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BRINGING FASHION RENTING TO THE MAINSTREAM

Customer-centricity of fashion rental companies

Faculty of Management and Business

Master's thesis

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ABSTRACT

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MARIA TOIVANEN: *Bringing fashion renting to the mainstream: Customer-centricity of fashion rental companies*

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Today's conscious consumers have begun to question the unethical business models associated with fast fashion and are seeking sustainable alternatives for clothing consumption. This sustainability movement has created a rise in business models of collaborative fashion consumption (CFC) where instead of buying, consumers only access new clothes whilst prolonging the life of the garments. Renting, the 'Netflix' for closets is a prominent form of CFC and a market that is projected to grow exponentially in the coming years. Despite the sustainability benefits, renting has yet to gain popularity among the mainstream. Since the success of fashion renting depends on consumer acceptance, this study explores how fashion rental companies accommodate to consumers' value creation through their service models. The findings can then guide fashion rental companies in designing their service offering to be customer centric, helping them to bring the service to the mainstream.

Customer-centricity is understood through the theory of customer-dominant logic (CDL). It asserts that value is not created by the service provider, but rather it arises in consumers' everyday lifeworld relating to consumers lived or imaginary experiences in present, past or future. This study utilizes multiple qualitative methods. To understand how consumers experience value whilst using rental services, a netnography of 20 YouTube videos and blog articles is carried out. These findings form the discussion points for semi-structured interviews with six Nordic fashion rental companies, operating both physically and online.

This study finds that consumers experience value within the affective and psychological spaces of their lifeworld, meaning that a lot of the aspects that brought value and retracted it in the renting experience had to do with emotions, opinions, concerns, and fears of consumers. Hedonic value was experienced through discovering new clothes and the self-actualization it brought. Utilitarian value was found through saving money from shopping. Finally, environmental value of being able to consume clothes more sustainably brought guilt relief to consumers. Value, on the other hand, is destructed by concerns about the hygiene and ruining the clothes, as well as getting used to giving up ownership. Mainly, consumers value services that require as little effort as possible on their part.

Clothing rental stores focus on accommodating to these value creators and destructors through considerate selection of clothing, providing experiences and guaranteeing ease of service. The service models of the Nordic clothing rental companies studied in this thesis are customer-oriented, but on the other hand there are also areas for development, especially in terms of ease of service. The study contributes to the fashion industry's sustainable transition by helping fashion rental companies to be customer-centric and thus, more attractive to the mainstream.

Keywords: fashion renting, clothing renting, collaborative fashion consumption (CFC), customer-dominant logic

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MARIA TOIVANEN: *Bringing fashion renting to the mainstream: Customer-centricity of fashion rental companies*

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Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten asiakaslähtöisyys ilmenee vaatelainaamoiden palvelumalleissa. Vaatteiden vuokraus on yhteisöllinen vaatteiden kuluttamisen muoto, jolla on suuri merkitys muotialan kestävästä kehityksestä kannalta. Vaatteiden vuokraus, niin kutsuttu vaatteiden 'Netflix' on markkina, jonka ennustetaan nousevan eksponentiaalisesti lähivuosien aikana. Vuokraus on kuitenkin uusi kulutusmuoto kuluttajien keskuudessa, eikä täten ole vielä osa valtavirtaa sen ympäristöeduista huolimatta. Tutkimuksen keskeisin tavoite onkin ymmärtää miten vaatelainaamot tuottavat palvelumalleillaan asiakkaille arvoa, jotta kyseiset kulutusmallit voisivat nousta valtavirran suosioon.

Asiakaslähtöisyys ymmärretään asiakasdominoivan logiikan kautta, jossa painopiste on asiakkaissa ja siinä, miten he kokevat palvelun. Asiakasdominoivan logiikan mukaan arvo syntyy asiakkaan elämässä palvelua ennen, sen aikana ja jälkeen, usein näkymättömissä palveluntuottajalle. Tutkimusaineisto kerätään kahdella metodilla. Tutkimus pyrkii ensin netnografian avulla ymmärtämään millaista arvoa kuluttajat kokevat arjessaan käyttäessään vaatelainaamojen palveluita. Netnografiasta nousseet arvoa luovat ja vähentävät aspektit muodostavat keskustelupointit osittain jäseneltyihin haastatteluihin kuuden pohjoismaisen vaatelainaamon kanssa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ilmentävät, että vaatteiden vuokratessa syntyvä arvo liittyy vahvasti kuluttajien tunnemaailmaan eli tuntemuksiin, kokemuksiin, mielipiteisiin ja huolenaiheisiin. Mielihyväarvoa luo uusien vaatteiden kokeilu ja sen kautta itsensä toteuttaminen. Asiakas kokee myös käyttöarvoa rahan säästämisestä sekä ympäristöarvoa vihreämmän kulutusvalinnan kautta. Arvoa taas vähentää huoli vaatteiden hygieniasta ja rikkomisesta sekä totuttelu omistajuudesta luopumiseen. Pääasiassa kuluttajat arvostavat palveluita, jotka vaativat mahdollisimman vähän vaivaa heidän osaltaan.

Vaatelainaamot vastaavat kuluttajien kokemaan arvoon ja sen vähentäjiin eri tavoin. Päällimmäiset keinot asiakaslähtöisyyteen keskittyvät mietittyyn vaatevalikoimaan, elämyksien tarjoamiseen ja palvelun helppouden takaamiseen. Pohjoismaisten vaatelainaamoiden palvelumallit ovat asiakaslähtöisesti suunniteltuja, mutta toisaalta myös kehityskohteita löytyy erityisesti palvelun helppouden osalta. Tutkimuksen keskeiset löydökset voivat auttaa vaatelainaamoita muokkaamaan palveluaan entistä asiakaslähtöisemmäksi.

Avainsanat: vaatteiden vuokraus, vaatelainaamot, yhteisöllinen kuluttaminen, asiakasdominoiva logiikka

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Bringing fashion renting to the mainstream

Today's conscious consumers have begun to question the unethical business models associated with the fashion industry and especially fast fashion (Kim, Jung Choo & Yoon, 2013) and are seeking alternative clothing consumption models. Renting is a distinguished form of access-based consumption and is growing popularity in the fashion industry (Lang, 2018). However, the concept of renting clothes has yet to take hold among the mainstream consumers despite the boom of initiatives based around it (Pedersen & Netter, 2015), including companies such as Rent The Runway, Le Tote and HURR Collective.

An emerging group of research has started to investigate how consumers view access-based clothing consumption and more specifically, renting. Consumers find that accessing clothes through renting enables them to reduce their excess consumption and ecological footprint, as well as helps them experiment with their style and creativity without having to own the items (Armstrong et al., 2016). On the flipside, perceived value destructors include issues ranging from emotional, economical, hygienic and convenience aspects (Armstrong et al., 2015; Lang, 2018). As an emerging understanding of the consumer views on renting clothing exists, it is time to turn the inquiry towards the company side. Despite the opportunism academia has expressed towards adoption of renting fashion, the company perspective of fashion renting has gone under-researched.

In order to bring fashion renting towards the mainstream, the clothing rental companies should be able to make their offering as convenient and desirable to the consumer as possible. In other words, fashion rental companies should be able to create value to their customers. This study aims to understand how rental fashion companies' current service offerings support value creation in consumers' lives. Value is understood from the viewpoint of customer-dominant logic (CDL), denoting that value is generated in-use within consumers' own lifeworld (Heinonen et al., 2010; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015). The study has two parts: first, consumer value-in-use is identified through netnographic data collection from blogs and videos detailing consumers' fashion renting experiences. Second, these findings are used as a basis of the questions in interviews with six Nordic fashion rental companies.

1.2. Background and problematization

Recently, sustainability issues regarding the fashion industry have come to the consumer forefront. Besides the environmental concerns over the water and chemical-intensive production process, the social sustainability of the supply chains has been questioned. Driven by increased consumption of cheap clothing in the West, clothing retailers have outsourced their production to low and middle-income countries (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). The working conditions within these factories have been criticized as the employees are exposed to health hazards and long working hours for low pay (ibid.), coining the term ‘sweat shops’. Simultaneously consumers are now more aware than ever, questioning the unethical practices of fast fashion brands and demanding more sustainable clothing alternatives.

This sustainability movement has created a rise in emerging business models circling around the idea of prolonging the life of the garment. One potential concept within the resale market is fashion renting, a sort of ‘Netflix’ for closets (GFA, 2017). Distinguished fashion rental companies such as Rent the Runway and HURR have entered the market and provide consumers the opportunity to access clothes for a fraction of the retail price (Lang, 2018). Traditional retailers are also following through the trend. For example, the retail giant H&M is piloting their clothing rental experiment in their flagship store in Stockholm, where consumers can rent garments for up to 350 kronor a week. After the initial trial, the company will consider expansion as its competitors such as Urban Outfitters have already jumped on the bandwagon (Wilen, 2019). Looking forward, the industry is expected to rise to a value of US\$ 2.08 Billion by 2025 (Businesswire, 2020).

Despite the boom of initiatives lately, fashion rentals remain small-scale business models with difficulties gaining mainstream popularity (Pedersen & Netter, 2015). In the past, renting has been limited to special occasion attire such as tuxedos and gowns. Convincing consumers to rent everyday clothing is challenging as it contradicts the prevalent norm of clothing ownership (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a). The corona virus pandemic that hit the globe in 2020 further hindered the growth of fashion rentals with lockdowns being enforced around the world and consumers choosing sleepwear over the going-out clothes they would typically rent (Brydges et al., 2021). On the other hand, the pandemic may prove to be a fertile time for fashion rental companies as consumers have had a period for self-reflection over their consumption habits.

Thus, it is now more important than ever for fashion rental companies to understand what their consumers need and implement it to their service models.

The academic community has sought to understand customer perspectives on fashion renting, but only few studies have investigated fashion rental companies: Pedersen and Netter (2015) described the business model of fashion libraries generally whereas Iran & Schrader (2017) explored their barriers and opportunities. Adam and colleagues (2018) studied the dynamic capabilities of early-stage rental firms in depth. However, surprisingly no study exists that would explore how fashion rental companies exactly accommodate to those consumer preferences. After all, the success of fashion renting is dependent on consumer acceptance. Renting instead of ownership represents a significant change for consumers who are used to purchasing clothes and therefore, fashion rental companies should support value creation in consumers' lives.

This study aims to tackle this research gap by identifying how fashion rental companies' service offerings accommodate to consumers' in-use value creation. Value is understood with a customer-dominant logic: it arises in consumers' everyday lifeworld, relating to consumers' lived or imaginary experiences in present, past or future. Value can rise in e.g. biological, physical, psychological and social spaces of the customer. It is thus formed within the broader reality and ecosystem of the customer, a "potential value landscape" (Heinonen, Strandvik & Voima, 2010; 2013). Therefore, the research takes into consideration any value creating activities in consumers' lifeworld, be it e.g. experiences, practices or mental processes. The scope of analyzed company offerings will focus on Nordic fashion rental companies, operating both online and offline. To uncover the research gap, the research questions are as follows:

1.3. Research questions

Q1: What kinds of value do consumers experience whilst using fashion rental services?

Q2: How do the current fashion renting companies accommodate to consumers' in-use value creation with their service offerings?

The research questions will be addressed through different qualitative research methods. The first research question is researched through the a netnography of consumers who have

created reviews of fashion renting services online. The second question is uncovered through the method of semi-qualitative interviews with fashion rental companies.

2. CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY OF FASHION RENTING

2.1. Customer-dominant logic

Underlying, dominant business logics have stimulated discussion in the research and business communities for already a few decades (Andersson et al., 2010). Dominant logic refers to the underpinning perceptions of how and where value is created in the company. It guides both the practitioners and researchers as it provides a lense for the strategic company decisions and research angles (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015). In recent years a business logic called customer-dominant logic (CDL) has come to the dominant-logic forefront. CDL challenges the traditional service-provider focused logics whereby the provider of services creates value. In these logics customers are left in the somewhat passive role of choosing available offerings, disregarding what happens after the customer-service provider interaction (Andersson et al., 2010; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015).

CDL flips the agenda and focuses on the customer entirely instead of analyzing service and product qualities, costs or growth. CDL aims to understand the customer's logic and how the service provider's offerings can become ingrained in the customer's life. Rather than focusing on what the company could do to sell their products, CDL suggests that the focus should be on what customers are trying to achieve by using the company's products and services. More specifically, the theory looks at how customers embed the offering into their life context, activities, practices and experiences (Heinonen et al., 2010).

CDL asserts that value arises in customers own actions and experiences outside the service provider-customer interaction. The underlying ethos is that value is formed in-use within customers' context of living. Value is thus subjective, formed in e.g. biological, physical, mental, social, geographical and virtual spaces of the customer, the so-called 'lifeworld'. Thus, the moments where value is formed are often invisible and uncontrollable to the service provider and thus cannot be deliberately created by companies (Heinonen et al., 2010; Heinonen, et al, 2013).

Heinonen et al (2010) argue three respects on how value has become more invisible to companies. Firstly, the customer's time frame is more extensive than just the service situation. Value can rise before, during and after acquiring the good or service. Using an example of renting clothing, customer value can emerge before the rental from the excitement of trying

new garments. During the wear, value is gained by getting compliments from peers, and after the rental in terms of not having the item sitting in the closet unused. Secondly, when value arises in the mental/social spaces of the customer's life, companies have a harder time gaining an understanding of it. Finally, customers exist in a dynamic social structure with certain roles, positions and interactions. For example, a customer might be interested in renting clothes but lives in a social structure where value of fashion and changing styles is considered vain or not worthwhile. These three invisibilities all interplay in customers' value assessments, and therefore they argue that value formation is not a deliberate or logical process that can be measured. The same service or product may be interpreted differently depending on the experiential context at the time (Heinonen et al., 2013). For example, a stressed customer renting a dress last minute for a special event has different value potential than a customer taking time to browse the rental selection for something experimental and fun.

2.2. Company implications of adopting customer-dominant logic

Since value is not merely created in the visible and controlled service interactions, CDL poses new perspectives and challenges for service providers. In essence, companies need to switch their mindset from provider logic (i.e. how do customers see our product) into how they could fit into the customer's world. The main focus is no longer what kind of service consumers want, but rather how their life and ecosystem reflect on their needs. Thus, the starting point for innovating offerings is to understand what would support value creation in customer's own context, activities and processes (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015). As value can arise in so many spaces of the customers' life, service providers should familiarize themselves with their customers lifestyles on a deeper level than before (Heinonen et al., 2010). In practice, this means that companies need to revise their customer research tools and approaches.

Traditionally customers have been studied by asking their perceptions about offerings or by studying how they use an offering in their own life, giving only a small snippet into customer's logics (Heinonen et al., 2010). Instead of identifying specific needs and trying to satisfy them, CDL steers companies to look into a more holistic picture of how customers live their lives. Looking into routines, practices, hobbies and other activities of customers sheds light into where offerings could be created. However, customers do not linearly perform activities but rather are multifaceted beings affected by their internal and external living contexts. Therefore,

companies should study their customers' social norms, values, living arrangements, rhythm of life and other factors that make customers who they are (Heinonen et al., 2013). With this knowledge, companies then need to design offerings that could be easily fit into the customers' existing and future lifeworlds (Heinonen et al., 2010).

2.3. Customer-dominant logic in the context of fashion renting

CDL denotes that companies should design their offerings to support customers' lifestyles and activities. However, what if the service/good offering requires drastic adaptation to customers' current lifestyles and habits? In offerings such as fashion renting, customers are asked to give up ownership of their clothing items which goes against the traditional clothing consumption habits. Fashion renting is indeed a fruitful empirical context for studying CDL.

Firstly, clothing renting is a longer process in the consumer's life compared to traditional clothing purchasing: interested consumers either have to go to a physical store and try on the clothes or make best guesses of the fit online. During wear consumer experiences different value dimensions, but those are short-lived as the clothing must eventually be returned to the renter. Thanks to the longer process, the service provider has more chances to learn about the customer's life and establish their role in it. Secondly, fashion renting is not a widely adopted consumption model as of yet. If consumers have not accepted renting service as part of their life, fashion rental companies more than ever have to understand their potential customers on a deeper level. Finally, besides clothing being a physiological need, it carries a lot of socio-psychological meanings and thus fashion renting most likely stimulates value in multiple spaces of the customer's life. For example, the rented clothing can give consumers peer acceptance which stimulates value in the social space of the consumer's lifeworld. Therefore, clothing renting provides fertile value aspects for customer-dominant logic analysis.

2.4. Linear business model of the fashion industry

The production processes of the fashion industry have faced a lot of scrutiny recently. As the production of fashion has moved to low-cost production countries, clothes are now produced cheaper and in higher quantities than ever before. This has had its problematic effects on both human rights and the environment: as clothing needs to be produced speedily and affordably, the clothing factories across cheap-labor countries expose their workers to long hours of work for miniscule pay, ignoring the wellbeing of the employees. Sometimes this comes at the cost of human lives as the disastrous collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013 came to show. A commercial building hosting five garment factories collapsed and killed over 1000 workers, bringing the issue to industry forefront. Further, the toxic chemicals, water and energy used in the production processes put strains on the ecosystems in the production countries as well as the entire globe through accelerated climate change (GFA, 2017).

All these issues are exacerbated by the linear business model of the fashion industry. Cheap production enables the fashion companies to offer cheap prices and fast trends, often in low quality which drives consumers to purchase, wear and dispose of the clothing at an unprecedented speed. The amount of clothes bought per person within the EU has increased by 40 % within last the two decades (EPRS, 2019). At the same time, around 30% of clothes in the household wardrobe typically have been unused for at least a year (WRAP, 2012). Customer behavior studies have found that some garments get an estimated wear time of only seven to ten wears before their disposal (Ellen McArthur Foundation, 2017). Once discarded, around half of the textiles get recycled and rest ends up as waste. These figures are especially prominent in wealthy Nordic countries, where more than half of the amount of textile products bought by consumers are disposed as waste in the municipal waste stream (Tojo & Kogg, 2012). Minuscule 1% of recycled clothing ends up becoming new clothes whilst most get cascaded to other industries for lower-value applications, such as insulation materials, stuffings and cleaning cloths. The fashion industry thus follows a “take-make-dispose” model, a linear model where raw materials are extracted and made into consumable products that are eventually disposed. The responsibility of the clothing producer ends at the point of sales and pushing new sales is the very logic of their business model (Ellen McArthur Foundation, 2017).

2.5. Moving towards circular approaches

The diverse environmental and social problems caused by the linear logic have motivated the research community and practitioners to direct attention towards more circular thinking in fashion. Circular economy is an “economic system that replaces the ‘end-of-life’ thinking with reducing, reusing, recycling and recovering materials in production/distribution and consumption processes” (Kirchherr, Reike & Hekkert, 2017, p.229). It is a closed loop whereby waste is minimized and re-processed into new material, keeping the once produced material in the production loop for as long as possible (EPRS, 2019).

In fashion industry, the closed-loop systems actualize when textile material is prevented from ending up as pure waste. There are two ways to do it: either by converting the textiles for new purposes or by extending the usetime of the clothes (Niinimäki, 2018). Since many textiles are synthetic and include harmful chemicals, they cannot be composted and brought back to the soil as in a natural, biological cycle. Furthermore, even bio-based textiles compost too slowly to fit in cities’ composting systems. Therefore, closing the loop with textiles is more feasible through technical processes whereby the textile waste is processed into new yarns and fibers (ibid.). Both pre- and post-consumer textile waste needs to be collected, separated by material and processed which requires sophisticated logistics, technology and behavioral change from both the company and consumer side (Leonas, 2017). Much work remains to be done in the end-of-use phase, but luckily industry initiatives such as the 2020 Circular Fashion System Commitment by Global Fashion Agenda show great promise. The agreement, signed by over 100 companies representing 12% of the fashion industry has action points on designing new strategies for recycling and increasing the collection of used garments, as well as the volume of garments made from recycled post-consumer textile fiber (GFA, 2018).

The overall volume of clothing ending up for recycling would be significantly smaller if clothes would remain in circulation longer. Consumer aims, behaviors and activities have a big role in the circulation times. Initially, consumers choose which clothes they want to purchase, be it fair trade, second hand or fast fashion. After purchase, consumers choose how they want to use and conserve their clothes. Do they repair the item after its broken? Do they try to find new uses for old, boring clothes? Even laundry practices affect the longevity of the fabrics. By the end-of-use phase, they can determine whether to reuse, recycle or re-design the clothing instead of throwing it into waste (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Prolonging the life cycle of clothing by

additional nine months of use would reduce carbon emissions, waste tonnage and water usage by 30 percent (GFA, 2017).

Hence, prolonging clothing usage is a key opportunity to make a difference for the environment. Making fewer and more mindful clothing purchases, washing clothes less and at lower temperatures, prolonging active use time and recycling are more sustainable ways of consuming clothes (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Beyond the traditional consumption model of purchasing new items, new collaborative models have been on the rise as a way of prolonging clothing usage.

2.6. Collaborative fashion consumption - new business models on the rise

Collaborative consumption is about consumers sharing goods and services to meet their needs (Pedersen & Netter, 2015). Collaborative consumption companies have been a boom especially within space and transport access as the boom of AirBnb, Uber, Tier and companies alike have shown. Although still not mainstream, fashion can be consumed in a collaborative manner just as any other item. In collaborative fashion consumption (CFC) consumers access new garments without purchasing and acquiring ownership (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Typical forms of consumption in CFC include gifting, swapping, sharing, lending, and renting fashion. In these models, clothing remains longer in circulation which reduces fashion industry's reliance on natural resources and redundant consumption of clothes in general. Collaborative consumption may also transform the industry towards the pre-fast fashion era: clothes may be designed for longevity to accommodate for CFC models (Armstrong et al., 2015).

These alternative ways of acquiring clothing are not new, yet the speed of consumer adoption has increased thanks to advancements in ICT technologies. Today, physical and digital marketplaces/platforms exist for both peer-to-peer (P2P) and business-to-consumer (B2C) clothing consumption (ibid). In P2P consumption consumers share clothing with other consumers, usually facilitated through company platforms such as apps. However, a group of friends organizing swapping parties or lending clothes to each other is also considered P2P collaborative consumption (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). In the B2C space, many emerging business models circling around the idea of reuse are popping up. Especially prominent sub-industry within CFC centers around clothing rentals, a popular and alternative way to extend the life cycle of garments.

2.7. Fashion renting - part of the CFC framework

This study focuses on renting which is a form of collaborative consumption that is highly popular within the CFC framework (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Figure 1 demonstrates the contextualization of renting within the framework. Fashion renting refers to the rental of new or secondhand clothing pieces for consumers' everyday and occasion use. This CFC model provides consumers an endless, alternative closet where they can choose new items to access. The main value in the model is its ability to satisfy consumers' need for novelty without the burden of ownership (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a). The item's ownership stays with the company (B2C) or the item owner (P2P) whereas the consumer pays a fee to wear the clothes (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). There are two types of renting models: either consumers pay to rent specific or they access a 'Netflix for clothing' model where they try out new clothes on a monthly with a subscription fee (GFA, 2017). Fashion renting is different from the traditional clothing rental for special occasions such as renting gowns and tuxedos that has been around for decades. This is because fashion rental companies often also offer everyday and office attire, believing that collaborative clothing consumption should extend itself beyond the special occasion space (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a).

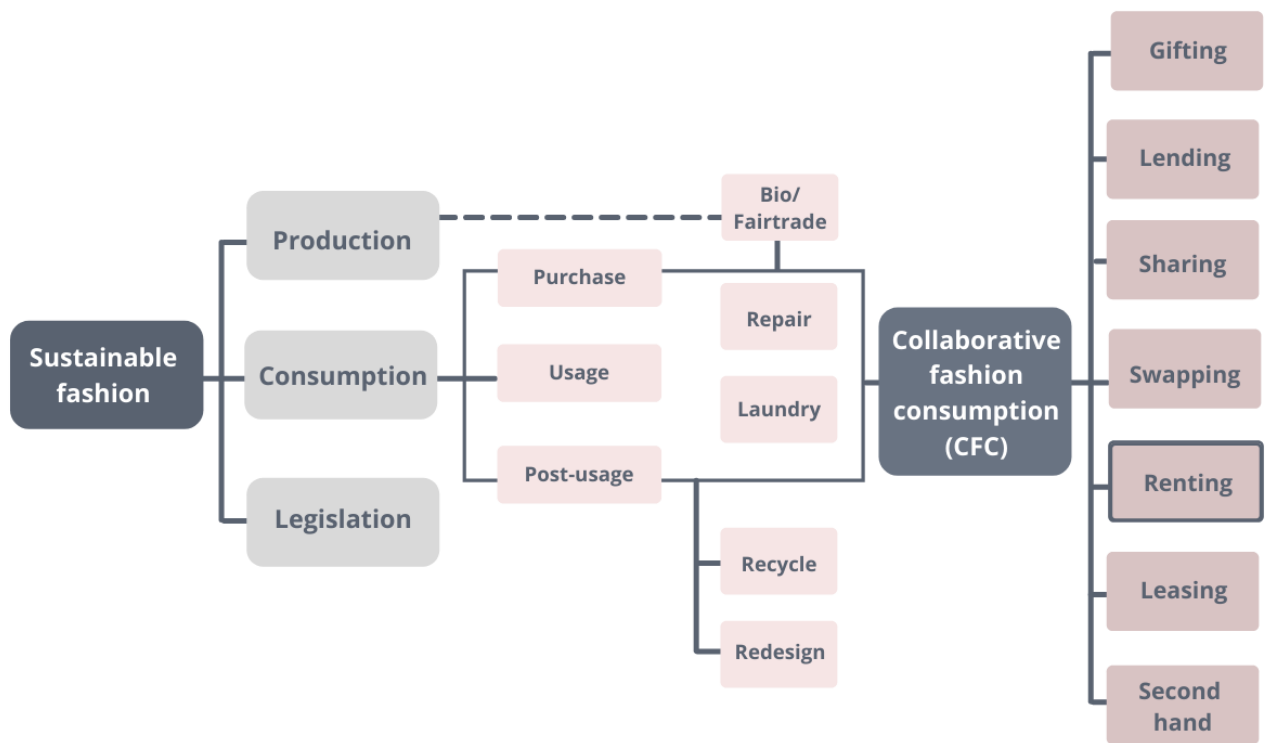


Figure 1. Renting in the larger context of collaborative fashion consumption CFC (Modified from Iran & Schrader, 2017 p.471)

Clothing renting can occur online through online fashion rentals as well as in physical shops. Consumers can rent clothes through an app or website whereby the pieces are delivered to consumer's door or a pick-up location. Renting can also occur in a physical space such as a department store or a clothing rental store. After wear, the consumer is expected to return the clothing, possibly washed (Niinimäki, 2018). The typical target audience is relatively young, predominantly female consumer who is open to alternatives to conventional shopping. On average, fashion rental companies serve around 100-300 members actively (Pedersen & Netter, 2015). Despite the boom of initiatives lately, fashion rentals remain a rather small-scale business with difficulties gaining popularity in the mainstream market (Pedersen & Netter, 2015). In the past, renting has been limited to special occasion attire. Convincing consumers to rent everyday clothing is a challenge, not least because it contradicts the prevalent norm of ownership (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a).

2.8. Consumer opinions on the value creators and destructors of fashion renting

The consumer opinions on fashion renting are rather well understood in the research through quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodology studies conducted within the last decade. Surveys are the most common method for the quantitative studies: for example, Lang & Armstrong surveyed for the effect of the tendency to buy new fashion earlier than other (2018a) as well as the need for uniqueness, and materialism (2018b) on female consumers' adoption of alternative clothing consumption models, including renting. Armstrong & colleagues used a mixed methods approach, utilizing both surveys and focus group methods to collect fashion-oriented female consumers' perceptions of alternative consumption models (2015), also comparing cross-culturally between the US and Finland (2016). In qualitative research, the methods included interviews and even nontraditional methods such as content analysis of customer reviews on fashion rental websites, example being McKinney & Shin' (2016) study in which they uncovered the evaluative criteria customers use in assessing their fashion rental experience. Through a literature review, it became apparent that these studies identified similar themes of the consumer-perceived value creators and destructors.

2.9. Consumer-perceived value

2.9.1. Hedonic value

Clothing renting allows consumers to always have new, diverse and fashionable clothing which satisfies the consumer need for change and newness (Armstrong et al., 2016). Consumers often feel irritated for owning too many clothes as they feel that they are spending too much money, especially if the clothes end up hanging in closets unused. Especially items purchased for certain events end up gathering dust in the closet (Lang et al., 2020). Fashion renting eliminates this problem consumers get to return the item after they have enjoyed the clothing for a period of time.

Consumers want to access diverse clothing pieces for multitude of reasons. Firstly, fashion trends come and go quickly and therefore trend-following consumers can try the trends without being stuck with 'last season' pieces (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a). Some consumers might be able to try out items outside their price range as many renting platforms carry luxury or branded items. Renting such items may create positive experiences of self-expression or belonging to a certain consumer group (Lang & Armstrong, 2018b). Besides price and brands, consumers might be able to try out materials, colours, quality and styles they would not normally go for

with ownership burden. Renting is perceived as a way to step out of comfort zone and try new styles without risks (Armstrong et al., 2016). The hunt for unique items and social interactions involved in renting allow the customer to express individuality and have fun with dressing up (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018).

2.9.2. Utilitarian value

As consumers only buy access to clothing, they end up paying less than what they would if they bought the item. Thus, saving money is a value consumers often site with fashion renting. This applies to consumers with limited financial means but also to consumers who want to reduce their clothing spending (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). The sentiment holds especially true for fashion goods in high price points that might ordinarily be economically inaccessible. Consumers get to try out the item before committing to the investment (Armstrong et al., 2016). Renting is generally good for trying out new items before making the purchase decision. Consumers might plan on investing in a clothing or accessory piece but want to first test out how the item would fit into their lifestyle. By renting the item, consumers can avoid wrong purchases (Lang et al., 2020). Another utilitarian value mentioned by Lang and colleagues' (2020) interviewees was ease of use in online rental experiences. Consumers appreciate user-friendly interface applications and easy delivery and return operations.

2.9.3. Environmental value

Environmental and ethical benefits of reusing clothes are also drivers for consumers, although the importance of the environmental aspect to renting acceptance has been contested. Based on prior research, Armstrong and colleagues (2015) asserted that companies cannot rely on the sustainability arguments or environmentalism of consumers to encourage collaborative models. However, they found that environmental benefits of renting made the concept attractive to consumers. This seems to hold especially true for individuals already possessing positive beliefs about sustainable consumption, a group that is more likely to rent clothing (Lang & Armstrong, 2018b). One of the key value aspects is preventing wasteful disposal of items and also gaining 'freedom' of the traditional fashion system (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018).

2.10. Consumer-perceived value destruction

2.10.1. Hygiene concerns

One of the recurring negative evaluations of rental fashion is trust in the providers clothing hygiene practices, especially when the items are worn close to the skin. The concerns occur since multiple people rent and wear the same items (Lang, 2018). Consumers are troubled by issues such as bugs and how the rental companies sanitize the clothes (Armstrong et al., 2016). Further studies confirm scares of bacteria from previous wearers, odors and dirtiness (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). Although the rental companies, individual owners or sometimes even the renters themselves are required to clean the items in between wears, being unaware of the used cleaning process worries consumers (Lang, Seo & Liu, 2019). Thus, consumers are likely to appreciate clear policies of the cleaning procedure (Lang, 2018).

2.10.2. Liability concerns

Among hygiene concerns, consumers worry about damaging or ruining the rented item. Clothing care can be complex as different fabrics require different washing conditions. Therefore, consumers are concerned about their capability of taking care of rented pieces and keeping them in like-new condition (Armstrong et al., 2016). Especially concerning is whether they have any guarantee or insurance policy for the item in case the item is tarnished. Consumers are not sure about their responsibility in case of accidents: do they have to pay the item back in full, is there a buy-back scheme et cetera (Armstrong et al., 2016; Lang, 2018). Further, there can be concerns of whether the damage was really the customer's fault or if the rented clothing piece was already of poor quality, or improperly maintained by the renter (Lang et al., 2019).

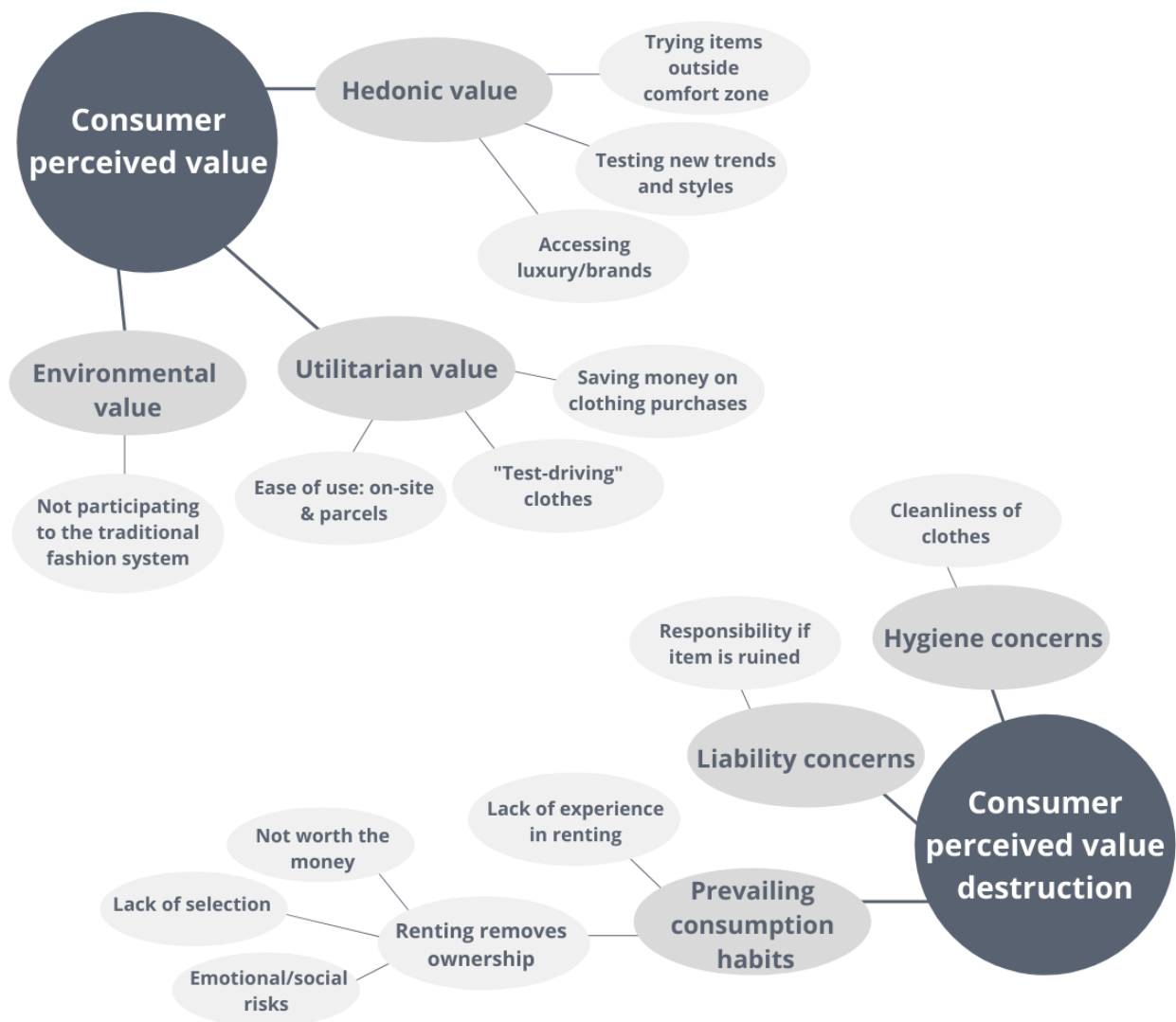
2.10.3. Prevailing consumption habits

Current clothing consumption revolves around personal ownership. Renting removes personal ownership which is perceived to destruct value for some consumers. Consuming clothes involves emotional and psychological aspects such as self-expression, status signaling, rush of acquiring new clothing and memory creation. Removing ownership through renting could possibly diminish these aspects from the consumption experience (Armstrong et al., 2015; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). Consumers also worry that they might want to keep the rented item after getting attached to them. Attachment to clothing is especially prevalent with everyday clothing as some consumers buy items they truly wear day-to-day, thus diminishing the

usefulness of the service (Armstrong et al., 2016). For some, clothing and ownership is highly attached to status. These consumers may be concerned that people perceive them as unable to afford those items, potentially damaging their social image (Lang et al., 2019). If renting presents a psychological risk to self-image, consumers are less likely to enjoy renting (Lang, 2018).

Because the consumer is not gaining ownership to the item, they might question the cost-benefit ratio of renting. They might not find it worth the money to only temporarily access the products and therefore paying for short usage is perceived as a waste (Lang, 2018). If rental fees come close to buying the product, consumers prefer to buy (Armstrong et al., 2016). Cost-benefit ratio is also highly affected by the offered clothing selection. When consumers buy clothing, they have endless options to browse from whereas the selection at rental companies depends on what the renters have acquired. The range and sizes of the clothing vary as clothing rental companies are not able to offer endless options. Also, consumers' favorite pieces might be rented out to another consumer at the point of renting. If the clothes are not ready to rent out, consumers may perceive this as a sacrifice to their selection range (Armstrong et al., 2016: Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018: Lang et al., 2020). Further concerns of accessibility arise especially with online rental services where consumers are not able to try on the items. By not being able to touch and feel the clothing items, consumers expressed concerns of whether the fit and quality of the items is right (Lang, 2018). Further service complaints online are slow deliveries (Lang et al., 2020) and easy site navigation (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). These aspects related to ease of use are similar to any e-commerce store, but their importance is emphasized since renting is not a widely adopted form of consuming clothes. Indeed, Armstrong and colleagues (2015) found that the lack of existing well-known industry examples may cause lack of trust in the providers. Tu and Hu's (2018) questionnaire findings revealed that most of the participants had not clearly recognized the perceived benefits of renting.

Figure 2. Consumer-perceived value and value destructors from previous research.



2.11. Value-in-use in clothing renting

Consumers' perceived value and value destructors in clothing renting are well-understood in the research. The reoccurring themes from previous literature are summarized in Figure 2 above. However, almost all the studies within the literature review did not require participants to have

any *actual* fashion renting experiences. To the author's best knowledge, only few exceptions exist: Tu and Hu (2018) used consumers of rental fashion platform as the questionnaire participants whereas Lang and colleagues (2020) used the customer reviews of three clothing rental websites. Beyond these studies, no rental experience was required and hence the findings remain as customer perceptions. This raises a gap in knowledge about customer-dominant logic and fashion renting: how do consumers experience value in-use beyond the service process? What phenomena in consumers' lifeworld creates value within fashion renting? In order to study the phenomenon of fashion renting with CDL viewpoint, there was a need to gather primary data that would detail consumer insights from individuals who have actually used fashion renting services. Netnography was deemed as the most suitable method for this purpose as it enables the researchers to mine data online from individuals who rented clothing through fashion rental companies. This method will intend to answer to the research question 1.

After research question 1, the focus will shift on the company perspective. As the literature on fashion rental companies service models is scarce, the literature review on the topic is limited. This study intends to enrich the knowledge on fashion rental companies. Company perspective of fashion renting will be discovered in the semi-structured interviews. This will be the core part of answering the study's research question 2.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Qualitative approach

The study follows a qualitative research methodology and combines its methods, both netnographic data collection and semi-structured interviews. As this study aspires to understand *how* fashion rental companies accommodate to consumers' value creation in their lifeworlds, it was necessary to have a methodology that seeks to collect rich and extensive data. The qualitative research instruments such as interviews allow the researcher to ask open-ended questions from the respondents, giving richer data of their perspectives on a phenomenon (Ospina, 2004). Fashion rental companies and their service logics are a novel research topic about which more information is needed. Qualitative research offers the right kinds of methods for explaining something that is not extensively researched. The theoretical framework of customer-dominant logic will be the underlying theoretical basis for all data collection, interview questions, data analysis and conclusions. Therefore, the study carries a theoretical assumption that companies create value by being customer centric. The study looks at the theory in the context of fashion-renting, producing analysis of how fashion rental companies are accommodating to consumer value creation with their offerings. The analysis is done by observing and looking for patterns in the data, therefore following an inductive research philosophy (Woo, O'Boyle & Spector, 2017). However, the themes identified in literature review most likely had an unconscious bias effect on those patterns which brings deductive elements to the analysis as well.

3.2. Research process

First, a research gap was identified within fashion renting through a literature review using various academic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar. After specifying the research gap (fashion rental companies' customer-centricity) and research questions, there was a need to collect primary data on both consumers' lifeworld and fashion rental companies' activities that accommodate for these practices. The data is thus collected through two qualitative methods: netnography and semi-structured interviews. The netnographic enquiry was executed in order to uncover the consumer value creation (through e.g. experiences, activities and mental processes) in relation to fashion renting. These findings

were used as a basis for the talking points in the semi-structured interviews. The interview requests were sent to both online and physical clothing rental companies within Nordic countries. The interviews were all recorded, transcribed and then coded into the main themes that arose from netnography. The final results attempt to explain how the current fashion renting companies accommodate to value creation within the consumer lifeworld. The process is summarized in Figure 3 below.

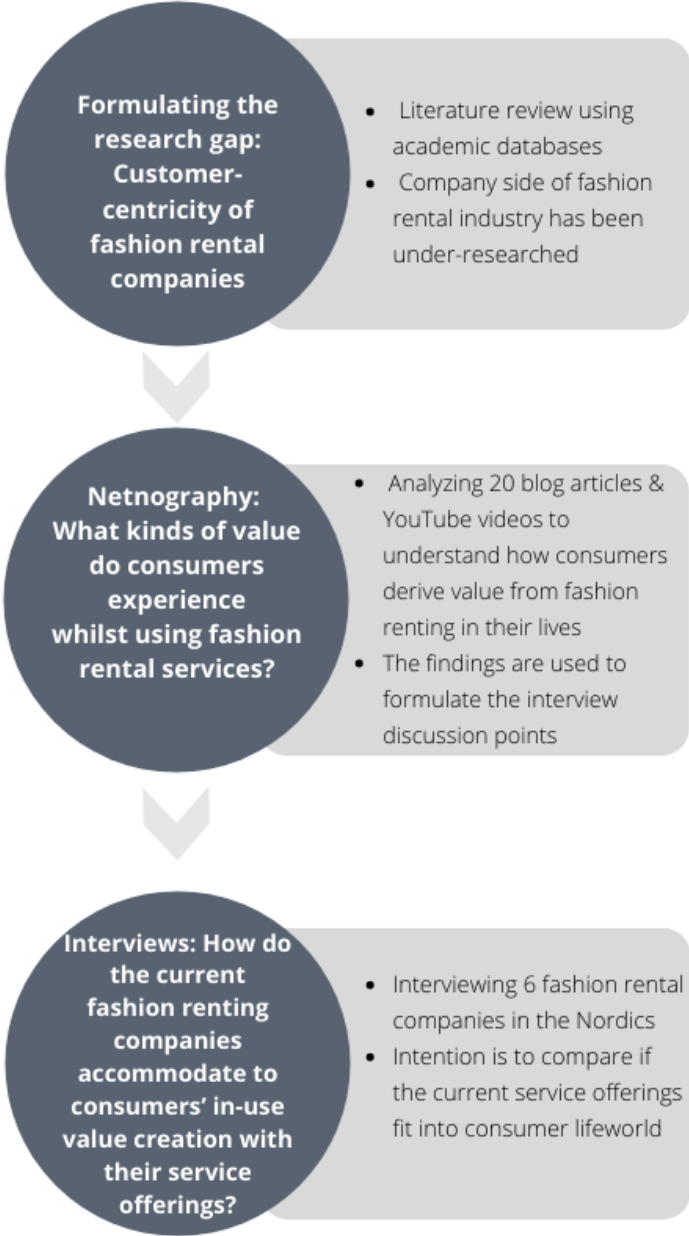


Figure 3. Summary of the research process of the thesis.

3.3. Data collection

3.3.1. Netnography

As consumers share their consumption experiences online, netnographic data collection was chosen as a productive methodology for uncovering consumers' experienced value in-use. Netnography is a research methodology of the digital age, based on the collection of individuals' shared, detailed information about their experiences published on the Internet (Kozinets, 2019). As individuals increasingly share their experiences online, they produce data that marketing researchers can utilize. Marketing scholars have found netnography to be an useful research tool for collecting and analyzing online customer information (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018).

Firstly, the amount and type of data online is vast and thus able to provide rich descriptions of a phenomena. In social media, communications forums, marketplaces or virtual worlds, people share written and audiovisual data of their experiences. Be it blog posts, YouTube videos or tweets researchers can uncover real concerns, meanings, causes, and feelings (Kozinets, 2015). The typical study methods for customer experiences such as observation and focus groups can be time-consuming and the wealth of data collected depends a lot on the individual(s) interviewed and their readiness to share their insights to the researcher. With netnography, the researcher can adopt a passive observer position, providing a convenient and subdued netnographic research approach (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). With the wealth of social media platforms and data accessible online, it can be difficult to distinguish the most appropriate data sources. Finding a suitable balance between text, photos, audio and video can be tricky (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Therefore, a careful data collection process was established. Following Kozinets' (2019) investigative process of netnographic data collection, clothing rental experiences online were approached through a process of simplifying, searching, scouting, selecting and saving.

To find suitable data online, the researcher must *simplify* research questions into search terms that can be used as input in search engines. A search with the whole research question is unlikely to bring up consumers' own detailed experiences. For example, searching with the research question "What are the practices behind consumers' experienced value in fashion renting?" only brings up academic articles and industry blog posts. As the aim was to find consumers' own descriptions of fashion renting in their life, a natural starting place would be

to look into consumer reviews of fashion rental companies. Consumers are unlikely to talk about their experiences with terminology such as practices or experienced value. Therefore, the research question was simplified into search terms ‘fashion renting’, ‘fashion renting tested’ and ‘fashion renting review’.

After establishing the search terms, the actual *searching* stage began. Besides the most popular search engine Google, the search terms were also entered into Ecosia in hopes of diversifying the results. Similar procedure was repeated on specialized search engines. Within social media sites, Facebook and Reddit were searched in hopes of finding discussion groups/threads dedicated to fashion renting. YouTube was searched for experience-opening videos. Finally, review sites such as Yelp and Trustpilot were scouted for consumer reviews. The search results were immersed into through the process of *scouting*, where the results were read, inspected and scrutinized. As recommended by Kozinets (2019), an immersion journal of analyzing the data was developed (see appendix of the study). The intent of this immersion journal was to work as field notes, recording the search results and evaluating their relevance as a sort of diary approach. Using the immersion journal during the scouting process helped in filtering the data sources and types of data used for consumer experience data. For example, the consumer review sites were left out of the study data because the scouting process showed that it was impossible to systematically search on those sites.

After scouting the data, *selecting* the most suitable types of media and platforms followed. Selecting is a crucial step in limiting the amount of data in the dataset and should be based on pre-defined criteria. The chosen criteria for this study were relevance, activity, diversity and richness of data following the recommendations by Kozinets (2019). The search terms generated lots of data hits on fashion renting, but around half of them were journalistic news pieces regarding the phenomenon of fashion renting in general. Also, in some of the reviews, consumers only reviewed the clothing and the company policies without really entailing their convenience/disturbance of them in their own lives. Therefore, it was important to assess only those datasets that actually were relevant to consumers’ experienced value within fashion renting. All the scouted data was created after 2018, so 2018-2020 was chosen as a data time sequence which can be considered recent, active insights from the consumers.

Other criteria for the data was also diversity in both consumers and rental companies under review. Throughout scouting it became evitable that a lot of the YouTube videos and blog posts

reviewed the same fashion rental companies such as the US-based Rent the Runway (RtR). If all chosen reviews were regarding a single company, the study would only reflect their offering in consumers' lives. The final data set tried to avoid repeating companies, yet one quarter of the data is reviewing RtR. Further, some consumers on YouTube had created multiple reviews of different companies and thus only one video per creator was included to reflect diversity in voices. All of the data is made by women from Western English-speaking countries i.e. the US and UK which hindered the diversity of search results. This may have been reflective of the English search terms: it can be contested whether the US and UK native consumers reflect the needs of Nordic consumers. Since the interviewed companies operate within the Nordics, there might be a discrepancy between the netnography and interview results. However, it could be argued that these are all Western countries with similar cultural contexts, characterized by overconsumption and conspicuous consumption (Håkansson, 2014). In these parts of the world, there is naturally a higher need for services such as clothing rentals and thus more data. The issue could have been diverted by using search terms in Nordic languages. However, the amount of search hits in these languages were rather limited. Besides amount of data, language barrier was an issue that led to choosing English search terms.

Finally, the criteria was to choose data that would provide rich descriptions of renting consumers' lifeworld and experienced value within fashion renting. In these descriptions, consumers would tell in descriptive detail how the rental service fit (or did not) into their everyday life. Sponsored posts were excluded to ensure legitimacy in the detail. Sponsorship was identified from the disclaimers in the videos, blog text or subscription box (text box below YouTube videos). Vast majority of rich, descriptive data could be found in a) blog posts belonging to magazines/individuals and b) YouTube videos. Thus, the chosen sources of data were both audiovisual and textual, allowing to gain a holistic view of this fashion renters' lifeworlds. Altogether 10 videos and 10 blog posts were chosen for analysis, prioritized on the basis of aforementioned criteria. Finally, in order to turn the social media posts into actual data and to preserve the viewed social media information the data was *saved* (Kozinets, 2019). Textual blog data was copied and pasted into Google Sheets. The most relevant comments from YouTube videos were transcribed in the same sheet.

The process ended up in findings of 10 YouTube videos and 10 blog articles. The used data set for the enquiry is summarized in the table below, selected based on the criteria detailed in methods section of this study.

Media	Consumer	Title	URL
YouTube videos	1. Shelby Church	I Tried A Clothing RENTAL Service... Is This The Future Of Fashion?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyNEPvZAJZA
	2. Alexa Sunshine83	I rented my clothes for a week trying a clothing rental subscription for the first time	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ayks8zHB3k
	3. Serein Wu	I try to rent my clothes to save money rent the runway review	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fnczWooKYk
	4. Jordyn Rebecca	ONLY WEARING RENT THE RUNWAY FOR 1 WEEK // WHAT I WEAR TO WORK	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDtSleJSl_4&t=10s
	5. More Hannah	I Try Renting Designer Clothes for the First Time More Hannah	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJrH8_UDeHA&t=139s
	6. Jennifer Rosson	Armoire Rental Clothing Review By Personal Wardrobe Stylist	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBRvS7qsb_8
	7. CanDesLand	FTF Closet Plus Size Rental Membership & Try-on Haul Fashion To Figure	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3x4u1vrD3s
	8. Jules Beth	I tried Express Style Trial for 30 days	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mj4ZDIhne0
	9. Emily Ann	Rent the Runway + Nuuly Try On Haul // is it worth the \$\$\$?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rM8AMTwOLAU
	10. Gianna Alexis	NUULY UNBOXING Renting My Closet!	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23KbfibOjCE
Blog posts			
	11. Chavie Lieber, Business of Fashion.com	The Fashion Rental Market Tested and Explained: Who Has the Best Service?	https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/fashion-tech/fashion-rental-market-rent-the-runway-nuuly-le-tote-vince-unfold
	12. Bethany Biron, Business Insider.com	I tested 5 clothing rental services, but none of them convinced me it's	https://www.businessinsider.com/renting-clothes-not-better-than-buying-them-opinion-2019-9?r=US&IR=T

		not worth it to own clothes	
	13. Anna Price Olson, Brides.com	A Brides Editor Tested Rent the Runway's Unlimited Service	https://www.brides.com/story/brides-editor-tested-rent-the-runway-unlimited
	14. Hilary George-Parkin, Who What Wear.com	Why I Prefer Renting My Clothes Rather Than Buying Them	https://www.whowhatwear.co.uk/clothing-rentals/slide2
	15. Emily Sutherland & Harriet Brown, Drapers online.com	Drapers Hit or Miss: fashion rental	https://www.drapersonline.com/insight/analysis/drapers-hit-or-miss-fashion-rental
	16. Cait, Everyday Cait.com	Gwynnie Bee Fashion Rental Subscription Review	https://www.everydaycait.com/blog/gwynnie-bee-fashion-rental-subscription-review
	17. Shannon Keating, Buzzfeednews.com	The Case For Renting Your Clothes	https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/shannonkeating/the-case-for-renting-your-clothes-nuuly-rent-the-runway
	18. Samantha Matt, USA Today.com	Is Rent the Runway's unlimited clothing subscription worth your money?	https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/reviewedcom/2018/03/23/used-rent-runway-unlimited-year-actually-worth-money/33214461/
	19. Monica Francis, Monicafrancis.com	A Year of Rent the Runway Unlimited	https://www.monicafrancis.com/blog/year-of-rent-the-runway-unlimited-review-hacks
	20. Lauren Goode, Wired.com	Just Rent Your Clothes	https://www.wired.com/story/just-rent-your-clothes/

3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

Primary data detailing the fashion rental companies' customer-centricity was collected through semi-structured interviews. All in all, six interviews were conducted during spring 2020. The conversations were structured around the findings of the netnographic enquiry, forming main themes of the interview (Kallio et al., 2016). Each point was discussed in their relevance to the business model of the fashion rental companies. Some questions were removed in order to get as informative data as possible (Alvesson, 2011). For example, if the interviewed rental companies operated in physical locations, some questions were dropped as some of the consumer processes were not relevant for physical stores (e.g. having to guess the size online). The interviews were allowed to take on paths beyond those points, depending largely on the interviewees. This is one of the benefits of semi-structured interviews: open dialogue may open

for information that would not have been covered by a structured set up (ibid.). No pre-designed follow-up questions were developed, which did not reduce the consistency of the interviews majorly, although this is a risk that was taken (Kallio et al., 2016).

The six interviewed companies operate in Nordic countries, both online and in physical locations. Both e-rental shops and physical shops were approached in order to be representative of the fashion renting scene. The interviews were all conducted online as at the time of the research, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the researcher from meeting the companies face-to-face. Each interview lasted for 30-60 minutes, all recorded and transcribed in order to be systematically analyzed. The audio recording totaled into 5 hours and 26 minutes of discussion, transcribed into 61 pages of text. The companies remain anonymous to respect their wishes (further discussion available in Ethics section).

Company	Country	Type of rental store	Interview date and duration	Amount of transcribed pages
1	Finland	Physical	1.4.2020, 31 minutes	5
2	Finland	Physical	2.4.2020, 1 h 10 minutes	15
3	Sweden	Online, peer-to-peer	22.4.2020, 59 minutes	11
4	Sweden	Online/Physical	23.4.2020, 48 minutes	9
5	Finland	Online, peer-to-peer	5.5.2010, 51 minutes	11
6	Finland	Physical	27.5.2020, 57 minutes	10
Altogether			5 h 56 minutes	61 pages

Company 1

The mission of the firm is to offer a more durable and ecological alternative to fast fashion, with their clothing selection focusing solely on Finnish designer brands. The chosen brands are ethical, with ecological production chains that respect human rights of the workers. The company helps customers to find new styles, cuts and colors. They offer both one-off rentals and memberships, where each piece of clothing can be lent for up to three weeks. Customers are expected to return the items washed, ready for the next customer to loan.

Company 2

Starting off as a traditional clothing retail store, the company transitioned into a clothing rental studio as the owner wanted their ecological lifestyles to be reflected in the business. The priority of the company is to offer clothing selection that is sustainably and ethically produced as well as size inclusive. The company also organizes events such as fashion shows and brand showcases on a regular basis. One-off rentals and memberships are both included in their offering, with up to two weeks of lending time. Clothing is then returned washed.

Company 3

The company operates as a peer-to-peer rental platform, offering extraordinary and chic clothes from like-minded, fashionable women. Clothing selection is mainly focused on flashy, trendy items from known brands. The renter can choose from an online calendar a rental time of up to two weeks. The clothing exchange is organized either face-to-face among the peer renters or through a delivery company. The owner of the clothing pieces is responsible for washing the clothes; however, the company has insurance for the pieces in case of any damage.

Company 4

The company specializes in dresses, offering them for different occasions such as work events and parties. Rentals can be booked and paid online, with either pick-up from the physical store or home delivery; returns have both options as well. The store space has styling and makeup services, offering a one-stop shop for special days. Clothes are offered only for one-off rentals with dry-cleaning included in the price.

Company 5

The peer-to-peer platform company offers the opportunity to rent and sell secondhand clothes that are unique and aesthetic. The rentals are paid through the platform and pickup/returns organized by the peers themselves. The owner of the clothing is responsible for washing the clothes. The platform is currently under hiatus and is launching with a new concept within the 2020/2021.

Company 6

Started already five years ago the rental library has become a local, shared wardrobe including clothing and accessories from dozens of Finnish brands. The company wants to uplift local, ethical brands that aim to change the industry. Another value point they emphasize is the ability to test-drive certain styles so people can make more confident purchasing decisions. The offering includes one-off rentals and memberships, in which items can be kept for three weeks at a time.

3.4. Data analysis

Both the netnographic and interview-collected data were analyzed and coded through a content analysis method. Content analysis is a “method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008 p.108). Existing academic knowledge about fashion rental companies is scarce in general with no knowledge existing about their dominant business logics. The study at hand aims to add in to the knowledge pool of fashion rental companies instead of developing definite theories: therefore content analysis was deemed suitable. The central idea of content analysis is to selectively reduce categories or concepts from textual data (Mayer, 2015).

The data analysis process of this study followed the standard procedure of content analysis. The procedure includes transcribing data, choosing units of analysis such as words, sentences or a paragraph) and developing a coding scheme in order to derive to the categories (Elo et al., 2014; Mayer, 2015). The coding schemes can be derived deductively from theory or inductively from the data (Mayer, 2015). Following the inductive nature of the study, the coding was conducted inductively as it was suitable for the study purpose of increasing knowledge in the field (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Also, the theory of customer-dominant logic does not set strict criteria that could be developed into codes: the core of the theory is in its belief of where value is created. Therefore, a deductive approach would not necessarily make sense.

In inductive content analysis, coding schemes are developed through an open coding process where the textual data read is read and coded into headings simultaneously. The textual data is revisited multiple times with the purpose of identifying recurring meanings, until the text is ‘exhausted’ of the meanings. The recurring meanings are then grouped into higher order headings in order to combine similar findings into broader themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The coding process was conducted manually utilizing Google Sheets and Google Docs. The data was transcribed to Docs where it was read coded, copy-pasting the interesting and relevant points function into Sheets. Then, the categories were further developed in Sheets, where different colors were assigned to each category. Bright red would mean ‘changed shopping habits’, for example. The color coding was even more helpful than naming the categories, as the visual cues helped in finding similar points quickly. Despite the analysis taking an inductive

approach, the role of the existing research on consumer opinions of fashion renting should be recognized. The articles in the literature review had already inducted themes that must have had an unconscious bias on the data analysis process.

3.5. Research ethics

The researcher commits to following the academic guidelines of the research institution and respects the intellectual property of scholars through avoiding plagiarism. Further commitment is made in the key aspects of ethical business research which are voluntary participation, informed consent and professional integrity (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). In the company interviews, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the researcher asked for permission to interview and transcribe the interviews. All discussion outside the scope of the research questions remain confidential especially since the content may unveil company intellectual property. The company identities were not disclosed to respect the wishes of the interviewees; the researcher could negotiate access to data-collection this way. This might have hindered the engagement and lost some richness from the conversations with the companies (Taylor & Land, 2014).

Although the interview participants agreed into data collection, the content producers of YouTube videos and articles in the netnographic enquiry did not as their consent was not requested. The question of whether research can freely use publicly available data such as blogs or videos is contested in academia (Kozinets, 2019). Many researchers would claim that the internet is a public space and therefore ‘free game’ for analysis. Kozinets (2019) calls this the consent gap since research shows that as many as 60% of the public would not want their social media data to be used in research. Although consent was not requested from the content consumers, there are certain factors that relieve the burden of ethical scrutiny. The netnographic enquiry of this study was purely investigative with no amount of interaction with the creators: therefore, the information regarding the consumers’ lifeworld was taken at face value. The analyzed communication was just as the consumers wanted to express themselves. Also, the topic of fashion renting is not particularly sensitive nor puts the consumers in a vulnerable position. The analysis does not reveal any further identifiable data about them beyond those that they made public. The aforementioned factors are all ethical points one should take into consideration with netnography (ibid.).

3.6. Trustworthiness

Maximized trustworthiness increases the credibility of a study's results (Burke, 1997). When beginning the research planning process, the priority was to ensure the trustworthiness of the study with qualitative methodology's criteria. The four criteria for design are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as defined by Bryman and Bell (2011):

Trustworthiness	Definition	Implemented actions
Credibility	To ensure that a study investigates what it is intended & that the research is carried out according to the canons of good practice	+ Multiple methods + Extensive description of the phenomenon under study
Transferability	To ensure that the contextual uniqueness and significance of the study's group/individual(s) is described rich enough	- Consumers in netnography from the UK/USA, whereas the interviewed companies from Nordics
Dependability	'Auditing' approach: keeping complete records of the research process	+ Interviews transcribed + Immersion journal in netnographic research + Data analysis in Google Sheets
Confirmability	Complete objectivity is impossible, but the researcher doesn't allow personal values or theoretical inclinations affect the results	+ Set search criteria in netnography searching stage + Renting not a sensitive issue + No personal renting experience

The biggest limitation of the study trustworthiness has to do with transferability. The netnographic consumer value in-use was derived from British and American consumers, whereas all the interviewed fashion rental companies are from Sweden or Finland. All of these four countries have unique cultural contexts and their intricacies might get lost in comparison. However, all of these countries are Western consumerist societies that are characterized by overconsumption of material things and conspicuous consumption (Håkansson, 2014). Therefore, it could be argued that the consumer's experienced value in-use is comparable. This issue is however a subject for deeper examination.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Netnographic findings: Consumer experienced value

As the customer-dominant logic denotes, value often takes place in invisible spaces beyond the service process. The netnography results could also be seen to take place in three distinctive phases of the fashion renting process: before, during and after wear.

4.1.1. Before wear: deciding to start renting

Consumers do not start renting clothes because of their physical needs as there are more inexpensive ways to get those needs satisfied. Rather, there were two significant reasons why consumers found that it would be valuable to pick up fashion renting, raising within the affective and psychological spaces of the consumer. These two were *satisfying the need for novelty as well as consuming more sustainably*. The need for novelty entails that consumers get to continuously access new clothes without the burdens that it creates. Customers enjoy getting new clothes because it lightens up their mood and allows them to experiment with their style:

Unbeknownst to me, I did have a problem. If I had a bad day, what could cure that better than a new shirt? Nothing! ... For a little over \$100 a month, I could have access to a very expensive wardrobe. Although it was not cheap, I figured if this service could make me happy and keep me from shopping. –

Blog 18

Consumers get bored easily of their old pieces and want to spark up the excitement of new clothes again. The pressure to have fresh looks also comes from the social context of the consumers. In today's social media culture, 'outfit repeating' is something consumers want to avoid. Pictures are taken more frequently and the pressure to wear something new was mentioned by multiple consumers. Further, many of the YouTube consumers worked as social media influencers which increased this pressure. They wanted to showcase new looks to their followers to stay relevant. Thus, having new clothes keeps the consumers 'in the now' and admirable to their peers. This is also a symptom of conscious consumption and consumerism that have been characteristics of the 2000s. However, a lot of the consumers felt that those continuous clothing shopping sprees only ended up cluttering their closets. They started to feel guilty over the amount of clothes they had hanging in the closet.

I have noticed that occasionally I will buy stuff I only wear once or twice. I think a lot of the times we fall into this mentality 'Oh, Instagram has seen this outfit already'. Fast fashion has made it so easy to buy new trends each season and then we just end up with too much stuff we do not wear. – Video 1

Adding to my struggles, I came of age in the era of "Lizzie McGuire" and was forever haunted by the words of villainous Kate Sanders outing Lizzie as an "outfit repeater" in front of her entire middle school class, as if she had committed murder. – Blog 12

Clothing is something I grew up hoarding, it is that haul culture where everyone is like 'look at all these things I bought'. You really do not need them and they really go out of style fast. – Video 10

Eventually consumers need to get rid of the clothes by recycling or donating, which then contributes to the vicious cycle of fast fashion. This made some of the consumers feel guilty as their loved hobby of style experimenting had a dark side. Indeed, almost half of the consumers cited sustainability as one of the main reasons for picking up fashion renting. Some of them had already tried to other ways of consuming more mindfully by e.g. secondhand shopping or practicing minimalism. With renting, the biggest value is that they could consume clothes sustainably without contributing to increasing textile waste problem.

Over a year ago, I set a goal not to buy new clothes. If I felt the urge to buy something, I decided, I would restrict myself to secondhand, borrowed, or rented clothing. ... If I was going to curb my consumerism, clothes seemed like a good place to start. – Blog 20

I have been on a bit of a sustainable fashion journey of late. .. I have never rented clothes before, but I thought this might scratch my itch of wanting new clothes but not wanting to contribute to mindless consumerism. –Video 5

8 of the 20 consumers cited both novelty and sustainability as main value driver for starting renting: satisfying need for new clothes without being wasteful with environmental resources. Interestingly, both value factors have an element of relieving guilt from the clothing consumption process. Consumers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about the harmful impacts of fast fashion and being a part of the problem is not sitting right with them. Renting makes the consumer feel little bit better about their love of switching fashions. Therefore, one big value proposition to starting fashion renting is soothing guilt. Of course, this was not

explicitly communicated by the consumers but expressed ‘in between the lines’. Fashion rental companies could benefit from focusing on the circularity message within their marketing communications. Also, they could try to appeal to the need for guilt soothing by offering other opportunities to be environmentally friendly, e.g. through recycling or reselling services.

“Whenever I pack up a big seasonal sack of old stuff to sell at Beacon’s Closet or donate to Goodwill, I feel a twinge of guilt, because I know that about 80% of donated clothing is eventually incinerated or destined to languish in a landfill, where the cheaply made kind will remain for hundreds of years” –
Blog 17

“It satisfies need to browse and shop without adding to the personal textile waste. My favorite thing is that I can guilt-free shop.”– Video 3

Despite the aware consumers, fashion renting is not a mainstream business model. Many of the consumers in the study had only just found out about fashion renting as a service, typically through word of mouth from friends or co-workers. Because there are not a lot of references of renting among peers, the consumers had their doubts about the value of fashion renting. The concern came up especially in relation to economic value. Why pay for clothes you could not keep? Not understanding the value proposition of renting destructs value in consumers’ minds.

Heading in, I had some concerns. Would this be worth the money? \$60+ a month is a lot to spend on clothes I don’t even get to keep. - Blog 16

“Honestly, I was skeptical too. ...Why would I pay all this money just to wear clothing that I have to return?” - Video 9

Fashion rental companies may not have been able to communicate their value proposal well enough. The results highlight the benefit of having consumers as active marketers for the service within their friend groups. Perhaps friend referral discounts or programs could assist in attracting consumers. Also, easing the economic value doubts through free trials or discount codes could help consumers be encouraged to try out the service.

4.1.2. *During wear: Using the rental service*

Once consumers decide to take the leap of renting, they experience a range of value within affective, psychological and social spaces.

Majority of consumer reviews praised the possibility of renting items that they enjoy but typically would not want to buy because the items are not as wearable. With personal closets, there seems to be a utilitarian norm of buying pieces that you can re-wear or combine with the existing clothes consumers already own. However, renting allows consumers to break from this pattern and relieves the burden of ownership. A lot of the women enjoyed renting flashier stand-out pieces such as colorful or printed items that they would usually wear only for a few times. Being able to break from the utilitarian mindset allowed consumers the freedom to self-discover and express their style on a more experimental level. Experimenting with different colors, prints and textures also pushed the consumers outside their comfort zone. Renting brought joy to everyday dressing and increased consumers' confidence as they could wear trendier and/or branded clothing. Social approval boosted this confidence: colleagues and friends had noticed consumers' new clothes and gave compliments which further encouraged consumers to keep using the service. Access to more special clothing awakens hedonic value and value from improved self-esteem and self-actualization, activating needs of higher echelons.

I think service like this is fun, because it gives you a way to try something out without committing to it, and it is fun to freshen up your wardrobe and get new pieces without a huge financial commitment. -
Video 6

What I've always noticed is that I pick things that I would not typically buy. I like this sweater, but I do not necessarily need a red lip sweater: but I thought this would be really cute for Valentine's day. -
Video 7

*Honestly, my favorite part of (renting) has been experimenting with colors and prints that I would never have bought out of fear of them being "too memorable." At the end of the day, a new designer dress does put an extra pep in my step, whether I'm wearing it to the office on a Monday or to a black-tie wedding on Saturday. Oh, and that feeling when someone gives you a compliment? Forget the price tag because to me that might as well be priceless. -*Blog 13

However, some consumers expressed difficulties in finding suitable pieces from the rental selections. Lack of options was described as a value destructor in accordance with either having too few clothing styles or sizes available. The rental styles were described either as too muted or flashy for the reviewer's style. Naturally, style is very subjective and thus pleasing every consumer's tastes would be near impossible, but consumers want to see a big variety of options in inclusive size ranges: otherwise, what is the point of renting if they cannot get items that fit and please them? As much as renting can enhance self-expression, lack of options in fashion rental stores may compromise consumers' ability to express their individuality.

I did find the selection online to be pretty limited. Not a lot of it was very enticing, it was very basic. ... For me, it was really a struggle to find 20 pieces that I liked that were in my size. - Video 8

As for the clothes themselves, RtR has a seemingly endless supply of peplum dresses, ruffle tops, statement jeans, off-the-shoulder tops and other trendy items. ... There were definitely items I loved, including a fun dress from The Kooples I wore to an office dinner. But overall it was hard to find clothes in my style for my everyday wardrobe. - Blog 11

As of this writing, there are a little over 2,800 pieces available to rent on Nuuly's site — a solid number of options, but not a crazy amount. If I filter items by my size range (10, 12, and 14) and select only to see items available now, the number drops to around 2,000. - Blog 17

Since the clothing needs to be returned, some consumers express worries over whether they would break or ruin the clothing. The financial consequences of destroying an item made the consumers uneasy. However, this anxiety depended a lot on the company policies. Some rental companies require the consumer to compensate for any damages whereas some take the items back in regardless of the shape. Consumers would seem to prefer policies where they are not liable for damages as the fear in-use draws away value from the rental experience.

I did technically damage one of them (items) which I am very upset about. I was a little bit like 'wait a second, am I going to have to purchase it, it is like a 50 dollar item'. Any damages, you do not have to worry about it, they take care of it. - Video 2

Because I am renting it, I do not want to have to pay the 350 pounds to replace this item if I wreck it. Like I have to be so much more careful with these items and eh, it makes me nervous. I do not want to feel nervous around my clothes. - Video 5

Another fear-inducing aspect in-use was hygiene. Not having to return things in pristine condition means that consumers can be a bit messier with the items, wearing them as they were their own. However, the hygiene of clothing rentals was questioned, especially if consumers received items that looked worn or had an odor to them. Consumers would want to receive the items in fresh condition as otherwise they are reminded of the fact that the item has been worn by strangers, irking value off from some consumers.

(jacket) The texture, I do not know. This feels like something got on it, like oil or something, the texture is really weird. I do not know what it is, but I am kind of sketched out by it. - Video 1

(shirt) For the first time ever, this smells like perfume. Not a bad thing, because at least it smells clean, but all of the other ones do not smell like anything. So this makes me think that someone wore it and it did not get washed. - Video 10

4.1.3. After wear: Returning the clothing

After the initial trial, most of the consumers explained that they had resubscribed to the rental services. Many of the reviews were from consumers with a couple of months' experience with renting. Renting clothing had changed their shopping habits and mindset on clothing consumption. They had reduced or even stopped traditional shopping since renting gave them the needed satisfaction of new clothes. Renting also made them more aware of their purchases in general: why would they own something when they could access? Thus, consumers started to alter their own lifestyles to accommodate to renting. They became more aware of their consumption, creating value in utilitarian terms such as saving money and buying only those pieces that would be frequently worn. This new lifestyle seemed to give the consumers a sense of self-control over their purchasing behavior, thus creating value in the affective/psychological space of the consumer.

I spend much less time and money shopping. I don't buy clothes for a certain event or trip, I'm not shopping fast-fashion stores just to have something new, and I don't get that 'nothing-to-wear feeling'. Really. - Blog 19

My shopping habits have changed, too. Every time I wanted to try out a new trend I wasn't sure about, I'd scroll through the app and pick out a piece to take for a spin instead of running to Zara or Urban Outfitters. While I doubt the service saved me money, there's no doubt that it's saved me from accumulating a pile of cold-shoulder tops I'll never wear again. - Blog 14

Of course, this was not the case for all renters. Although most renters tend to be happy to let go of ownership after wear, some consumers feel like it is a pity having to let go of the item. They had already gotten attached to the item and thus, letting go destructed value in the process. These consumers appreciate the ability to buy out the item in case they have fallen in love with them. Then there were some who simply did not prefer access over ownership, forming a customer segment that would be difficult to reach by fashion rental companies. However, these consumers tend to appreciate longevity and classics: perhaps, a value proposition rental companies could emphasize.

At the end of the day, so many things in life are ephemeral — I don't want my clothing to be. In addition to shifting my shopping habits away fast-fashion brands with their quick-to-disintegrate clothing, I enjoy crafting a wardrobe with longevity and having control over what's in my closet. - Blog 12

One possible value distraction for rental clothing is the hassle of receiving and returning clothing in the mail or to the physical store. The logistics of it is an additional hassle on the already busy life of consumers. Here, consumers prefer returns that are a breeze. They do not want to wait for their items or constantly run to the post office.

Ironically, my attempts to use rentals to build my infinite closet left me dying to go shopping — maybe even in a real, brick-and-mortar store. Constantly updating my wishlist, waiting for packages and shipping them back was exhausting. - Blog 11

To get the MOST out of your RTR Unlimited membership, you constantly have to go to UPS. When you don't like something, you have to return it ASAP so you can order as much as possible within the span of a month. Sometimes I get lazy and wait a few days to go to UPS. I know I could get more out of my membership if I didn't put off returning things but going back and forth to UPS all the time is annoying. - Blog 18

Through the analysis, it became clear that experienced value and the factors diminishing value in-use followed suit with the themes identified in the literature review. Hence, it can be

concluded that the previous literature is representative of consumers’ actual in-use renting experiences. However, the netnographic analysis enabled the study to go deeper into the “potential value landscape” of consumers (Heinonen et al., 2010) as the researcher could identify the value created in affective, psychological and social spaces of the customer. Below Figure 4 illustrates the netnographic findings in pink, enriching the existing literature.

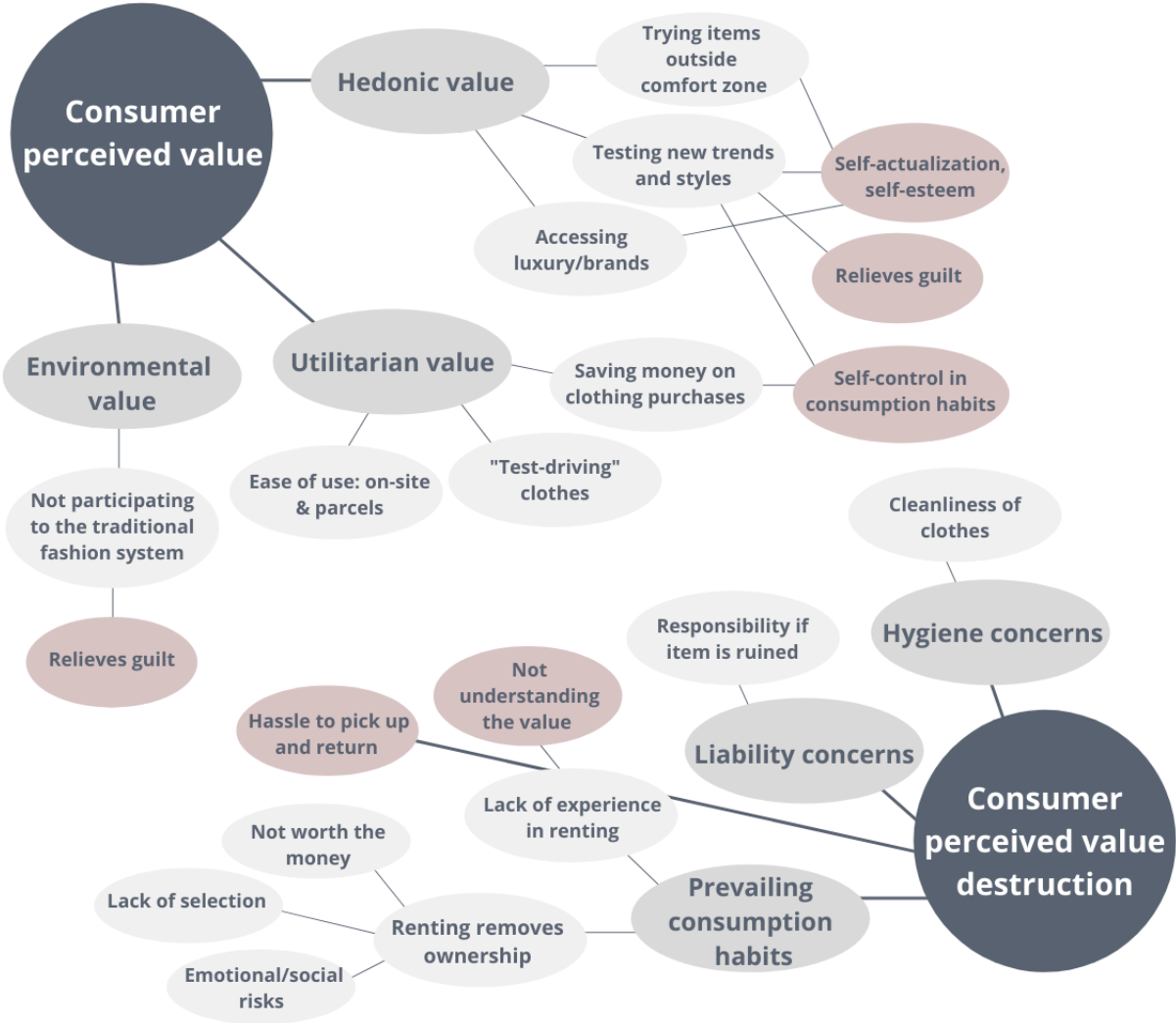


Figure 4. Netnography consumer perceived value & value destruction.

4.2. Interview findings: Fashion rental companies’ customer-centricity

This chapter shares the findings of how fashion rental companies service currently fits into the lifeworld of the consumer. The better the service is integrated into consumers’ lifeworld the more customer-centric the service is, as assumed by the study’s theoretical underpinning of customer-dominant logic. The netnographic findings of the main value (destructors) formed

the discussion points in the interviews with the clothing rental companies, summarized in the Figure 5 below. The interview results are also structured around these points.

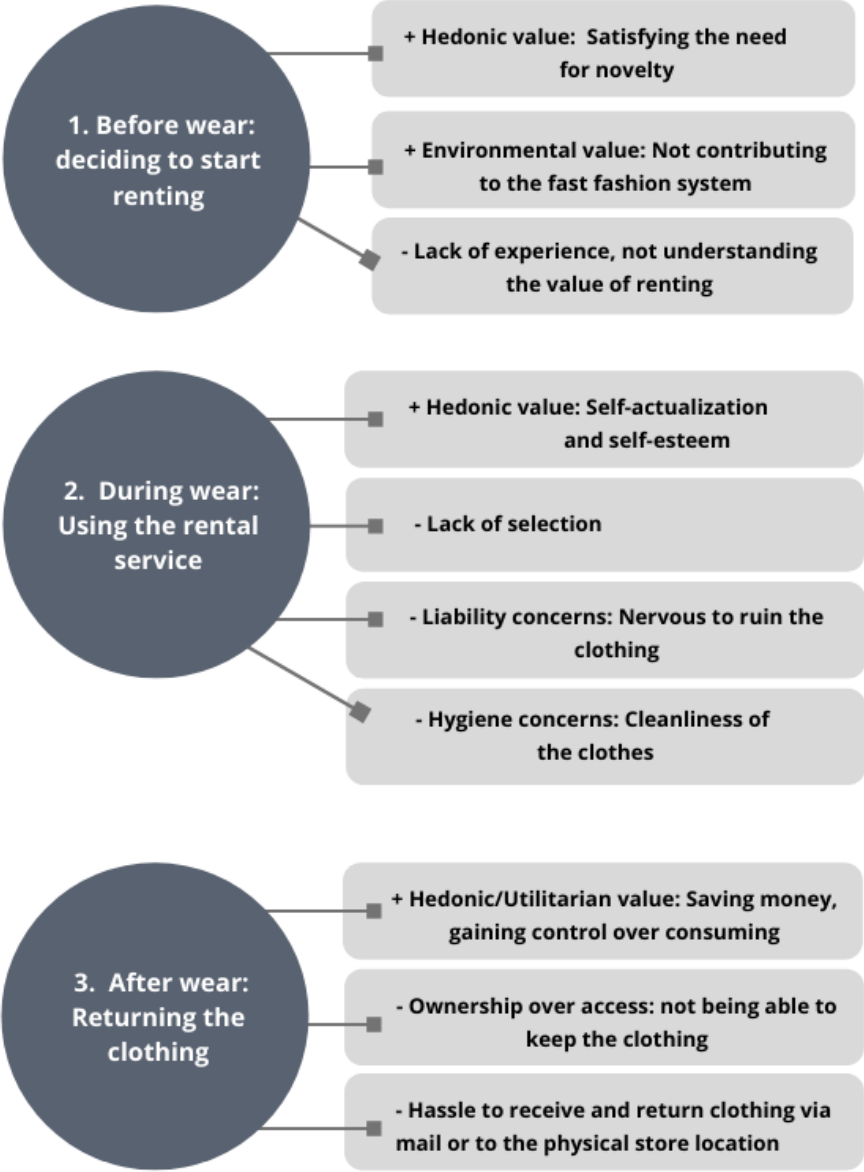


Figure 5. Discussion points in the interviews with fashion rental companies

4.2.1. Hedonic value: Satisfying the need for novelty

Despite the traditional fashion manufacturing being unpopular currently, one should never underestimate the power of an attractive product assortment. All of the fashion rental companies agreed that their consumers do not want to compromise style even if they switch to more circular fashion consumption: they seek variety and freshness in their closets. The rental companies satisfy this need with their purposefully chosen inventory of clothes. Even though

some companies had a bigger sustainability emphasis than others (see 4.2.2.), the main logic for their clothing selection is to offer more special and even ‘flashier’ items. The enticing prints and colors are more likely to get the consumers hooked and re-interested in renting as they feel more novel than e.g. neutral basics. Purchasing new inventory regularly was also seen important in keeping the novelty level up, although keeping it as up-to-date as the retail stores is not realistic.

“The consumer wants to look fresh, and experiment with new styles and new trends. They want to have what Kylie Jenner is wearing.

... We started at the top of the triangle by inviting those with the coolest closets. So that is why we became quite high end, and that is what you would want to rent. Maybe you do not want to spend like 23 000 SEK on a bag that’s really trendy this year but you do not really know if it’s a classic. So we thought that let’s start with the pieces that you would not buy, but you could imagine to rent” - Company 3.

4.2.2. Environmental value: Not contributing to the fast fashion system

“I would say that people who are interested in environmental issues are the first ones who have found us. It is the ecologicalness and minimalism, people do not want excess in their wardrobes.” - Company 1.

The interviewed companies all confirmed that sustainability is the background motive to all their operations and a part of the reason rental services exist in the first place. Sustainable consumption is also a driving force for finding and starting to use the rental service for many of their customers. Although none of the companies mentioned the cultural context as a driving force for this, the fact that all the companies are from the Nordics should have an impact on the positive environmental attitudes. Previous research has identified Nordic countries as a proactive and cutting-edge region for circular textiles, see e.g. Salo, Suikkanen & Nissinen (2020).

However, perhaps surprisingly sustainability divided the companies into two ‘schools of thought’. Half of the companies (1, 2 & 6) operated from a strong sustainability view, where their selection of clothing was ethically sourced. They have built their selection solely of local brands who have ethical production chains, mentioning that they *“have to be able to stand behind their clothing brands”* (2, 6). Company 2 sees it also as a fun service to customers to be

able to ‘*tell the stories of the clothes*’ i.e. where the clothing is produced and how the print idea came to the designer.

Other participants were not as adamant about bringing the sustainability point forward in their communications to consumers because they want to be careful of not creating a narrative of them moralizing the consumers. Company 5 elaborates that they personally know a lot of independent designers and that they would never want to discourage people from purchasing their clothes. Rather, “*it would be better to pay attention to the maintenance of the clothing*” (5). Participant 3 does not believe that the environmental angle should be the sole argument for renting, as consumers will look to satisfy their hedonistic motivations before environmental motivations:

“Instead of saying to our followers that ‘you should rent, not buy’ - because that message is completely wrong, you should not say that because then you would put someone in a place that would make people uncomfortable. ... So what we are meaning, is that we do not believe that the consumer wants to rent something from us only because it is sustainable. Because if people would only care about sustainability, you would have one outfit and wear the same outfit every single day and you would never purchase something new. And that is not the case, even if you are like Greta Thunberg.” -Company 3.

Both ‘schools of thought’ seem to genuinely want to help the customer to be more sustainable but their approach was just a little different. However, as all of the companies operated in different countries and with different styles, it is difficult to tell which approach would create more value for the consumer in-use. Probably, there are two types of consumers who answer to these messages: a too sustainability-focused messaging could make some feel uneasy with their lifestyle choices, whereas for some a very green way of consuming is exactly what they look for. In the netnographic findings, renting was found to bring value as to consumers as a guilt reliever. Connecting the two schools of thought to renting, some consumers would answer to this guilt by going to a sustainable rental service whereas the more novelty-seeking consumer would gain value by just accessing and not having to hear lectures.

4.2.3. Lack of experience, not understanding the value of renting

All participants confirmed that the newness of renting as a consumption model is intimidating to many, although some reported that in a decreasing degree as consumers become more aware of the renting alternative (4, 6). Most also recognized this as the biggest hindrance of their

business growth, stating that some people still only know of special occasion rentals. Respondent companies had different ways to tackle this issue. One way to reduce the hesitation in the beginning is to make the rental process as comfortable and relatable as possible to the consumer. Company 3 has preset rental periods from 1 to 14 days in order to “*not let too many ends loose because the consumers cannot really take that many decisions when you do not know the service*”. They also use influencers in their marketing as their followers love their style already and would want to try out their clothes, just like they would borrow clothes from their stylish friends in their personal lives (3). Company 5 also wanted to lower the threshold of joining by making the selection seem more attainable: “*I wanted to make the company a little bit more approachable. I think some customers may be intimidated by the branded clothes*”.

Few respondents quoted that word-of-mouth by friends and colleagues had been a major help in convincing unsure consumers. Indeed, being able to have friends in the renting experience brings up hedonic experiences of spending time with loved ones or bonding over a common hobby. Therefore, companies tried to engage their consumers to bring in their friends through different methods. Company 6 offers a referral program where a member gets 2 weeks’ worth of rental time for each referred member. This has worked in their advantage as their customer base now includes many friend groups. Another way to convince people to join is through organizing events as consumers tend to bring their friends to attend as well. This marketing method was quoted only by physical rental stores. Company 1 offers a possibility to organize private events where friend groups can gather and try on clothes together without any hesitations. Company 4 offers bachelorette party packages where people can get their hair and makeup done whilst trying on dresses, whereas company 2 has organized fashion shows and brand showcases where brand representatives come and tell about their products.

When it came to price concerns, i.e. whether renting was worth it, most companies had not faced such issue from the customer side. However, one company (4) offered different rental price ranges to accommodate for people’s budgets. Most respondents actually highlighted how inexpensive their service was. None of them had started to communicate this aspect to customers in their offering, except company 2 that had printed flyers with a cost breakdown:

“Then they (flyers) say that my 6-month membership is 175 euros which means that the price for one rental item is 7 euros. What can you find in the stores for 7 euros? Nothing.” - Company 2

Fashion rental companies could benefit from emphasizing the money saving to their consumers as they remain unsure of the value.

4.2.4. Hedonic value: Self-actualization and self-esteem

Having agreed that their consumers experience such hedonism, the rental stores detailed how they increase the delightful experience. Multiple physical rental stores (1, 2, 4) explained that they try to start the hedonistic experience already at the store. All of them offer styling services and whilst the customer browses through the selection, they actively encourage them to try out new styles and colors. According to the entrepreneurs, this helps the customer by relieving decision fatigue and making clothing choices that they could not have thought of themselves: *“I would have never thought that this suits me! Then I say yep, wasn’t it good that you tried?”* (2). Giving the extra boost of trying new styles supports customers with their self-actualization and self-esteem journey:

“Perhaps one of the nicest feedbacks in this regard is that many have said that the service has relieved them from dressing and like, someone was talking about a more positive body image. They have formed a more relaxed relationship with their own body image and style” - Company 6.

The ambiance of the experience also plays a role. Interviewee 3 explained that they have purposefully chosen higher-end items to give customer access that they would not have gotten otherwise. Company 4 has taken the level up a notch and has built a glamour experience for the rental store, offering a styling bar of makeup and hair stylists for partygoers. Consumers can thus gain access to a sense of luxury that heightens their self-esteem.

When consumers take the clothes home for wear, fashion rental companies do not have a lot control over the hedonistic experience at that point. However, some of the respondents had found use for social media in this regard. These included sharing customers’ pictures in their social media accounts (6) and emails or direct messages on Instagram for *“just those kind of small nudges that make them feel not only beautiful on the outside but also inside. It is also the kind of impact you do while you are wearing it.”* (3).

4.2.5. Lack of selection

All respondents agreed that they have a limited selection in their rental stores as they cannot offer endless options to their customers. However, the companies try to accommodate their closets to be as representative of their customers as possible by e.g. purchasing new sizes and styles as they get new members (1, 2, 6) and sending customer surveys (6). However, when it

comes to bigger sizes the companies are “*very limited on what exists out there*” (4) as there is no excess of plus size fashion suppliers. Company 2 detailed that they have also tried to be mindful in what kind of clothing they purchase: dresses and shirts are more likely to fit on multiple people compared to pants, for example. Again, encouraging customers to try new styles during ‘shopping’ might be able to alleviate the issue (1). The issue is especially prevalent for peer-to-peer companies as they cannot fully control the supply of clothes on their websites:

“And that is the tricky part right, that is the general problem with all second hand. ... Because of course every person only wears one product in one size, not many people are buying many sizes of the same product. So that is just a general problem, but we are looking at data on our users, like what are they searching for, what kind of brands, what colors....” - Company 3.

Peer-to-peer companies can affect their selection by asking their suppliers (users) whether they have items in the sizes, styles and brands that consumers search for. Company number 5’s trick is to be proactive in searching for interesting renters in social media. They search people with fun styles and message them about their service, which has been successful in gaining users in all sizes and styles to their platform. Especially influencers with ‘*all the latest and newest items in their closets*’ (5) would be fruitful for this. P2P companies are also able to use data from their digital platforms to see what their customers are searching for, *what kind of brands, what colours are they looking for, sizes, materials* (3) and adjust accordingly.

4.2.6. Liability concerns: Nervous to ruin the clothing

All six fashion rental companies recognized this concern in their clientele, especially in when the concept is new to customers. The most frequently emphasized points that they communicate to customers is that “*they are only clothes*” (5, 6) and that it very rarely has happened in the companies’ history that a clothing item has been ruined (1, 2, 4, 5). Despite consumers preferring policies where they are not liable for damages, the respondents had varying liability policies. Half the companies (2, 5, 6) required customers to take care of the repairs to small damages such as stains and holes in the clothing. Companies 1 and 4 took care of such small repairs, as “*we expect some small things to happen and we can take care of most of them and it is included in the price*” (4). However, if the item was ruined beyond repair, customers had to purchase the item to themselves by paying either the recommended retail price (1, 2, 4) or a discounted price (6). However, company 4 expressed that they had never charged the fee from customers despite damages because “*for us (losing) good relationship with the customer, if it*

is a good relationship, costs more than the dress". Company 3 was the only service provider to offer insurance for all their rentals, covered in the listing price whereas few others (4, 5) were looking into getting one as well.

4.2.7. Hygiene concerns: Cleanliness of the clothes

Although a relevant operational question, the fashion rental companies had not had uproar about hygiene from their customers. As with liabilities, the hygiene policies were split to two options: either the clothing renters had to clean the clothes themselves (1, 2, 6) or the company/clothing owner took care of the washing, included in the price (3, 4, 5).

"It might be true, that all of these dresses are actually second hand and it is used but it should not look like that. It should look like the dress is in perfect condition and they are. And you know, if the customer comes in and it sees that there are spots in the dresses and there is a really weird smell in the store, then of course the customer gets questions about hygiene." - Company 4.

However, those companies that asked the customers to handle washing tried to make it as straightforward as possible. Either they offered a chance to pay extra for cleaning (1), provided laundry bags (2) and gave washing instructions (2), often following the laundry symbols already attached to the garment (6). Few respondents (2, 5, 6) explained that their clothing selection is also chosen so that most of them would be easy to wash with regular washing machines. Such instructions had soothed the consumers' fears and also made the renting process easier, providing utilitarian value.

"I choose materials like organic cotton, viscose, lyocell and tencel.. Of course there are wool and silk clothes which require a whole other kind of care, but majority needs wash in 30-40 degrees and drying in a hanger and then you are ready to go" - Company 2.

4.2.8. Hedonic/Utilitarian value: Saving money, gaining control over consuming

The study companies 1 and 6 echoed what was found in netnography. When consumers have started renting clothes with these companies, they have found that their consumption habits have changed, and they have become more considerate of their own shopping.

“People are completely hooked and say ‘I have not bought new clothes in two years during my membership because I get everything that I need from here’” - Company 6.

Company 6 also highlighted the role of fashion rental stores promoting smaller, local brands. Through rental selection, consumers get to know smaller and more sustainable brands they otherwise would not get to know (2, 6). When the consumers fall in love with those pieces, they may want to own them and thus the selection of their closets is more conscious and better quality.

However, the money savings are not something that clients have communicated to these companies even though *“we know that people are very happy that they can wear those really expensive pieces for a fraction of the price”* (3). When asked how the rental companies could help customers in the money saving aspect, few (1, 2, 6) referred to their already low membership prices, especially for designer items. At best, the rental price per clothing piece was only 7 euros (1, 2) and especially for designer items the price is unbeatable. However, the price cannot be too low as then customer don't want to see the effort of returning as pointed out by company 5: *“Do the sellers or buyers want to go through the struggle for some 4 euro items?”*. The point highlights that there may be a fine balance of finding a good price point and valuable enough rental clothes.

4.2.9. Ownership over access: not being able to keep the clothing

Rental companies frequently hear from their customers how they would not want to let go of the items. However, this reaction is often well-intentioned as customers are just so head over heels for the product:

“It is actually good practice to give the clothing back as you realize you do not need to own everything. When customers give up something lovely, they get something lovely back” - Company 1.

Company 2 has noticed that especially their older clientele tends to prefer ownership, suggesting that there might be a generational gap in this preference. Therefore the rental store also has clothes for sale. In fact, most of the interviewees (2, 4, 5 & 6) relieve this customer hindrance by offering the opportunity to purchase the items, although this is always evaluated discretionary. The purchase is not possible if the clothing is too new or too unique for sales: more people should enjoy the clothes first. Only company 3 did not want to offer the

opportunity as of yet since they want to keep their business concept clear to customers in the beginning stages, although this feature might be in the books in future.

The companies cited that a larger, societal mindset change about consuming clothing was needed (3, 4) to tackle this issue. Needing a new outfit is generally associated with buying “*and that is what we have to change, we want to be on top of mind when people want something new*” (3).

However, the supporting actions for changing the consumer mindset change were the same arguments as mentioned in previous results: having an enticing selection, using influencers and having a good price range. Company 3 analyzed that the growth in secondhand fashion’s popularity was a driving force as well. However, concrete solutions for changing the mindset for individual rental companies seemed to be limited.

4.2.10. Hassle to receive and return clothing via mail or to the physical store location

The value distractor in return phase was recognized by the companies, although only company 3 was accepting parcel returns. The others were physical stores where consumers returned the items themselves or P2P platforms where consumers handled postage themselves. In physical rental stores clothes are often returned whilst picking up new items, so it is only natural to visit them. Rental companies also argue that it is important to be able to try on the items (6) and to check the condition of the clothing at the point of returning the item (5, 6). The P2P company 3 is trying to make it as easy as possible to their customers by offering courier services for deliveries and returns. The courier would pick the item up from a desired location, be it the office or the gym. They were also looking to set up a pop-up store or drop-off points in e.g. hotels where you can just drop off pieces in convenient opening hours. Such solutions could be recommendable for even physical fashion rental stores, especially if they operate in premises outside easy reach.

4.3. Integrating the findings

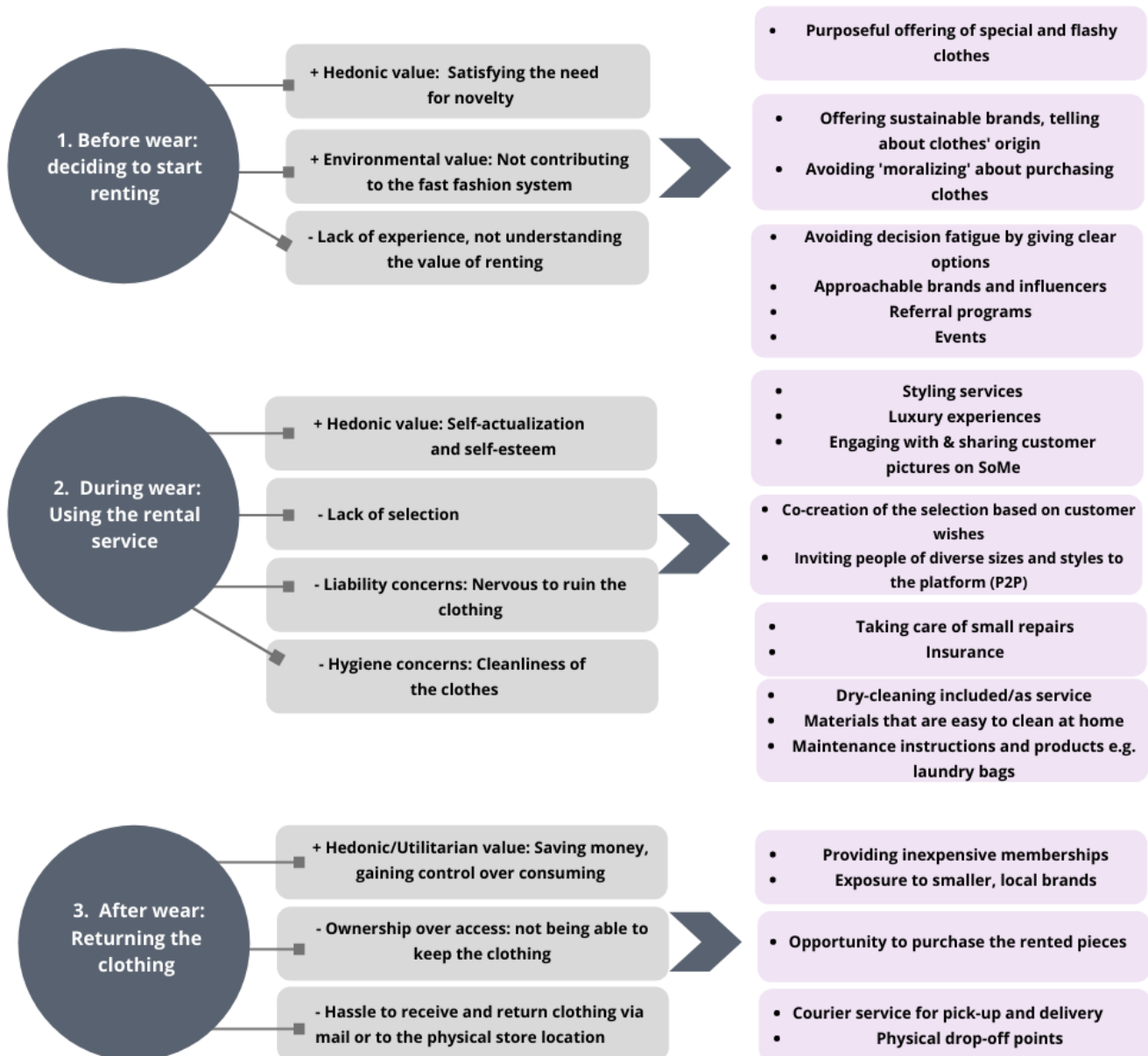


Figure 6. Integrating the netnography and interview findings.

Figure 6 integrates the findings for research question 1 and 2. Consumer value in-use creators and destructors before, during and after renting are summarized on the left side. On the right side, the aspects of fashion rental companies' service models that aim to accommodate to the destructors and creators are listed. The following text summarizes and integrates the findings of chapter 4.

Consumers experience multiple kinds of value during usage of fashion renting services. However, there are also many aspects of fashion renting services that can destruct this value. Mostly, the value and its destructors arise within the affective and psychological spaces of the consumer. Consuming clothing rental awakens emotions, opinions, fears and concerns, illustrating that clothing consumption is an emotional experience.

The main values consumers experience in fashion renting are hedonic, environmental and utilitarian value. *Hedonic* value had a lot to do with self-image and self-actualization. Accessing new items satisfied the need for novelty, which then allowed the consumers to stay fashionably relevant and admirable to their peers. Whilst wearing the items, consumers got braver and more versatile with their clothing choices, allowing to break away from the utilitarian 'how many wears can I get out of this'-mentality. This expanded their perception of themselves as the new styles pushed the consumers outside their comfort zone. Finally, after the renting experience consumers felt more in touch with their consumption habits and noticed that the need for shopping had diminished. They had reduced or even stopped traditional shopping since renting gave them the needed satisfaction of new clothes. This saved consumers money, which was the main *utilitarian* value quoted by the consumers. However, could consumers not experience similar self-expressionist feelings with access through traditional clothing retail? This is where the main source of *environmental value* comes into play. Renting provides consumers guilt-free consumption as they get to enjoy the hedonism of new clothing without contributing to increasing textile waste problem. They are introduced to local and ethical clothing brands and by supporting them, they contribute positively to the local craftsmanship. Thus, the ideal consumer for rental fashion companies is this conscious consumer who also enjoys dress-up of new styles.

However, renting as a consumption model is new and thus awakens many concerns and fears that destruct value in-use. These concerns are central to the unique aspects of renting: the clothing selection is limited and after wear, the clothing needs to be cleaned and returned anew. Consumers also worry if they can find anything worth renting in the selection. During wear concerns over hygiene and consequences of breaking an item make them wary. After all this worrying, the clothing needs to be returned which is a hassle in consumers everyday life.

The netnographic inquiry of 20 consumers for research question one was able to uncover experienced in-use value and its destructors within fashion renting, following along the themes

uncovered in previous literature. However, the novel question of this study was to uncover whether the fashion rental services accommodate to these factors in their service offering. There are ways to appeal to consumers each wish and worry, as at least one of the six interviewed fashion rental companies had solutions in their service offering that could accommodate to the value creators/destructors.

To accommodate to consumer's in-use value creation, fashion rental companies' efforts could be summarized to three focuses: clothing selection, providing experiences and ease of use. The companies put a lot of thought into the *clothing selection*, as since company 3 put it, "never underestimate the power of a product". The interviewees ensured that the clothes were fascinating and special for the consumers to awaken hedonistic experiences. Half of them emphasized the sustainability of chosen brands as well. Also, customer co-creation of the clothing selection is an important tool to stay customer-centric and inclusive. P2P companies invite diverse people of different sizes and styles to join their platform whereas B2C rental firms purchase clothes of certain sizes as they get new customers. *Providing experiences* attracted new customers and brought hedonistic value to them. Rental companies cited ways such as organizing events, friend referral programs, styling/luxury services in-store, using influencers in marketing and staying in touch with consumers via social media. *Ease of use* refers to how effortless the process of renting is, including considerations on how the clothing is received, returned, washed and repaired. The top customer-oriented rental companies eased the process and consumer concerns by offering couriers for pick-ups, washing services and insurance on the clothing. Also, low prices of the renting service made the offering more attainable to consumer lives.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Research summary

The purpose of this study was to complement the existing literature on fashion rental companies' service models whilst exploring how these services accommodate to consumer preferences, a research gap that was identified through an extensive literature review. To guide my research, two research questions were established; "*What kinds of value do consumers experience whilst using fashion rental services*" and for the business side, "*How do the current fashion renting companies accommodate to consumers' in-use value creation with their service offerings*".

Previous literature understands consumer preferences, yet none of the studies demanded consumers to have any renting experience. To figure out how customers actually derive value from clothing rental services, a customer-dominant logic theory was adopted. The theory asserts that value is not created by the service provider, but rather it arises in consumers' everyday lifeworld relating to consumers lived or imaginary experiences in present, past or future. Consumer in-use insights were gained from a netnography of 20 YouTube videos and blog articles. These findings formed the discussion points for semi-structured interviews with six Nordic fashion rental companies. The qualitative netnography and interview data were both analyzed through content analysis process where the textual data was read and coded into headings simultaneously. This coding process was carried out manually, resulting in three phases in the renting process: value was seen to be experienced before, during and after using fashion rental services. Therefore, the netnographic findings were presented in this 3-phase chronology. Interview results revealed the fashion rental companies' ways of accommodating to consumer value-in-use creation in their service models. These findings were also presented in the set chronology.

5.2. Conclusions

Clothing consumption is an emotional and psychological experience and as the netnography results show, renting seems to be no exception. The group of consumers within this study

experienced value mainly in the affective and psychological spaces of their lifeworld. This means that a lot of the aspects that brought value and retracted it in the renting experience had to do with emotions, opinions, concerns, and fears of consumers. These feelings are only amplified because renting as clothing consumption model is foreign to consumers. Consumers are used to going to a traditional retailer, having a large selection to choose from and then purchasing and keeping the items forever (or at least until they get bored of the clothes). Switching these habits towards renting requires consumers to take emotional and psychological risks, which is not an easy ask. The interviewed fashion rental companies highlighted that in order for renting to become mainstream, there needs to be a larger shift in consumer behavior and mindsets. How exactly can fashion rental companies facilitate this change?

The companies can start off with making their service offerings as customer centric as possible. In this study, at least one of the six interviewed fashion rental companies had solutions in their service offering that could accommodate to consumer value creators and destructors. The findings can guide fashion rental companies in designing their service offering to be customer centric.

However, none of the interviewed companies had solutions for each point, showcasing that there is room to grow with customer centricity. The biggest misconnection in this study between consumers in-use value creators and the fashion rental companies' service offerings was ease of use in the renting journey. Consumers appreciate clothing rental services that demand little effort from their side. The clothes should be easily accessible in their sizes at the store locations or in easily usable applications/websites. During wear consumers do not want to worry about cleaning or consequences in case they ruin the clothing. Once it is time to let go of the item, the returns should be a breeze even if the store operates physically. For example, returns via mail are appreciated. However, the process was not this effortless for consumers in half of the interviewed rental companies. In majority of the physical rental stores, consumers had to clean, repair and return the clothes to the shop spot themselves. The selection was also somewhat unpredictable for consumers as the clothes they would have liked to rent were lent to other consumers. The other half of the interviewees operated online and were more customer centric in terms of effortlessness. The clothing selection and their bookable times were clearly visible online. They also accepted unwashed or faulty clothes back through parcel sending. Operating online may give more agility to be customer-centric: costs of brick and mortar stores may hinder physical rental stores of offering services such as insurances and dry-cleaning. Regardless, the ease of use is something rental shops should take into consideration in their service design.

Besides adopting the study findings, fashion rental companies could increase their customer centricity through utilizing this study's method of *netnography*. Netnographic research can help clothing rental firms with service innovation, advertising and environmental scanning. Consumers tend to share their experiences online, detailing what they enjoyed and disliked during fashion renting. By collecting and analyzing that data, fashion rental companies can integrate the customer voice to their service innovation. They can also identify the right community and key players within it. For example, a fashion rental store may research online content in second hand/ethical fashion communities and recognize top influencers to collaborate with. These influencers then produce content (new netnographic data) which not only gives them insights but also works as digital word of mouth for the company. Manual processes of doing netnography may be time consuming so using social media monitoring tools such as HootSuite and Google Alerts can help automatize the process. The tools allow rental firms to get alerts whenever their company/competitor name or keyword such as 'clothing renting' is mentioned. Utilizing netnography for staying up to par with customer preferences could be essential especially in the future when renting services become more popular. Consumer concerns and aspects that bring value to them may change over time as fashion renting moves towards the mainstream.

Bringing renting to the mainstream has also larger societal consequences. As presented in the background context of the study, the linear business models of the fashion industry are extremely polluting and wasteful. To make the industry more sustainable, it would benefit from a widespread acceptance of renting and other collaborative fashion consumption models. This study aims to contribute to the industry's sustainable transition by helping fashion rental companies to be customer-centric and thus, more attractive to the mainstream. Once consumer masses start accepting clothing rentals, their consumption practices and mental models will change. Closets will partly become shared instead of owned, which has the potential to bring people closer together into fashion-loving communities. This holds especially true in peer-to-peer rental platforms where consumers rent out their own clothes to each other. Sharing clothes may translate into even more empathetic, communal consumers who do not need to own everything. Renting may also lead to further normalization of secondhand items. These are all qualities that should reduce the demand for new fast fashion items. Eventually this would lead to less clothing being produced which slows down the fashion industry and reduces natural resource use. Producers could also be inspired to design for rental purposes, making the clothes

more durable and easier to care for. Durability and easy-care lead to less disposable clothes. Thus, the sustainability effects of mainstream fashion renting are promising.

Going into the future, it will be interesting to see whether the sustainability effects hold true. A critique of fashion renting is that it keeps alive the mentality of needing new clothes all the time. It could be that renting reduces consumption of new clothes yet encourages quicker trend production in the industry. Also, carrying renting into the mainstream with sustainability arguments is contested. The issue struck conversation and divided the interviewed companies into two schools of thought. Half of the companies operated from a strong sustainability view, where their selection of clothing focused on local brands. The other half wanted to offer good rental products that would satisfy consumers' hedonistic value needs. Previous literature (e.g. Armstrong et al., 2015) has pondered whether collaborative fashion consumption should be marketed with sustainability. This study's results confirm that consumers enjoy knowing about the sustainability market. Also based on the interviewed fashion rental companies, consumers seem to answer positively to both approaches in marketing. After all, the consumption model of renting is ultimately a sustainable and attractive market that consumers are likely to increasingly adopt.

5.3. Theoretical contribution

A key theoretical contribution of this study is to bridge the gap of consumer experienced value-in-use and the services of current fashion rental companies. Although there is extensive literature on consumer opinions of fashion renting, to the best of the author's knowledge there are no studies that would investigate how fashion rental companies accommodate to consumers' value creation. Besides customer centricity, the study adds on to the pool of knowledge of fashion rental companies in general. There are studies on fashion rental companies such as Pedersen & Netter's (2015) study on fashion libraries' business models and Adam and colleagues' (2018) study on the dynamic capabilities of early-stage rental firms. Adam et al. (ibid) concluded that early-stage rental firms empathically observe consumers to sense their business opportunity. This study sheds light on how that empathy looks like in practice towards the consumer. Besides increasing knowledge of fashion rental companies, as far as the author is aware the study is the first to utilize both the lense of customer-dominant logic and the methodology of netnography in the context of fashion renting.

5.4. Limitations and future research orientations

As with any qualitative study, the scope of the findings is limited as the netnographic consumer insights came from the US and UK only. Further, the interviewed companies only operated in the Nordics. All these four countries have unique cultural contexts and their intricacies might get lost in comparison. Though it should be highlighted that all of these nations are Western countries with an overconsumption problem, it is impossible to confirm whether the findings can be generalized to other consumer cultures (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This is a limitation that could generate interesting research problems, either through analyzing just one market of consumers and rental service providers' offerings or through a comparative study between countries and cultures. Also, the consumer opinions came from young female YouTubers or bloggers and thus, they only represent a certain kind of consumer or even a personality trait as they publish online. They might be more extroverted than an average consumer for example. A more heterogeneous group of consumers could produce different kinds of consumers insights. Same goes for new versus experienced consumers. Many of the analyzed consumers had only recently started to use fashion rental services and it could be that their concerns would be diminished as they get used to renting. A study of consumers who have used renting services for a long time could explain how customers are kept happy long-term.

Although the interviewed fashion rental companies were only from Nordic countries, there was variety from both online and physical rental stores. Consumer opinions/consumer centricity of online versus physical stores could reveal which operating model could be more likely to go mainstream in the future. P2P rental firms could also provide a more fertile research ground than this study focused on. These companies do not own the rented clothes: how can they convince consumers to start sharing their clothes, an emotional possession? Also, a deeper look into the kind of value they provide could explain how they avoid being merely the platform for exchange; how can they build their own brand and consumer communities? Finally, sustainability in renting services still needs further investigation. Although this study and previous literature confirm that consumers enjoy the sustainability of renting services, using it as a core marketing message for rental services may make the consumer feel guilt. Sustainability guilt in the context of fashion renting is a topic worth discovering. All in all, the research field of fashion renting and collaborative fashion consumption in general is a robust and growing area for research.

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APPENDIX

Immersion journal for Netnographic data

The intent of this immersion journal is to record what the researcher found from each site, sort of following a diary journal approach.

Search terms: *'fashion renting'*, *'fashion renting tested'* and *'fashion renting review'*.

Search engines: Google and Ecosia.

Specialized search engines:

- Social media sites Facebook and Reddit in hopes of finding discussion groups/threads dedicated to fashion renting.
- Review sites such as Yelp and Trustpilot for consumer reviews of rental company services.
- YouTube for experience-opening videos.

1. Facebook

Facebook has a lot of discussion groups for certain hobbies and interests, thus providing great potential to find groups where like minded fashion renters discuss their experiences.

However, the search terms did not result in other than wedding or other occasion gown rental stores in Asia, which are outside the scope of everyday rentals anyways. Therefore, Facebook was scraped as a data source from the study.

2. Reddit

Reddit has discussion forums based on certain topics, called threads (r/). Reddit's discussions are anonymous, so people may have it easier to discuss topics freely. Firstly, the researcher tried to look for specific threads such as r/fashionrenting or r/clothingrenting, but they were nonexistent. Therefore, search terms were used as is, with only one thread coming up.

With *'fashion renting'*

https://www.reddit.com/r/Vindicta/comments/in2vgq/has_anyone_tried_fashion_passrent_the_runway/ - People discussing pro's and cons of 'Rent the runway', the American online clothing rental. The material here is relevant, detailing consumers' everyday practices and how the particular company does (not) support them. However, as this is the only result on Reddit, it would not make sense to include only one data point from the social media site. Netnography works with smaller and more focused datasets, and the aim is not to do big-data analytic type analyses of all fashion renting mentions in social media.

3. Yelp & Trustpilot

Consumer reviews were deemed to be most likely to entail consumers' detailed experiences. Therefore, the research looked into two, internationally well known review sites, Yelp and Trustpilot. Yelp is a customer review site, where users can browse service providers in specific locations. The purpose was to find out reviews of fashion rental companies that would provide rich descriptions of consumer experiences. However, the location requirement in the search engine proved to be difficult - which city should the researcher use? As the stores interviewed in this study were from the Nordic countries, their capitals were used as location searches. However, nothing came up so Yelp was removed from potential data sources. Trustpilot is also a customer review site that aims to build consumers' trust in online service providers. However, the search engine turned out to be tricky as it could only be used to search specific company names: therefore, the search terms of the study could not be applied. In order to be systematic with search results and to not take preference of some company over the other, Trustpilot was deemed irrelevant.

4. YouTube

YouTube is an audiovisual content sharing site, where lots of content creators tend to do topical/review videos of their purchasing experiences. Rental services were no exception, as using the search terms resulted in a bunch of hits, many of them consumer reviews. YouTube has renewed its search page in a way that you cannot see how many pages of search hits exist: it just keeps on refreshing the results which made estimating the amount a bit difficult. With

all three search terms, dozens of videos pop up out of which around half are consumer reviews and half journalistic news pieces regarding the phenomenon of fashion renting (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TT0yptPUqHo>). Almost all of the videos are published after 2018, so their information can be considered very recent. The journalistic videos weren't relevant to the purpose of the netnographic inquiry as they did not detail consumer experiences. I began to watch through the videos to filter out what I should include.

Most of the consumer reviews focused on specific companies in the US such as Rent the Runway or Nuuly. Firstly, I noticed that in some videos the vlogger only did a 'first impression' i.e. tried on the clothing and reviewed them without going into much detail on how the service fits into their life (e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htVc8DEJ3_U). In some videos, vloggers were focusing on specific firms, only detailing that company's policies, e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0la6XHniDY> . As these would not really provide rich data of rental services in people's lives, I decided to limit such videos out. Some of the videos were sponsored and because sponsoring may affect the vlogger's judgement, I decided to skip these videos out as well. Another limitation I decided on was representability of the different voices: I noticed that many vloggers had made multiple videos on the topic, so I decided to include only one video per a content creator. Another realization was that I need to have variety on the companies that are under review: majority of the videos regarded single company such as Rent The Runway. However, this could also be the YouTube algorithm pushing those types of videos but for representability, the final chosen data will represent different companies. The algorithm also pushes new videos on 'watch next', although those videos did not show up in the search results list. For the sake of being systematic, I disregarded those videos (they also majorly repeated the points in the other videos).

4. Search engines

The search terms were put into two search engines: Google and Ecosia. The aim was to find any consumer reviews, in the form of blog posts or forums. In Ecosia, the term 'fashion renting' only resulted in journalistic news pieces about the phenomena, whereas the other two search terms produced quite the few reviews. The search results seem scattered, but relevant results could be found for up to 11 pages (after that, the search hits had to do with rental apartments and fashion in general). All of these were reviews in personal or journal article

blogs (such as Business Insider). In Google, just 'fashion renting' produces over 68 900 000 search results and it becomes clear that this search term only produces journalistic articles about fashion renting in general, much like Ecosia. 'Fashion renting tested' did not lead to relevant search results, but 'fashion renting review' produced dozens of relevant reviews of various rental services. Again, sponsored posts (usually with affiliate codes) were left out and a diversity of companies in review was maintained.