” for “the internet generation” because people have “come to think of freedom, not in the negative sense – the right to exclude others – but rather in the positive sense of the right to be included with others,” and that “for them, freedom means the ability to optimize one’s life and the optimal life is realized by the diversity of one’s experiences and the distributed reach of one’s relationship in the various communities to which one affiliate over a lifetime.” Rifkin (2015) concludes that “the deeper and more inclusive one’s relationships, the more freedom one enjoys. Freedom for an Internet generation is the ability to collaborate with others, without restriction, in a peer-to-peer world.” Rifkin’s argument about freedom is mainly based on people’s sense of inclusivity to a networked community and of connected relationships with other people. He emphasizes the importance of access to the network and to various experiences in providing one’s life meaning, which is beyond the access to physical or digital assets.

Consistent with Rifkin’s arguments, Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould (2012) assert that access has emerged to manage the challenges of a liquid society. Instead of buying and owning things, consumers want access to goods and prefer to pay for the experience of temporarily accessing them. Durgee and Colarelli O’Connor (1995) similarly argue that “the consumer is acquiring consumption time with the item and, in market-mediated cases of access, is willing to pay a price premium for the use of that object.” From this perspective, such consumption modes in the postmodern age also reflect what Charles Baudelaire (1863)¹⁷ describes as “modernity,” which signifies “the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent.” Following these reasonings, this

¹⁷ <https://arthistoryproject.com/timeline/industrial-revolution/impressionism/the-painter-of-modern-life/modernity/>

thesis chooses to embed the constructs of consumers' perceived flexibility value and perceived social value into the operationalization of the assessment of their choice of renting over buying.

Second, this group of consumers who participate in renting consumption may hold different views on how possessions may define one's identity than those who prefer ownership over access. In contrast to prior research highlighting how consumers view possessions as a dominant carrier in signaling the owner's identity and part of the extended self (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992), "concepts, ideas, and images – not things – are the real items of value in the new economy" (Rifkin, 2000; p 5). Belk (2014a) also indicates that humans may simply be entering the "post-ownership economy," transforming the former wisdom of "you are what you own" into the new wisdom of "you are what you can access." The new social transformation could explain such a change in how consumers construct their self-identity. In a study, Wüst (2011) analyzed why auto companies would facilitate practices that encourage short-term rental rather than ownership of their cars. He identified young people's losing interest in car ownership as being essential to their self-definition as one reason underlying such approach of auto companies.

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, 2017) similarly argue that ownership and attachment to things become problematic in an increasingly liquid society: "in contrast to the solid emotional, social and property relations embedded in ownership, access is a more transient mode of consumption, enabling flexibility and adaptability suitable for liquid consumer identity projects. Access has emerged to manage the challenge of the liquid society" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; p. 883). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) expected the informants in their empirical studies concerning Zipcar's consumers to incorporate accessed cars into their extended selves; however, they uncovered an opposite outcome. The empirical results reveal how three dimensions of access, namely "short-term temporal duration, anonymity, and market mediation, inhibit a sense of identification with

the item used” (Bardhi and Eckhart, 2012; p 889). Additionally, “the high level of consumer involvement, as well as the intimacy provided by the spatial proximity, did not foster a sense of identification.” This lack of identification transpires “within a larger context of the politics of consumption, in which car ownership continues to be valued more than access.”

Accordingly, we propose an “Innovation 4.0 Circle: **TIBE** Model” that aims to explain how renting consumption and renting entrepreneurship emerge in the digital age. Appendix 7-2 presents the synergies between technology, consumers’ ideology, consumption behaviors, and business models. Together, they foster the economic and social evolution toward what we refer to as the “New Economy 4.0.” The **TIBE** Model reflects “New **T**echnologies” such as the internet, mobile applications, analytics, blockchain, and artificial intelligence; “New **I**deology” corresponding to new values and culture (i.e., how consumers construct their identities); “New **B**usiness models” such as peer-to-peer or subscription-based renting models; and “New **C**ustomers’ **E**xperience” such as synergizing consumer experiences through both physical and digital channels, accessing other consumers’ reviews, and benefiting from efficient logistics service. Following these criteria, certain models belong to the “traditional economy;” for example, the buying or selling of commodities in marketplaces, the swapping and charity donation with ownership transferred, as well as the “traditional access economy” without ownership transferred such as house and car renting (because it does not involve new customers’ experience), and charity organization offering temporary beds for tramps (because it does not include new technologies).

Other global economic, social, or personal psychological reasons cannot be neglected either. For example, the issue of whether the worldwide emergence of renting consumption and startups implies the downturn of the global economy needs to be considered. According to Belk (2014), consumers find car purchase, maintenance, and parking to be prohibitively expensive and

would increasingly prefer to avoid the accompanying hassle. Helena Pike (2016) also argues that millennial consumers resonate with the sharing economy because they may be economically minded as they come from the age of recession. Thus, they may increasingly value experiences over material goods. Hence, the aim of the “Innovation 4.0 Circle: TIBE Model” (see *Figure 7-2*) is to provide a starting point to consider preliminary criteria for why the current renting consumption or business model is “new” compared to conventional modes of renting. We intend to complement this model with other criteria and refine it based on further empirical research in the future.

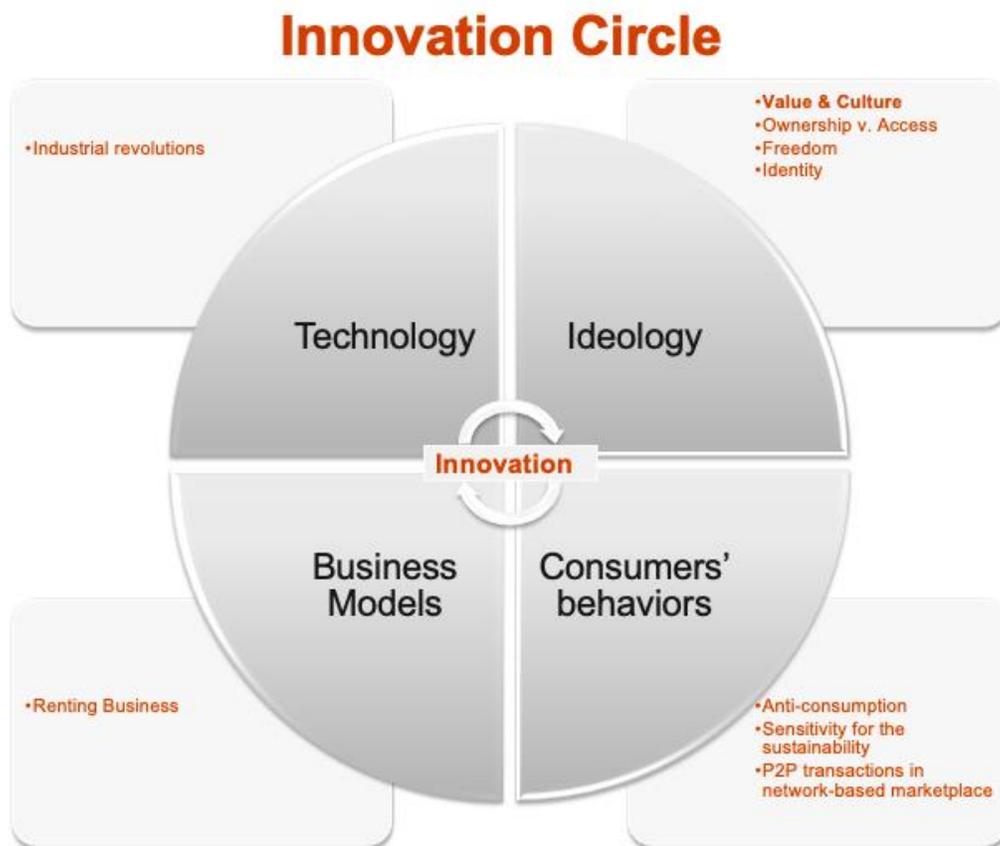


Figure 7-2: Innovation 4.0: TIBE Model

2.6. Environmental Sustainability of Renting

In this thesis, to assess how renters perceive the pro-social value in renting consumption, Question 13 in the questionnaire asks consumers about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement “renting instead of owning them reduces our usage of natural resources.” As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 3.2.3), considering the potential close relationships among transaction utility, flexible utility, and pro-social utility, as well as the primary research objective of exploring the overall functional utility versus social utility, this thesis analyzes pro-social utility as one of three dimensions of the overall functionality of the renting consumption. The results show that consumers who have a higher degree of instrumental materialism, variety seeking, and frugality traits are more likely to perceive functional values in renting consumption, and that perceived functional values have a negative impact on consumer loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Although we did not specifically assess the antecedents and outcomes of consumers’ perceived pro-social utility in renting consumption, how consumers perceive whether renting consumption contributes to sustainability can influence the results of this thesis. This assumption is aligned with the existing literature on how consumers’ environmental awareness has a significant influence on attitudes toward fashion renting through online platforms (e.g., Lee and Huang, 2020). According to Kärkkäinen (2013), some consumers regard renting luxuries to signal a responsible identity to protect the environment, whereas others who place more materialistic values on their luxury goods would not want to rent them.

The topic of whether renting consumption mode and rental business model could be sustainable for the environment is a debatable one. From the product perspective, renting may or may not lengthen the lifespan of a product’s usage. Taking fashion products as an example, studies

show that consumers wear an item approximately seven to 10 times before it is thrown away.¹⁸ In the renting context, one renter can use a particular item several times, and different users can rent it multiple times. Hence, in case the overall usage rate before being discarded in the renting context is higher than in the owning context, then renting can contribute to sustainable development by reducing the release of methane gas in landfills during a specific period. Especially for those products that are not made with eco-friendly textiles, renting could help lengthen the usage lifespan and delay the landfill process. On the contrary, renting may accelerate the process of discarding an item due to the overuse of low-quality products.

From the consumption perspective, renting over buying could increase the frequency to use the product, hence may reduce the consumers' need to own the number of products during a limited period. With the subscription model, some renters may become accustomed to the renting mode and decrease their desire for ownership. Contrary to sobriety, "unlimited" access to a large selection of choices could also induce over-consumption to satisfy consumers' fast-changing tastes and social trends (e.g., fast fashion).

From the business model perspective, the rental service model requires large inventory storage, frequent delivery, wet and dry cleaning, and repair services to maintain the hygiene and quality of rented items. In their research, Martin, Keiska, and Bjorklund's (2020) examined the environmental implications of the function-based product-service system (PSS) using a life cycle assessment for the annual service of one electric chainsaw and compared it to a conventional sales alternative. Their results suggest that rental service is extensively influenced by the location of the rental depot. Furthermore, the results indicate that although the impacts of product and accessories,

¹⁸ <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/fashion/overview>

infrastructure, waste management, and use are reduced compared to the sales alternative, their contribution is only minor compared to the environmental impacts from transportation.

Finally, from the managerial perspective, renting service companies promote their efforts in using eco-friendly technology in the logistics chain (e.g., Rent the Runway¹⁹). However, further empirical research is necessary to understand how consumers perceive the environmental sustainability of rental services.

3. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

3.1. Theoretical Implications

As presented in Chapter 1, this thesis posits that the new renting consumption in the digital age, as one type of access-based consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), is a unique phenomenon to investigate because it distinguishes itself from the traditional forms of renting in terms of augmented renting experience with the digital rental apps as well as new forms of value co-creation by the renters. For example, by interacting with other renters in social media groups, renting provides access to a community and networks where users may create new consumer roles (e.g., style influencers). Such renting consumption mode also exemplifies the three characteristics of a liquid relationship with (psychologically perceived) possessions, namely “temporary situational value,” “use-value,” and ‘immateriality’ (Bardhi et al.’s, 2012). Subscription to fashion renting particularly reflects the “culture in a liquid modern world” as described by Zygmunt Bauman (2011), whereby “perpetuum mobile (a self-perpetuating process which gathers energy while expending it) becomes the norm the moment it finds itself in a ‘socialized world’” (Bauman

¹⁹ <https://wwd.com/sustainability/business/exclusive-rent-the-runway-esg-impact-report-standard-sustainable-fashion-new-1235135807/>

2011; p. 20). Therefore, the findings of this thesis contribute to the research stream on access-based consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012) and liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). The main theoretical implications of this thesis are summarized below.

(1) In response to Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2017) call to reexamine the concept and measurement of materialism considering liquid consumption, this thesis provides new perspectives and empirical evidence to understand the relationships between materialism and renting consumption. This thesis also helps to clarify the divisive arguments on the relationships between materialism and access-based consumption (e.g., Lawson et al., 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010). This thesis particularly proposes to consider two aspects of materialism, namely "instrumental materialism" and "terminal materialism," when analyzing the role in access-based or liquid consumption. Based on the empirical evidence in this thesis, the positive effect of terminal materialism on perceived social value in renting corroborates prior research, which indicates that possessive attachment and non-ownership consumption such as renting may be compatible and reinforcing (e.g., Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter, 2008; Belk, 2010). On the contrary, the empirical results reveal a positive effect of instrumental materialism on perceived functional value in renting. This finding implies that instrumental materialists are likely to consider renting as a more affordable, flexible, and sustainable means of obtaining derived values, including symbolic value for self-extension (Belk, 1988), in the rented products. Additionally, these instrumental materialists may draw value from the renting experience because they may regard renting as an alternative way to construct their new identity, such as being "responsible consumers." Therefore, this

finding provides evidence of “the new logic of distinction” described by Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020).

(2) The findings of the positive effects of instrumental materialism and terminal materialism on the users’ choice of renting over buying in this thesis corroborate the notion of “frugal materialists” described by Lastovicka (2006). According to Lastovicka (2006), frugality and materialism do not always represent opposite intentions and result in different results on alternative consumption behaviors; rather, these two constructs may interact to increase the likelihood of these behaviors. Furthermore, depending on different types of materialists and frugality traits, their effects may be different. The empirical results of this thesis reveal that instrumental materialism and voluntary frugality positively affect the users’ perceived functional value in their choice of renting over buying. These results imply a new type of “frugal materialist” who tends to perceive the derived values in possessions and simultaneously chooses to voluntarily live a frugal life. Therefore, this thesis suggests that this specific type of “frugal materialist” is likely to perceive the functional values in renting consumption. This group of consumers may regard renting as an alternative mode of consumption, which meets their needs to signal new identity projects and corresponds to their voluntary frugality lifestyles. The findings of the positive effect of variety seeking on the users’ perceived functional value in renting are consistent with the propositions in previous research. For example, in their empirical research, Lawson et al. (2016) propose a positive relationship between variety seeking and consumers’ intentions to participate in access-based consumption. However, the empirical results do not show a

significant effect of variety seeking on the users' perceived social value. Therefore, this thesis provides more detailed insights into how the variety-seeking trait may affect the consumers' choice of renting over buying.

(3) As Richins and Dawson (1992; p. 314) state, "we hope that our work will spawn more research on materialism, including investigations into its antecedents and consequences." In response to Richins and Dawson's call, this thesis fills the research gap in understanding the role of the consumer's materialistic value in their choice of renting over buying, which is different from the traditional economic transaction context. Moreover, by reassessing the dimension properties of Richins and Dawson's (1992) MVS measure with Chinese consumers and in the renting context, this thesis provides original empirical evidence in comprehending the dimensionality of the construct of materialism. Such findings offer evidence of the dimensions in Richins and Dawson's (1992) MVS original measure, as suggested by Bearden and Netemeyer (1999). Hence, these findings also challenge Richins' (2004) shortened version of MVS scale, in which Richins suggests a 15-item measure of the material values scale (see Appendix 6).

(4) The findings of this thesis challenge previous research suggesting that the emphasis in access-based consumption is more on experience value and less on the identity value of objects (e.g., Chen, 2009). As indicated in the previous literature, access-based consumption is unlikely to play a salient role in consumers' lives, particularly in defining their identity because it does not create a linking value as what a solid possession does (Belk, 1992; Price, Arnould, and Folkman Curasi, 2000). To

reassess how consumers may perceive the rented items as a vehicle for signaling their identity, we have selected constructs that are closely related to one's self-identity construal, including materialism, variety seeking, brand engagement in self-concept, and frugality, as antecedents in the framework to examine their effects on the consumers' choice of renting over buying.

- (5) We choose to assess how consumers' brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) traits may impact their tendency to decide to rent over to buy. Our findings of the positive effects of BESC (Sprott et al., 2009) on the perceived social value in renting suggest that users with a high degree of BESC are more likely to perceive social experience value in the renting experience. This result can be because such social value can enhance the identity value of the brand of rented items.
- (6) Our empirical results also demonstrate the positive effects of instrumental materialism and variety seeking on the users' perceived functional values in renting. Such results can be because these consumers may perceive renting as a more affordable, flexible, and environmentally friendly consumption mode that can help realize their fast-changing and diverse identity projects in an "age of uncertainty" (Bauman, 2007). Therefore, our findings indicate that consumers can perceive using rather than owning salient identity products, such as fashion apparel, as an alternative means of signaling their identities. Depending on their psychometric traits, consumers may translate the identity values in renting consumption differently.

(7) This thesis provides original empirical evidence in understanding how the traits of individuals may impact their perceived social value in the choice of renting over buying. Specifically, the empirical results denote that consumers with higher degrees of terminal materialism and BESC traits are more likely to perceive social values in choosing to rent over buying. As previously explained, during an interaction with other users, the user may perceive a connection between self-identity, the brand of rented items, and collective common identity in the renting social group to which the renter belongs. Consequently, in response to the debates in existing research on whether access-based consumption deters or encourages the emergence of the brand community (e.g., Belk, 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Mohlmann, 2015), this thesis suggests whether and how brand community emerges in access-based consumption can depend on how consumers with diverse personality traits or orientations may perceive the social value differently. For example, the renters' group can provide its members with a sense of shared identity with other users in the renting group, such as being sustainable consumers.

(8) To our best knowledge, this thesis is the first research that provides empirical evidence in understanding how renting consumption can impact consumer loyalty to the brands of rented items. Specifically, the empirical results of this thesis demonstrate the positive effects of participating in renting consumption on the users' emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. On the contrary, the empirical results reveal the negative effect of users' perceived functional values in the choice of renting over buying on their loyalty toward the brand of rented items. However,

the impact of perceived social value on the users' commitment toward the brand of rented items is not significant. Such results indicate that renting consumption can reduce the consumers' brand loyalty. This result echoes the ones in Vogel, Cook, and Watchravesringkan's (2019) experimental studies on the impact of renting on brand equity. Their findings suggest that the means of the brand credibility and brand leadership dimensions of traditional luxury brand equity are significantly reduced after a renting option is offered.

(9) This thesis provides new perspectives in understanding how consumers may develop emotional attachment or loyalty toward the brand of rented items, with which the consumer only interacts in a temporary short-term liquid context. Rather than drawing a generalized conclusion, this thesis considers the psychometrics of consumers and their perceived values in renting consumption based on their actual renting experience. For example, Lawson et al. (2016; p2617) argue that "accessing products may be a way for consumers to determine the products they like, thus providing an alternate route to product loyalty." This thesis corroborates Lawson et al.'s argument suggesting that renters are likely to develop an emotional attachment to a particular brand and find their preferred brand of rented items. On the contrary, this thesis challenges Lawson et al.'s latter argument by indicating that the users' perceived transaction utility, flexibility utility, and pro-social utility are likely to deter them from developing loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Therefore, depending on the consumers' different perceived values in renting, our findings suggest that these perceived values can influence how a consumer develops an

emotional attachment to the rented objects and how such emotional attachment may be equivalent to what a possession can bring to the consumer.

3.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this thesis have several important implications for rental service firms and brands that consider renting as an alternative strategy for connecting with customers.

First, with the support of artificial intelligence or customized surveys, service firms such as YCloset can design different marketing strategies to target consumers with other personal traits or orientations. Specifically, to attract consumers whose traits or orientations are instrumental materialism, variety seeking, and frugality, the rental service firm can highlight the functional values in the renting consumption. For example, in the marketing communication with these potential customers, the rental service firm can customize messages enhancing the transition, flexibility, and pro-social advantages in renting consumption compared to buying. The rental service firm can also highlight the social values in the renting consumption. For example, the firm can create social media groups that enable subscribed renters to connect. These groups are likely to attract consumers whose traits or orientations are terminal materialism and BESC.

Second, the empirical results of this thesis indicate that the actual renting consumption can positively affect the users' emotional attachment to the brand of rented items. Therefore, for brands that aim to augment a potential customer's emotional attachment to the brand, participating in a renting service is likely to help achieve this goal. Specifically, the brand can highlight the advantaged functional

value and social value in renting the brand of rented items compared to buying the related products.

Third, the empirical results of this thesis highlight the importance of the users' emotional attachment to the brand of rented items in developing their loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Without the emotional attachment to the brand of rented items, even though users may perceive the functional values in renting consumption, they are unlikely to develop loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Therefore, brands that participate in renting services should work closely with the renting service provider to accentuate their emotional connection with renters. Such efforts are essential elements to develop the potential users' loyalty toward the brand of rented items.

Fourth, based on the empirical evidence in this thesis showing the positive effect of BESC on the users' emotional attachment to the brand of rented items, to attract brands on the platform, the rental service firm can help the brands to target consumers who tend to fully appreciate and use the preferred brand's products with overt brand identification. For instance, as fashion rental could reflect a liquid lifestyle with more freedom, consumers who participate in renting fashion products may prefer brands that highlight the image of a free and flexible lifestyle, which corresponds to their own identity.

Fifth, the results further suggest that the consumers' perceived functional value in renting experience can negatively impact their loyalty toward the brand of rented

items and that their perceived social value in renting service has no impact on their loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Therefore, for brands that plan to develop brand loyalty with potential consumers, renting may not be an efficient option in brand strategy. Specifically, the manner by which the majority of renting service companies currently communicate with potential users (i.e., highlighting the functional values in their marketing communication) can potentially damage the users' loyalty toward the brands of rented items on their renting platforms.

4. Limitations and Research Agenda

Similar to all research efforts, this thesis has some limitations. In this section, these limitations are outlined and future research directions are proposed from three perspectives.

In terms of the collected data sample and methodology used, the limitations are as follows:

- (1) The findings are based on data collected at a single point in time. Future longitudinal studies could create a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between variables in the framework.

- (2) Other demographic characteristics such as financial status and educational background could provide further insights into the profiles of different groups of renter. For example, the idea of whether a renter is materialistic or frugal may be linked with not only one's age or life stage but also the financial status or educational background.

(3) In terms of gender, all the respondents are female because the fashion rental company YCloset only targets female consumers. Nonetheless, whether females and males perceive values differently in renting consumption is still unknown. For instance, male consumers may be less sensitive to the social significance than female consumers (Shoaf et al., 1995). In other words, male consumers may be unenthusiastic about participating in fashion renting consumption because they are less interested in clothing and fashion (Cox and Dittmar, 1995). Future experimental research with male and female consumers could enhance the understanding of fashion renting consumption behaviors. For example, we could design a simple simulated rental application and invite both male and female participants with diverse demographic characteristics to try the rental service for a period. We can also put these participants in a virtual group during the process to observe their interactions. We subsequently ask about their feelings and thoughts about the rental experience and compare the experimental results based on their interviews.

(4) Data in different regions in China are collected in the survey. Future studies could also compare the results in other regions, as previous studies identify distinct market segments of Chinese consumers (Ling, Norton, et al., 2009). Furthermore, the participants in the current study are exclusively Chinese citizens, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. For instance, consumption in collectivist cultures (e.g., China) tends to be less about uniqueness (Kima and Markus, 1999). Previous research has discussed the response biases linked with specific cultural orientations in survey research (e.g., Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006). Therefore,

as explained in the previous section of the discussions on the cultural context in this thesis, further cross-cultural research is needed to reassess the proposed theoretical framework in this thesis.

- (5) The model with the B2C renting business model is tested in this thesis. However, research that determines whether and how consumers develop brand loyalty in the P2P rental is still lacking. Further study to assess the proposed framework in this thesis with data in the P2P business model could help fill this research gap. The focus of this thesis is on prêt-a-porter fashion apparel rather than luxury fashion in terms of product categories. According to the author's interview with a manager of YCloset, YCloset did not cooperate with luxury brands due to luxury brands' concerns on brand loyalty of consumers in the renting context. In addition, renting business model takes a much longer time to generate cash flow compared to selling. As fast fashion and luxury target different consumers, the issue of whether consumers' renting behaviors differ between fast fashion and luxury products remains unknown. Hence, further research can assess the current framework in other product categories. Additionally, the division of two dimensions of the chosen construct of materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992) and their effects on the main variables and outcomes reflect how the inferred social and personal aspects of "material self" could influence the brand loyalty of consumers. Bagozzi, Ruvio, and Xie (2020; p. 662) conceptualize material self as "the construction and maintenance of a personal and social self through the acquisition, ownership, and use of material objects." Further research can assess how this recently developed concept could influence consumers' brand loyalty in renting different products. As Bagozzi et al.

(2020) suggest, using the material self measure would be especially valuable to global companies that market products with social signaling value, such as clothes, cars, and jewelry (Batra et al., 2000).

(6) Through the development of a theoretical framework, this thesis suggests an underlying mechanism of consumer choices of renting over buying. For future studies, an interesting approach would be to conduct qualitative research with users of renting services to obtain an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the results found in this research. The reason is that “interpretivism,” which is integral to the qualitative research tradition, emerged in response to some of the perceived limitations associated with “positivism,” the research paradigm that we follow to guide our choice of methodology in this thesis. Contrary to positivism, interpretivism indicates that “a social researcher has to explore and understand the social world through the participants’ and their own perspectives; and explanations can only be offered at the level of meaning rather than the cause” (Richie et al., 2013; p. 24). For example, further research can involve semi-structured interviews with users of renting services to understand the reasons why they may be less likely to develop loyalty toward the brand of rented products compared to owning them. In addition, interviews can help understand the social and material contexts, in which consumers choose to rent, as well as the meanings that consumers attach to their own renting experiences. For instance, this question can be explored among consumers who are more likely to link brands with self-concept: How do they interpret the most pertinent social values versus functional values in renting experience? Meanwhile, these questions can be examined among consumers with

a higher degree of materialism traits: In which contexts do they differently perceive diverse values in the renting experience? What contingencies do consumers perceive regarding the sustainability of the rented items or renting consumption?

Second, in terms of the proposed theoretical framework design and research questions, the aim of this thesis is to explore the chosen antecedents and outcomes of a consumer's choice of renting over buying. To reach the best model fit indices, the proposed theoretical framework simultaneously embeds functional utility, flexibility utility, and pro-social utility altogether into perceived functional value. It helps provide a general understanding of a renter's perceived functional values versus perceived social value in renting. Statistically, however, various effects may also influence each other in the same framework. Further studies could focus on specific variables and reassess the relationships between them. For example:

- (1) Further research could focus on a single perceived utility in renting and analyze the different antecedents and outcomes of this chosen perceived utility. It can help provide further insights into whether and how the consumer may perceive each specific utility differently. For example, based on the results of this thesis, pro-social utility in renting, meaning being environmentally friendly, is one of the components of perceived functional value. The empirical results likewise suggest that pro-social utility may negatively affect the users' loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Further research focusing on the assessment of pro-social utility can help in the understanding of how this utility alone can impact user loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Consequently, it could provide a reference for both renting service providers and brands on designing their marketing campaigns. These renting service providers and brands are expected to be cautious when

highlighting the sustainable benefits in renting consumption, as it may negatively affect (or not) brand loyalty. With the intensifying call for research on sustainable consumption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, future studies could focus on assessing antecedents and outcomes such as the brand loyalty of consumers' perceived pro-social value in renting (being environmentally friendly). Operationally, if choosing to study perceived pro-social value as the main variable in the renting consumption, we can decide to explore "pro-environmental self-identity" (Dermody et al., 2015) or "enviro-materialists" (Dermody, Zhao, et al., 2021) as antecedents and brand loyalty as the outcome.

- (2) With the exception of this thesis, empirical studies providing further understanding of the relationship between consumers and brands in the renting context are still lacking. The existing research explores such a relationship only in the ownership and solid consumption context. Although this thesis underscores the negative effect of the users' perceived functional value in renting consumption, more studies are needed to understand further whether brand loyalty can also develop in a liquid consumption context. For example, further research can also explore how perceived emotional value in renting can affect the user's loyalty toward the brand of rented items. This thesis does not find a significant effect of perceived social value in the users' loyalty toward the brand of rented items, which could also be due to the sample size or other statistical effects of the other variables chosen in this framework. Further empirical studies could reassess the relationship between the users' perceived social value in renting and their loyalty toward the brand of rented items.

- (3) In addition, the focus of this thesis is on the assessment of how the renters' choice of renting over buying may impact their relationship with the brand of rented items. However, an understanding of how the real renting experience may impact the consumers' relationship with the renting service provider's brand is still lacking. As Lawson et al. (2016) suggest, access-based service providers would be interested in determining if consumer brand loyalty shifts from the product brand to the access-based provider brand. Further studies exploring these research questions can help provide more evidence to understand the relationships between renters and product brands and renting service brands.
- (4) The results of this thesis partially support and simultaneously challenge Spratt et al.'s (2009) conclusion on the relationship between BESC and brand loyalty. In particular, the results indicate a potential mediating role of perceived social values in renting in understanding the relationship between BESC, emotional attachment to the brand of rented items, and user loyalty toward the brand of rented items. Further studies could focus on assessing solely the relationship between these variables to boost the understanding of the roles of consumers' renting behaviors in shaping the relationship between BESC and brand loyalty in the renting context.
- (5) Regarding the outcomes or consequences of renting behaviors, this thesis focuses on exploring the consumers' relationship with the brands of rented items. Further research can also investigate other potential outcomes of such renting choices. For example, as some consumers subscribe to the membership to access "unlimited"

options of items on the renting service platform, some research questions that merit an investigation include the following: Do consumers develop a habitude to rent, thus changing their consumption preference from permanent ownership to temporary access? How does the renting consumption mode impact the consumers' frequency to buy the same types of products? If any change occurs, why do consumers choose to do so?

Third, further research can reassess the definition and measurement of materialism in the realm of renting in the digital age, in which the relationship between “possession” and users changes from long-lasting to ephemeral and the ownership shifts from legally bound to psychologically owned. As Hulland, Thompson, and Smith (2015) suggest, psychological ownership rather than legal ownership represents a hybrid notion of legal ownership and access; they add that understanding this notion in a digital context is expected to become increasingly important. Therefore, further research could explore how renters perceive the ownership of rented items; in particular, the following issues merit an examination: How are consumers psychologically attached to the rented items compared to the legally owned products? Do they also perceive “shared ownership” with other users during the renting period of the product? Accordingly, how do materialist consumers redefine “success” with temporarily owned possessions? How do they signal their identities with the brands of rented products?

Rindfleisch, Burrough, and Wong's (2009) studies likewise demonstrate that materialistic individuals are less likely to manage social uncertainty and insecurity through strong self- and communal-brand connections. Rindfleisch et al. (2009) conclude that materialism strengthens brand connections when existential insecurity is high but not when it is low. Based on the results of this thesis, terminal materialism is the antecedent of perceived social value, whereas

instrumental materialism is the antecedent of perceived functional value. However, these results engender some key questions: Do these results suggest that instrumental materialists may feel less secure in renting than terminal materialists? How do renters feel confident with non-ownership compared to owners? How do consumers link community brand identity with one's self-identity by connecting with other social media users in the renting context? Further research using qualitative methods such as online interviews and ethnography (Kozinets, 2020) with active users of renting service firms may help provide more detailed insights to answer these questions and to assess the explanations for the findings of this thesis.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Review of construct definitions, aliases, and representative papers related to Loyalty (Watson, Beck, Henderson and Palmatier, 2015)

Constructs	Definitions	Common aliases	Representative papers
Loyalty			
Attitudinal loyalty	A "cognition" or "pleasurable fulfillment" favoring one entity such as a firm, its brand, its salespersons, or its offerings (Oliver 1999, p. 35).	Affect, preference, warmth	Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Chaudhuri and Ligas 2009; Yim et al. 2008
Behavioral loyalty	Repeated purchases that stem from a conation or action orientation involving a "readiness to act" favoring one entity (Oliver 1999, p. 35).	Purchase, repurchase, repurchase intentions, retention, return	Brown 1952; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; De Wulf et al. 2003; Ehrenberg et al. 1990; Horsky et al. 2006
Loyalty	A collection of attitudes aligned with a series of purchase behaviors that systematically favor one entity over competing entities.	Customer loyalty, true loyalty	Brady et al. 2012; Dick and Basu 1994; Oliver 1999; Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002
Antecedents			
Commitment	A desire to maintain a valued relationship.	Affective, behavioral, obligation, and normative commitment	Anderson and Weitz 1992; Moorman et al. 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994
Trust	Confidence in the reliability and integrity of a seller.	Trustworthiness, credibility, benevolence, and honesty	Hibbard et al. 2001; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002
Satisfaction	The perceived difference between prior expectations and actual performance.	Overall satisfaction or satisfaction with relationship, product or service	Geyskens and Steenkamp 2000; Tse and Wilton 1988
Loyalty incentives	Enticements meant to encourage repeat patronage.	Rewards, gifts, perks, benefits, resources, investments, and loyalty programs	De Wulf et al. 2001; Ganesan 1994
Outcomes			
Word of mouth	A customer's positive referral or endorsement of the seller to others.	Referrals and customer referrals	Berger and Schwartz 2011; Söderlund 2006
Performance	Actual seller performance enhancements including sales, share of wallet, profit performance, and other measurable changes to the seller's business.	Sales, share, sales effectiveness, profit, revenue, Tobin's Q, and sales performance	Gupta et al. 2004; Kumar 2013; Palmatier et al. 2007; Petersen et al. 2009

Appendix 2: Description of the Firm YCloset

YCloset is right now the largest fashion rental company in China. It received \$50 million in a series C fundraising round in 2017 led by Alibaba Innovation Ventures, Softbank China, and Sequoia China. According to the interview with the COO of YCloset on Medium, they get the inspiration from Rent the Runway in the US but distinguishes itself in several ways and adapts it into China's local environment. First, it is a subscription company, which offers the apparel renting service. Consumers can browse hundreds of fashion brands on the mobile application, enroll for a

monthly fee and rent unlimited preferred clothes and accessories free of charge. Founded in 2015, the Beijing-based online platform operates in about 40 cities in China and targets female users, especially those aged between 22 to 33 living in first and second-tier cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, with 15 million registered users (data in September 2018). According to the self-description of the firm on LinkedIn: YCloset is “the most symbolic women fashion monthly rental APP and the most innovative ‘fashion sharing platform’ in China.” It aims to “become the Netflix in the fashion industry, leading women in a new age to experience the variety of fashion in a more affordable and environmentally friendly way”, to “disrupt the traditional fashion retailing modes”, to “change Chinese women’s traditional way to consume fashion” and to “create a new fashion lifestyle.” Different from Rent the Runway, which addresses fashion apparel for special occasions that corresponds on dressed-up culture in the U.S. market, YCloset targets fast fashion daily wear market where people can wear their products to work, during the weekend and to a party. Hence, from this perspective, this study provides authentic data with original features of products on the rental service platform, which is different from other empirical studies in fashion rental consumption that are based solely on data for occasional use of high-end designer clothing and accessories, such as on Rent the Runway.

Regarding the value proposition, according to the COO, YCloset “targets the population that has limited budget, but those who want to change clothes and try new styles.” According to the interview with the COO, renting provides not only a great opportunity for consumers to get to know these new brands, but also to “keep them if they like”. In this way, consumers may regard YCloset “as not only a platform for them to rent, but also to try different things” at a lower cost compared to owning them. Therefore, by providing consumers the options to eventually buy the rented piece with a discounted retailing price, it helps YCloset generate profits, which

distinguishes it from traditional rental markets. From this perspective, beyond a rental company, YCloset “position themselves more like a subscription-based e-commerce company that bridges brands and designers with the customers”, as described by the COO, and aims to provide consumers “a third channel with this rent-to-buy model so actually the designer of the brand can offer their products to their customers for them to try first before they want to buy.” In December 2019, the platform also attracts H&M’s higher-end independent brands, such as Cos, to join its trial service (Source: BoF). It allows brands “to explore customer demand, the business model, potential to scale and sustainability factors.” From this standpoint, such innovative business model corresponds to one of our main purposes of this study, which is to explore whether and how consumers’ renting experience may impact their ‘use loyalty’ of the brands, including not only through renting again the product but also buying it in the future.

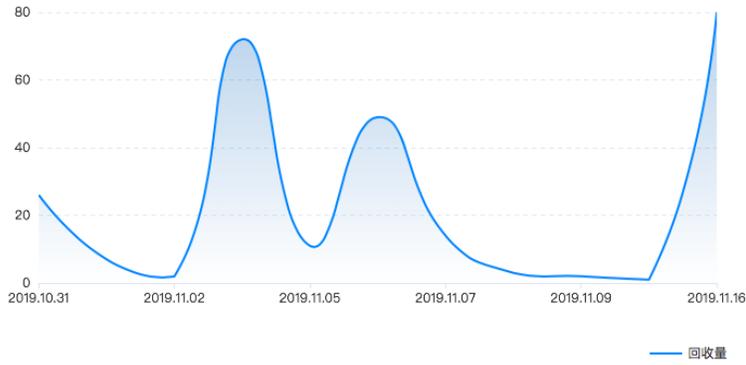
In addition, based on the presentation of the manager and observation of the author, members of the platform are connected in Wechat groups, which are initiated and managed by the firm. Wechat is one of the dominant Chinese social media platforms in China. Such Wechat groups allow members to share their latest looks with rented apparel, to get feedback from each other, and to share digital vouchers for special discounts to rent a preferred look on the platform. Such digitalized social group may enable users to e-meet new friends who share the same new values to shop fashion. It also distinguishes it from other Western fashion platforms, on which users may not have such spontaneous conversations and create new connections between them. Therefore, this data basis may provide new insights to understand consumers’ choice of renting over buying, specifically from a social perspective.

Appendix 3: Screenshots of Summary of Data Collection on Tencent Survey



租衣 回收量 267

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
267 **537** **49%** **9分33秒**



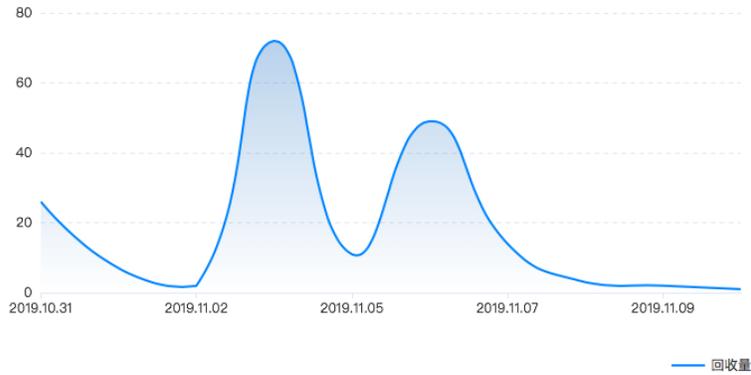
地域位置



广东	27%
北京	22%
四川	12%
上海	7%
江苏	7%
其他	25%

租衣 回收量 187

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
187 **361** **51%** **9分10秒**



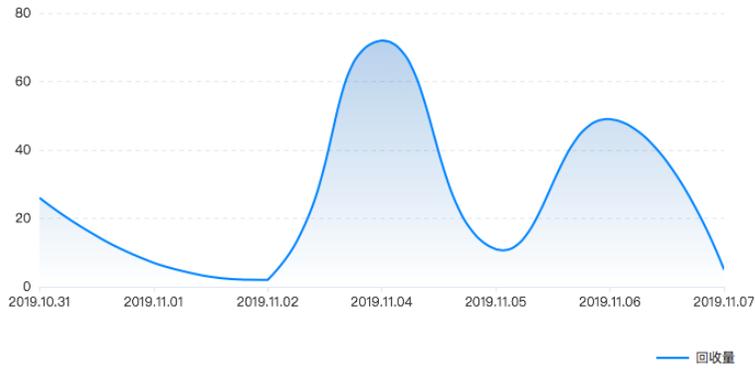
地域位置



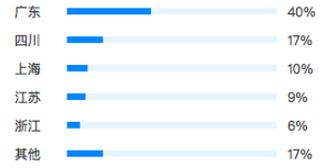
广东	39%
四川	17%
上海	10%
江苏	10%
浙江	8%
其他	18%

租衣 回收量 172

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
172 **335** **51%** **9分19秒**

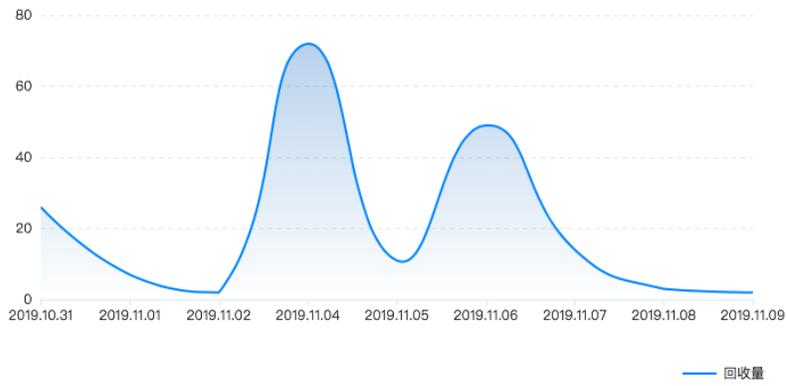


地域位置

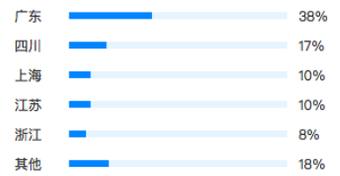


租衣 回收量 186

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
186 **359** **51%** **9分11秒**

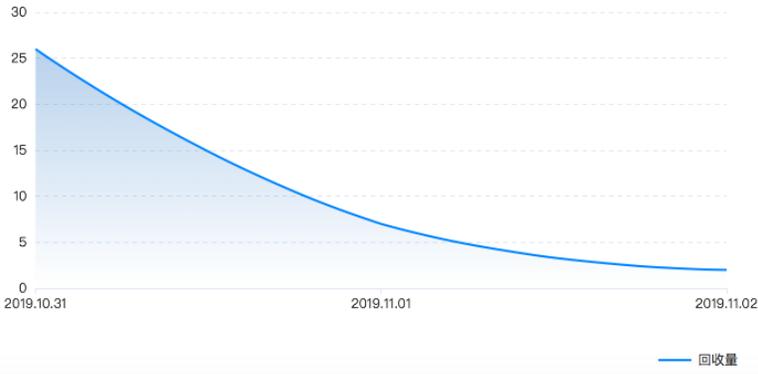


地域位置



租衣 回收量 35

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
35 **84** **41%** **8分58秒**

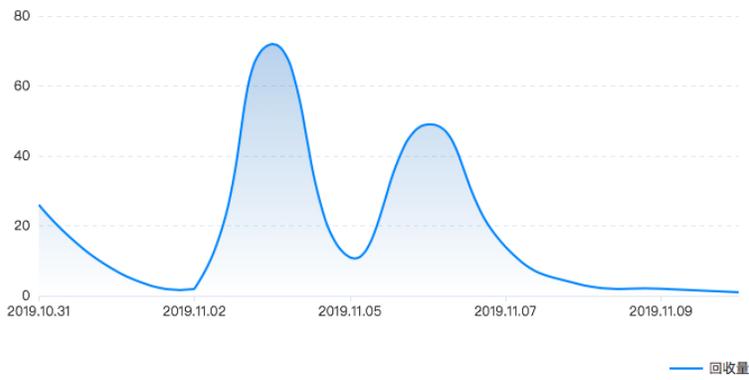


地域位置

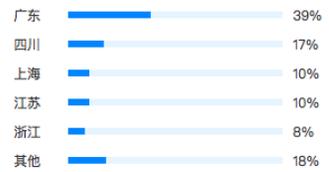


租衣 回收量 187

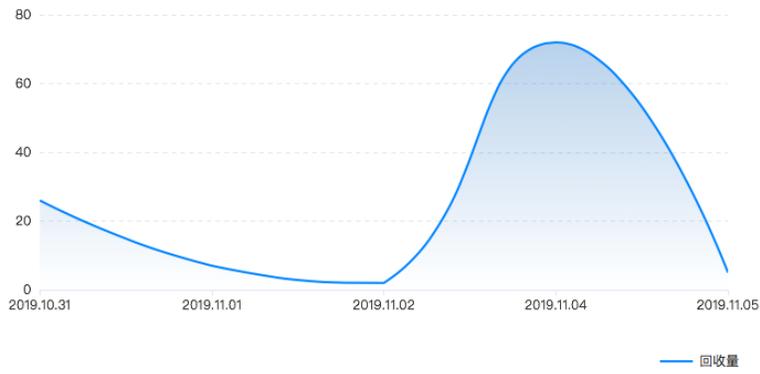
回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
187 **361** **51%** **9分10秒**



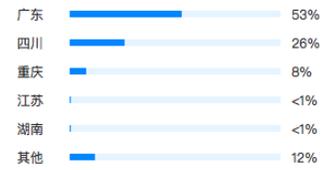
地域位置



回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
112 **232** **48%** **8分33秒**

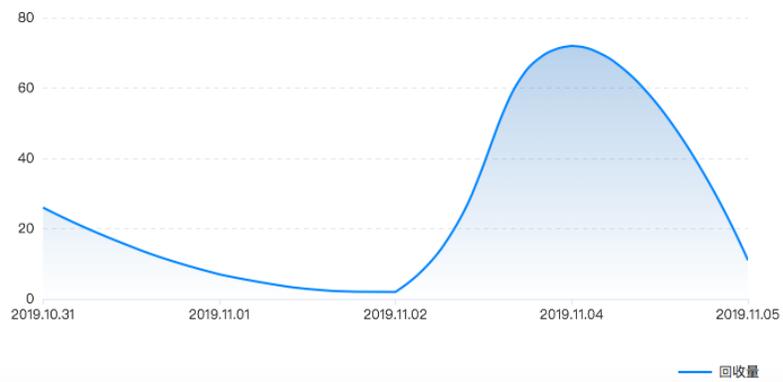


地域位置

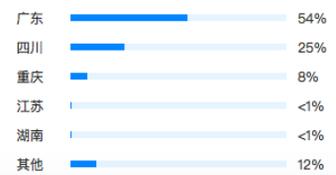


租衣 回收量 118

回收量 浏览量 回收率 平均完成时间
118 **242** **48%** **8分33秒**



地域位置



Appendix 4 – Questionnaire in English

Introduction:

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Answering to this questionnaire should take about xx minutes of your time. This research aims to better understand consumers' rental behaviors. There is no right or wrong answer. All information will be anonymized and used for non-profit academic research purpose only.

YY will offer xxx for respondents to this survey. To receive the gift, please note your telephone number that you used to register for your membership at YY: _____

Part I – By answering questions in this section, you could better understand your relationships with brands and products in general:

Question 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree):

I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.

Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.

I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.

The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.

I like to own things that impress people.

I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own.

Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree):

I usually only buy the things I need.

I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.

The things I own aren't all that important to me.

I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.

Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.

I like a lot of luxury in my life.

I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.

Question 3

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree):

I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.

My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.

I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.

I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.

It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.

Question 4

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree):

I am constantly seeking new ideas and experiences.

I dislike change and variety in daily routines

I like continually changing activities.

I prefer a routine way of life compared to one full of change

I like to experience novelty and change in daily routine.

Question 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 6="strongly agree"):

If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run

There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful

Making better use of my resources makes me feel good

If I can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new

I believe in being careful in how I spend my money

Question 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"):

I have a special bond with the brands that I like.

I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.

I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.

Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.

I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.

I can identify with important brands in my life.

There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.

My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.

Part II – In this section, we would like to know your feelings about brands you rent on YY.

Question 7

What is the brand of the last product that you rented recently? _____

(There is a list of brands at YCloset here.)

Please complete the following two question based on this brand:

Question 8

How would you describe your interest for the brand of the rented product? (1= “describes poorly”; 7= “describes very well”)

Affectionate

Friendly

Loved

Peaceful

Passionate

Delighted

Captivated

Connected

Bonded

Attached

Question 9

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1= “very strongly disagree”; 7= “very strongly agree”)

I will use the same brand the next time I have to use a product from this category.

I intend to keep using this brand.

I am committed to this brand.

I would be willing to pay a higher price to use this brand rather than to use another brand.

Part III - Thank you very much for answering the first two parts of the survey! In the following section, we would like to know more about your renting experience at YY and your general tendency to rent rather than to buy.

Question 10

How many times did you rent this category of products with YCloset within the past year?

once (occasionally)

twice - 5 times (sometimes)

more than 5 times (often)

Question 11

How long in average do you keep the rented product(s) each time? (open question)

__Month(s) / __Day(s)

Question 12

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"):

I feel that renting clothes products offers significant cost saving relative to buying them.

I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying is a good deal.

Question 13

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"):

I believe that renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go.

Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs.

Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of the product virtually anywhere, anytime I want.

Using a rental service is better than owning a product because switching between multiple shared dresses is not time-consuming.

Question 14

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"):

Renting instead of owning them reduces our usage of natural resources.

Question 15

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"):

I often use sharing services with my friends.

I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends

I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people

Meeting and socializing with other people are essential advantages of using sharing services

Part IV – At last, could you tell us a little more about you, please?

Question 16

What is your year of birth? _____ (*ADD a list of years here*)

Question 17

Please choose the following description that represents the best of your current life-stage:

Single without children

Single with children

Couple without children

Married with children

<THE END OF THE SURVEY>

Thank you very much for your contribution to science! Please don't forget to provide your phone number and get your voucher on YCloset. We will keep you posted soon.

Appendix 5 – Questionnaire in Chinese

简介:

非常感谢您参与本次调查。本问卷大约会占用您**分钟时间。我们希望通过此次调查能够更好地理解消费者的租赁行为。问题答案没有对错之分。所有信息均为匿名采集，并只用于非赢利性学术研究。

为了感谢您的配合，YY 将向本问卷的受访者们提供***。请您留下您在 YY 注册会员时所使用的电话号码，以便我们向您赠送礼物：_____

第一部分：本部分问题能够帮助您更好地理解您和品牌及产品之间的关系。

1. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法？（1=非常不同意，2=不同意，3=中立，4=同意，5=非常同意）

我欣赏那些有豪宅、豪车、名牌服装和名牌家具的人。

获取并拥有物质财富是人生成功的一个重要部分。

我不太看重一个人拥有的物质财富的多少，这并不能代表他的成功。

我所拥有的东西能够说明我现在过得有多好。

我喜欢拥有那些能让人高看一眼的东西。

我不太关注别人拥有的物质财富。

2. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法? (1=非常不同意, 2=不同意, 3=中立, 4=同意, 5=非常同意)

我通常只买自己需要的东西。

在拥有的物质方面, 我尽量做到简单。

我拥有的东西对我来说不是很重要。

我喜欢把钱花在一些不实用的东西上。

买东西能给我带来快感。

我喜欢非常奢华的生活。

我认识的大多数人都比我更注重物质。

3. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法? (1=非常不同意, 2=不同意, 3=中立, 4=同意, 5=非常同意)

我有一切享受生活所真正需要的东西。

如果我拥有某些现在没有的东西, 我的生活会更好。

即使我有了更好的东西, 也不会过得更快乐。

如果我能买得起更多东西, 我会更快乐。

有时候我会因为自己买不起自己想要的一切而十分苦恼。

4. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法 (1=非常不同意, 2=不同意, 3=中立, 4=同意, 5=非常同意)

我总是在寻求新的想法和体验。

我不喜欢日常生活里的改变和多样性。

我喜欢那些不断变化的活动。

相对于多变的生活，我更喜欢某种固定的生活方式。

在生活中，我喜欢一些奇特的体验和改变。

5. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法（1=非常不同意，2=不同意，3=中立，4=同意，5=非常同意）

如果我注意保养自己的物品，那么长期来说肯定可以省钱。

我们扔掉的东西里有很多其实还是很有用的。

更好的利用我的资源会让我感觉很好。

如果我能重复使用一件你有的东西，那么没必要买新的。

我认为在如何花钱上应该谨慎些。

6. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法（1=非常不同意，2=不同意，3=中立，4=同意，5=非常同意）

我对我喜欢的品牌有特殊的依恋感。

我把自己最喜欢的品牌视为自己的一部分。

我经常感到和自己喜欢的品牌之间有种亲密的感情。

我的一部分是由对我重要的品牌定义的。

我感觉我和自己最喜欢的品牌之间仿佛有种亲密的感情。

我对生活中重要的品牌有认同感。

我喜欢的品牌和我的自我认识之间有一定关联。

我最喜欢的品牌是我自我的一种重要表达。

第二部分 在这一部分，我们想了解您对在所租赁品牌的感受。**

7. 您最近租赁的产品是什么品牌的？ _____

(在此添加 YCloset 的品牌清单)

请完成以下2个针对该品牌的问题：

8. 您如何描述您对所租用产品品牌的感兴趣程度？（1=非常不符合，5=非常符合）

喜爱

友好

热爱

平和

有激情

愉悦

着迷

有感情

亲切

依恋

9. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意以下说法？（1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

下次我需要同类产品时还会选择相同的品牌。

我打算继续使用这个品牌。

我对这个品牌很忠诚。

为了使用这个品牌，我愿意付更高的价格。

第三部分-非常感谢您回答本调查的前两部分问题！在接下来这一部分中，我们想进一步了解您在YY上的租赁体验，以及您选择租赁而非购买的倾向。

10. 在过去一年中，您在 YCloset 租赁过几次这一类别的产品？

一次（偶尔）

2次-5次（有时）

5次以上（经常）

11. 您每次平均租赁几天？（开放式问题）

（__月份数 / __天数）

12. 您在什么程度上同意或不同意下列说法（1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

我觉得与购买服装产品相比，租赁服装能省很多钱。

我觉得只租不买费用很划算。

13. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意下列说法（1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）：

我认为租赁比购买更合适，因为我不论到任何地方都能拥有很多可选的产品。

相对于购买来说，租赁服务能给我提供更多满足我特定需要的产品。

相对于购买来说，租赁服务使我随时随地都能够很容易地更换其他产品。

使用租赁服务比购买产品更好，因为在众多共享的衣服之间更换会更加省时。

14. 您在什么程度上同意或不同意下列说法（1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）：

使用租赁服务代替购买能够减少我们消耗的自然资源。

15. 您在何种程度上同意或不同意下列说法（1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）：

我经常和朋友们一起使用共享服务。

我特别喜欢共享服务，因为我可以和朋友们一起用。

我喜欢共享服务，因为我可以认识新朋友。

认识新人并和大家社交是共享服务的一个重要优点。

第四部分-最后，可否请您简单介绍一下自己呢？

16. 您的生日是哪年? _____ (此处增加年份列表)

17. 以下哪个选项能够最准确地描述您现阶段的生活阶段?

单身, 无子女

单身, 有子女

非单身, 无子女

已婚, 有子女

<调查结束>

非常感谢您对我们的研究作出的贡献! 请不要忘记留下您的电话号码, 领取 YCloset 送给您的礼物。我们会尽快与您取得联系。

**Appendix 6: Comparisons of Items adopted from Richins and Dawson’s (1992) original
Material Values Scale (MVS) in This Thesis Versus Richins and Dawson’s (2004) MVS**

Dimensions	18 Items in the MVS Arranged by Subscale (Richins and Dawson, 1992)	15 Items Chosen in Richins and Dawson’s (2004) from Richins and Dawson’s (1992)
Success	1 I admire people who own expensive homes, furniture, cars, and clothes.	chosen
	2 Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	chosen
	3 I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.*	chosen
	4 The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	chosen
	5 I like to own things that impress people.	chosen
	6 I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own*	eliminated
Centrality	7 I usually only buy the things I need.*	eliminated
	8 I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.*	chosen
	9 The things I own aren't all that important to me.*	chosen
	10 I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical.	eliminated
	11 Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	chosen
	12 I like a lot of luxury in my life.	chosen
Happiness	13 I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.*	chosen
	14 I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.*	chosen
	15 My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	chosen
	16 I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.*	chosen
	17 I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	chosen
	18 It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	chosen

**Appendix 7: 8-Item Frugality Lifestyle Scale (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner and
Kuntze, 1999)**

Items in the Frugality Scale (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Shaw Hughner and Kuntze, 1999)	
1	If I take good care of my possessions, I will definitely save money in the long run
2	There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful
3	Making better use of my resources makes me feel good
4	If I can re-use an item you already have, there’s no sense in buying something new
5	I believe in being careful in how I spend my money
6	I discipline myself to get the most from my money
7	I am willing to wait on a purchase I want so that I can save money
8	There are things I resist buying today so I can save for tomorrow

Appendix 8: Nomological Validity Test on BESC's Relationships to Other Constructs

(Sprott et al., 2009)

NOMOLOGICAL VALIDITY: BESC RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER CONSTRUCTS

<i>Construct Measures</i>	α	<i>N</i>	r^a
RISC (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000)	.87	279	.152 *
Independent self-construal (Singelis 1994)	.64	199	-.027
Interdependent self-construal (Singelis 1994)	.74	199	.058
Collective self-esteem (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992)	.87	199	-.009
Self-concept clarity (Campbell et al. 1996)	.86	107	.090
Self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965)	.86	398	-.071
Satisfaction with life (Diener et al. 1985)	.86	398	-.011
Material values (Richins 2004)	.85	398	.420**
Self-deception (Paulhus 1998)	.68	199	-.076
Impression management (Paulhus 1998)	.80	199	-.064
Interpersonal Bem sex-role inventory: masculinity (Brems and Johnson 1990)	.86	107	-.073
Interpersonal Bem sex-role inventory: femininity (Brems and Johnson 1990)	.83	107	-.146

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

^a" r " represents correlation with BESC.

Appendix 9: Oyedele and Simpson's (2018) and Lamberton and Rose's (2012) Sharing

Utility Scales

Dimensions	Items to Measure Perceived Values in Renting over Buying (1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree")	
Transaction Utility	1	I feel that renting products offers significant cost saving relative to ownership.
	2	I feel that the cost of renting rather than buying service is a good deal.
	3	I feel that using renting service offers significant cost saving relative to ownership.
Flexibility Utility	1	I believe renting is better than owning because I can get access to many product options everywhere I go.
	2	Using rental service is better than owning a product because I can choose among numerous product options for different purposes.
	3	Compared to ownership, a rental service will allow me to get access to products that fit my specific needs.
	4	Compared to ownership, a rental service makes it easy for me to change my choice of product virtually anywhere, anytime I want.
Social Utility	5	Using a rental service is better than owning a product because the process of switching between multiple shared dresses is not time consuming.
	1	I often use sharing services with my friends.
	2	I especially like sharing services because I can use them with my friends.
	3	I enjoy sharing services because I meet other people.
Prosocial Utility	4	Meeting and socializing with other people are an important advantage of using sharing services.
	1	Renting instead of owning them reduces our usage of natural resources.

Appendix 10: Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) Brand Loyalty Scale

Items in Measuring Brand Loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978) (1="very strongly disagree"; 7="very strongly agree")	
1	I will <i>buy</i> the same brand the next time I have to <i>buy</i> a product from this category.
2	I intend to keep <i>purchasing</i> this brand.
3	I am committed to this brand.
4	I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.

Appendix 11: Summary of Coding of the Brand of a Recently Rented Item

Question 6	
Brand	What is the brand you rented recently?
1	don't know / forgot / not sure / don't care
2	many different brands / any brand / no particular brand
3	Elitime
4	Komiline
5	太平鸟 (a brand name; Pinyin: Tai Ping Niao)
6	Ycloset
7	Komello
8	others
Question 9	
TimesR	how many times rented?
1	Once
2	2-5 times
3	>5 times
Question 10	
Duration	How long rent each time?
1	<1w
2	1w-1m
3	>1m
Question 16	
Life	Lifestage
1	single, no children
2	single, have children
3	non single, no children
4	married, have children

Appendix 12: The Chosen Structural Model in Amos

