Article

An Investigation of Circular Fashion: Antecedents of Consumer Willingness to Rent Clothes Online

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Abstract: Circular fashion has gained attention among practitioners and academics. We further contribute to this debate by investigating leasing in the context of rented online clothing in greater depth. First, we conduct a qualitative study and identify several themes important to individuals when renting clothing online. The findings are as follows: social representation, green value, familiarity and innovativeness. Several categories emerged from the interviews with the respondents in relation to social representation: use of technology, feeling good when renting clothing online and renting clothing online as a necessity. Familiarity factors relate to circular fashion's role in reducing perceived risks associated with a relatively new service in the market. Green value perceptions have emerged among respondents that reflect a growing environmental consciousness. Second, based on the initial qualitative findings, we introduce an ad-hoc theoretical model and put forward propositions. Our theoretical model emphasises the role of four antecedents (i.e., social representation, green value, familiarity and innovativeness) when influencing consumer willingness to rent clothing online and a shift towards circular consumption. We develop theoretical propositions and provide recommendations to marketing managers and public policy makers regarding how to encourage a change towards circular consumption behaviour among individuals.

Keywords: circular fashion; consumer attitudes; rented clothing; purchase intentions

1. Introduction

Context. The increasing threat of pollution from the fast fashion industry around the world raises concerns to public policy makers [1]. "Fast fashion fuels climate change, plastic pollution and violence" [2]. According to Greenpeace [2], "the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse sparked a call for change in the global fashion industry". Despite the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 raising awareness about poor conditions in garment production, the fashion industry continues to mass-produce vast quantities of clothes. For instance, more than 100 billion clothes a year are made (40% more than are needed for wear) under unsafe conditions, using materials such as oil-based polyester [2]. The "fashion industry produces 8–10% of global CO_2 emissions (4–5 billion tonnes annually) and the use of synthetic fabric is a huge part of fashion's role in climate change" [2]. Half a million tonnes of plastic fibres, equivalent to 50 billion plastic bottles, are polluting the world's oceans each year [2]. Only 10–30% of clothing donated to charity shops finds new owners there, while charity shops ship about 70% of these used garments overseas [2].

Fast fashion, characterised by the mass production of trendy garments at low prices, has fuelled overconsumption and environmental devastation. "In Europe, fashion companies went from an average offering of two collections per year in 2000 to five in 2011. Some brands offer even more. Zara offers 24 collections per year, while H&M offers between 12 and 16 collections per year. A lot of this clothing end up in the dump The equivalent of one garbage truck full of clothes is burned or dumped in a landfill every second" [3]. Fast fashion retailers produce cheap garments, making it tempting for consumers to buy more

than they need. Fast fashion garments are often designed with lower-quality materials and construction, leading to quicker wear and tear, further fuelling repurchases.

One way to reduce fast fashion overconsumption is to persuade consumers to engage in circular consumption [4]. Circular consumption presents a powerful alternative, offering a more sustainable approach to clothing. Circular consumption aims to disrupt the traditional "take–make–dispose" model of consumption, which is wasteful and unsustainable. Circular consumption aims to keep resources and products in use for as long as possible, minimising waste and maximising resource efficiency. Circular consumption aims to reduce overall consumption by encouraging less buying, which extends the lifespan of existing resources. Circular consumption encourages the reuse of products by extending their lifespan through repairs, maintenance, or finding new purposes for them. Circular consumption reduces environmental impacts and offers economic benefits to individuals. For instance, WRAP, the resource efficiency agency in the UK, has identified renting clothing online as a sustainable business model for the future in terms of benefits for the environment [5]. It predicted reductions in the carbon dioxide emissions due to the reduced use of materials while giving a longer life span for clothes and increasing the number of companies willing to adopt this business model [5].

Although circular consumption is slowly gaining attention among consumers worldwide [6], it is not as widespread as it could be. Not very many companies worldwide have adopted the business model idea introduced by the UK's WRAP several years ago to offer clothing renting services to consumers to reduce pollution. Today, the majority of consumers mainly rent dinner dresses, jackets, and wedding suits for men [7]. The fashion industry, a major source of pollution globally [8], presents a significant challenge for business leaders and public policy makers. Their current priority is to curb excessive clothing consumption by consumers and encourage a shift towards circular fashion practices. This approach emphasises clothing that not just financially benefits the company, but also contributes to environmental and social good [9].

Research gap. Academic research provides some initial insights into circular consumption in terms of consumer preferences for renting clothing online [10], selecting second-hand goods [6] and sustainable clothing (e.g., Ref [4]). However, previous research offers little guidance to practitioners on how to effectively persuade consumers to contribute to circular consumption in the context of rented clothing. Although some studies identify a few factors contributing to consumer willingness to adopt such decision-making approaches to clothing rental, a more advanced understanding and guidance are required to better understand consumer intentions to rent clothing online and contribute to circular consumption with their decision-making.

Aim of the study and contribution. To answer calls in the literature, this study aims to explore the online clothing rental behaviour of individuals, and, based on these initial findings, proposes an ad-hoc theoretical model comprising several antecedents (i.e., innovativeness, social representation, familiarity, and green/environmental value) to increase consumer willingness to rent clothing online. The study raises the following propositions:

P1a: Social representation in relation to trustworthiness in using technology will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.
P1b: Social representation in relation to fun and enjoyment will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.
P1c: Social representation in relation to necessity will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.
P2: Innovativeness will act as a moderator in the relationship between social representation and consumer willingness to rent clothing online.
P3: Familiarity with renting clothing online will act as a moderator in the relationship between social representation and consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

By combining antecedents which have not previously been tested in one model in the literature and selecting a novel context of online clothing rental services, the paper con-

tributes to the existing knowledge on the sustainable marketing and consumer behaviour fields, and provides managerial recommendations for business leaders and public policy makers.

2. Theoretical Background

Previous studies identified two types of behavioural change among consumers: pragmatic and radical [11]. Based on this finding, our paper suggests that innovative business models are required to address radical changes among consumers, which would encourage a shift towards circular consumption among the members of society. The more consumers perceive such innovative online rental services as acceptable, the stronger their willingness will be to adopt such services, leading to a positive outcome to both society and environment.

2.1. Theory of Innovation

The theory of innovation [12] suggests that innovation adoption depends on timing in terms of the acquisition of a new thing introduced into the market. According to this theory, innovativeness refers to both the speed and degree to which an individual adopts an innovation faster than other individuals [12]. The speed of innovation adoption is categorized into early adopters, early majority, and late majority [13] (p. 353). Consumers with high levels of innovativeness are crucial for markets when introducing new products and ideas, as such consumers act as market mavens for new products to other consumers [14] and may increase the consumption of novel goods/services.

Consumer innovativeness can be researched as a domain-specific category and innate innovativeness category [15]. According to these authors, the "innate innovation" behaviour depends on dimensions of personality, while "domain-specific behaviour" refers to a willingness to try innovations for a specific product category [15]. This study focuses on the "domain-specific innovativeness" category and refers to it as the "innovativeness" of individuals in the remainder of the paper.

2.2. Social Representation Theory

Social representation theory refers to an individual's values and ideas that contribute to the "social order" among society's members [16,17]. The social representation construct has been introduced as essential to predict the adoption of new products or ideas in the marketing literature [18–20]. Social representation has not yet been researched in the literature, to the best of our knowledge, in the context of clothing online rental.

We further investigate the roles of social representation and innovativeness in consumer willingness to rent clothing online. Additionally, we find that that familiarity and green value criteria also play a significant role in online clothing rental. Grounded in theory of innovativeness and social representation, and based on the findings of our qualitative empirical study, we offer an ad-hoc theoretical model and suggest theoretical research propositions.

2.3. Consumer Perceptions and Behavioural Intentions in Relation to Online Clothing Rental

The market of clothing rental online is related to circular consumption and sustainable consumer behaviour, and is expected to grow exponentially by 10% annually to USD 2 billion within the next few year [21]. A study from the USA in 2018 found that the purchasing of second-hand goods by women increased by 12 million from 2017, and now comprises USD 56 million [22]. The growing consumer willingness to purchase second-hand clothing reduces the stigma around second-hand clothing purchases. More and more online second-hand clothing rental platforms are emerging on websites and are offering consumers the option to rent for a certain period, or to subscribe to casual wear [23]. Such services are very cost-effective and enable consumers to wear different designer brands on different occasions, and eliminate the need to store and wash clothing [22].

Previous studies have investigated circular consumption in the fashion rental industry. For instance, the study by [21] focused on Indian respondents. The sample comprised

women who rent clothing online. They suggest that the online renting clothing market is dominated mainly by women [21]. Their study found that attractiveness of clothing, attitudes, trustworthiness, performance expectancy, effort expectancy and social influence have an effect on behavioural intention, which subsequently influences actual consumer behaviour [21]. The study by [21] offers valuable theoretical insights to better understand the nuances of consumer behaviour in the context of adopting sustainable fashion in circular consumption contexts.

Further, Ref. [24] examined the Italian market using a case study methodology addressing companies engaged with sustainable fashion. Based on the findings, their study suggests a quadrant with four variables: low commitment, low disclosure, high commitment, and high marketing [24]. The findings given by [24] offer implications for circular consumption practices by identifying drivers and barriers to sustainability. Ref. [25] conducted a qualitative study with six participants investigating upcycling brands in the UK fashion upcycling industry and their relationships to consumers. Upcycling brands, which use waste as a source material and "address the textile waste problem" [25] (p. 29), offer consumers a cost-effective way to access designer brands and encourage them to use them in a sustainable way. A study by [26] looked at fashion rental using an online survey conducted in the USA, and identified how perceived risk influences consumer attitudes towards fashion rental [26]. The study by Lang [26] found the negative effects of perceived risk on consumer attitude towards the fashion rental industry. His study also found that perceived enjoyment and consumer attitudes positively influenced consumer intention to rent fashionable clothing. This study advances our knowledge in the area related to perceived risk and enjoyment, and the link of both to consumer intentions in the fashion rental industry. A study by [27] was conducted in Germany, starting with a qualitative study and followed by a survey identifying "determinants of a preference for non-ownership modes of consumption" [27] (p. 176). The results of their study suggest that "possession importance", or the importance of full ownership of goods, is negatively associated with non-ownership services, but positively associated with convenience and trends in the market [27]. The study advances our knowledge on the "non-ownership role" in the fashion rental market. A study by Armstrong et al. [28] investigated consumer perceptions about online product rental services using a mixed-methods approach in Finland, and identified that consumers prefer to rent products online, as they can try new products without the requirements of ownership, maintenance and storage, or aftersales care, as well as accessing the latest fashion clothing brands at reasonable prices [28].

Based on the above synthesis of prior research on fashion rental and consumer perceptions, it can be stated that consumers perceive fashion rental as a risky choice, but these services enable them to try new brands, stay trendy and constantly change their appearance, which contributes to increased willingness to rent clothing online, as they can rent clothing at a reasonable price and enjoy designer brands for a small price [26,28,29].

3. Research Design

3.1. The Context of the Study: Sustainable Clothing Industry

The clothing industry was chosen because it is one of the largest environment polluters in the world [1]. The production of new clothing requires vast quantities of water, energy, and raw materials such as cotton. This leads to water scarcity, the depletion of natural resources and energy-related pollution. A significant amount of clothing ends up in landfills each year, taking up space and releasing harmful chemicals as it decomposes. Fast fashion, with its emphasis on trendy clothing at low prices, contributes heavily to this problem.

The recent commitment of countries to the sustainable advancement of and reduction in environmental pollution [30] has sparked interest in renting clothing online among circular consumption-conscious consumers. This subsequently prompted us to consider the online clothing rental service and consumer willingness to use such services, since, by adopting more sustainable practices like clothing rental and using eco-friendly materials, the clothing industry can significantly reduce its environmental impact.

3.2. Research Method

Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most relevant data collection method when investigating certain psychological characteristics of consumers (i.e., levels of consumer innovativeness in terms of their readiness to rent clothing online and the role of social representation when renting clothing online) and their role in consumer willingness to rent clothing online in the context of circular consumption. Semi-structured interviews were the most suitable data collection method for the following reasons [31]: Using semi-structured interviews, they allow us to ask open-ended questions and probe for deeper insights into how participants perceive and talk about clothing rental in the context of sustainable consumption. Also, via flexibility in conversation, we can delve deeper into motivations behind consumer choices. We could further explore why consumers find renting clothing online valuable in terms of environmental benefits, yielding richer data than fixed-answer choices.

3.3. Sample Selection and Data Collection

The United Kingdom was selected for this study for several reasons. It is the first country in Europe to commit to net-zero emissions by the end of 2030 [30]. The growing focus on sustainability among consumers in the UK warrants a closer look at consumer behaviour related to sustainable clothing-related decision-making [5,7]. The UK has a strong presence in the fashion industry. Consumers are exposed to diverse fashion trends, potentially leading them to explore alternative consumption models such as renting clothing online [5]. The UK has a well-developed e-commerce market, with a high percentage of consumers comfortable shopping online [5,7]. This makes them more receptive to adopting online clothing rental services.

Ten respondents in the UK provided data for this empirical study. To ensure a robust and insightful study on consumer preferences for renting clothing online or buying second hand, the following sample selection criteria were applied: (a) awareness and experience with clothing rental services, including occasional renters and frequent renters; (b) fashion interests and keeping up with the latest styles. By applying these criteria, we selected consumers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their choices related to renting clothes online or shopping for second-hand clothes.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the UK. The interviews lasted 45–60 min. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed (verbatim).

The majority of respondents were females (Appendix A); their education levels ranged from secondary education to higher education with a medium annual income level. The interviewer was a psychology graduate with expertise in conducting qualitative research. To ensure the richness of data collected, convenience snowball sampling was used to recruit participants who rented or purchase second-hand clothing online. This method relies on existing networks to select participants, but it is the most financially viable method for data collection. Respondents were recruited in various locations, and all interviews were conducted in locations—such as their home, university setting or coffee shops—based on the preferences of the respondents.

In our study, the respondents were based in the UK and ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old. This suggests a focus on a mid-career professional demographic. Most respondents were females. All respondents had either university degrees or college educations. This indicated a sample with a relatively high level of education. The income level among the respondents was identified as medium. The recruitment method suggests that respondents actively participate in online shopping for second-hand goods, or use a clothing rental services.

A sample size of 10 respondents [32] is typical for qualitative studies aiming to explore consumer willingness to rent clothing online in depth and achieve thematic saturation. Prior qualitative studies exploring consumer perceptions have achieved thematic saturation, with sample sizes ranging from 6 to 16 participants (e.g., [33]). Our study aimed to achieve a similar level of depth in understanding consumer perceptions. When conducting semi-

structured interviews, thematic saturation [32] was a better indicator of sample size than a specific number of participants. In our case, after interviewing nine respondents, a saturation point was reached when no new themes emerged from further interviews.

In addition, in qualitative research, the aim is to gain in-depth understanding rather than statistical generalisability. A smaller, more focused group allowed for rich data collection through detailed interviews. Finally, we also engaged in purposive sampling [34] to derive 10 participants who self-identified as "working consumers" who rent clothing online. Although our sample is skewed towards females, the literature suggests that usually females (and not males) oversee purchases in their household [35]. For this reason, we believe that our sample is suitable in providing relevant and suitable data for developing our ad-hoc model and putting forward our propositions.

3.4. Data Collection: Interviewing Technique

To investigate consumer willingness to rent clothing online in relation to social representation and innovativeness, we followed an interpretivist approach [36] with a focus on consumer experiences with the fashion industry. We started interviews with an introductory open-ended question about their background and their interest in online fashion (e.g., When did you start renting clothing?). Then we moved to the topic of consumer innovativeness with more specific questions (e.g., When you rent clothing, are you the first among your friends to rent clothing or are you the last?) and environmental benefits (Do you think renting clothing online adds value to the environment? If so, why?), and finally, we questioned them more specifically about social representation (e.g., (Do you think that renting clothing online is safe as compared to purchasing new clothing online? Why?). We ended our interviews with a question on their willingness to rent clothing online in the future (e.g., Do you willingly rent clothing online?) (Appendix B).

3.5. Data Coding and Analysis

In our analysis, we followed an interpretivist approach [37] that focuses on interpreting the meaning the participants create through their words and actions, acknowledging that participants' experiences and perceptions are shaped by their social, cultural, and historical background. Therefore, the authors, when engaged in data analysis, considered the context in which the data were collected in order to understand the deeper meaning behind it. Based on the widely accepted practice of data coding and analysis for qualitative data, such as reducing the data, displaying it, and drawing conclusions [38], the authors followed the above steps to analyse the data collected through interviews. Data analysis is an iterative process, and the authors moved back and forth between individual data points and overall themes [39]. The authors actively interpreted the data, instead of simply coding or categorizing it. They looked for underlying meaning and narratives within the participants' stories. The data analysis involved manually highlighting key emerging themes that played an important role in consumer sustainable decision making when renting clothing online, while broad themes, factors and categories were narrowed down to more focused concepts, as the following section demonstrates.

4. Results and Discussion

This study utilises qualitative data from interviews to propose an ad-hoc theoretical model along with research propositions, as presented in the section below.

4.1. Results and Analysis of the Qualitative Empirical Study
4.1.1. Initial Qualitative Findings

The qualitative empirical study provides the initial findings for this paper, which are then used to propose an ad-hoc theoretical model and raise research propositions regarding consumer willingness to rent clothing online in the context of circular consumption.

The results of this study indicate that respondents are willing to rent clothing online, and they enjoy using rental services for various reasons, such as convenience, ease, acces-

sibility, and practicality, while others point out certain risks and find it hard to adjust to these when renting clothing online (e.g., damaged clothes would arrive/worrying about damaging clothes at a party). These initial findings are in line with those of previous studies [21,24,25,27–29] in the context of sustainable fashion.

For instance, one respondent reported:

"I like renting clothing for different big and small occasions",

while another stated

"I rent clothing online because it gives me time to consider what I like-I can go on the website and look at my dress several times and I can decide after 2–3 days if I really want to rent it. If I go to the department store, I have to buy a piece of clothing immediately and then I regret buying it, so have to go back to the shop and return it, which is rather inconvenient".

Another respondent indicated:

"I rent my outfit just before the special occasion. I hate shopping and this service offers my dress to be delivered by post, so I use it to save time".

All respondents acknowledged that renting clothing online is a convenient and accessible way of selecting the right outfit, and this service is especially great for individuals who do not live in big cities or do not have access to many outlets in their towns. This finding is in line with the earlier findings of a study by Armstrong et al. [29], evidencing an innovative approach to clothing rental that is preferred by consumers. However, some respondents indicated some perceived threats related to renting clothing online. To them, renting clothes causes stress and raises doubts as to whether the right piece of clothing has been chosen, if the size is suitable, and how it will look on them or how much it will cost to them if the rented piece of clothing becomes damaged at a party. This finding parallels results of a previous study [28] in the context of sustainable fashion referring to negative perceptions about online rental services in terms of trust and lack of accessibility to specific garments.

According to one respondent:

"I always have doubt when I place my order—if the dress that I chose fit me and will I look beautiful, will I feel comfortable in that dress? Have I selected the right size?"

Such doubts can be reduced be ordering clothing several weeks before the occasion, but that increases the cost for the item:

"Usually, the dress arrives two days before the occasion, and I am always worried if it looks good on me and whether I will have a nice piece of clothing to wear for the occasion?"

We further identified variety as an important consideration when renting clothing online. Rental services offer a constantly updated wardrobe. This finding parallels results by Mukendi and Henninger [29] stating that utilitarian factors are important to preferred renting services. Consumers find it rather easy and enjoyable to browse selections, rent items, and manage returns within the online service platform. However, we here found contradicting views among respondents.

For instance, one respondent stated:

"it is very convenient and enjoyable for me to browse different clothing collections on the website and I is very confident with ordering my chosen clothing online to save time",

While another respondent was more conscious about ordering online when stating

"I like browsing the website and look for new brands and models but I only order in a retail store outlet because I do not like returning items that do not fit me perfectly. I feel more confident trying them on first. I am also conscious about potential delays in receiving rentals".

In our interviews, we have noticed that a few respondents mentioned that some of their relatives and friends do not even try to rent online. According to one respondent:

"My colleagues are carefully considering renting service, but they have doubts if they like having a dress for one night only".

This reluctance to rent might be because these consumers do not think an online rental service is a suitable alternative to them as compared to purchasing new clothing and keeping that piece of clothing for life. This finding contradicts a previous study by Moeller and Wittkowsi [27] stating that ownership is a burden to consumers, and that this is the reason to switch to clothing rental services. This contradiction of the previous literature might be due to a sample bias. Our research targeted a specific demographic that prioritizes owning clothes they can keep forever. The previous study focused on demographics more receptive to the temporary access model. Our findings may highlight the emotional connection some consumers have with clothing, leading them to value ownership over renting, even if it is less practical. The prior study has emphasised the practical aspects of avoiding clutter and storage issues. It might also be possible that some of our respondents see renting as a temporary solution, rather than a complete replacement for ownership. They might rent for special occasions while still wanting to own clothes they wear frequently. Finally, our participants may not be fully aware of the benefits of clothing rental services, such as access to cost savings in the long term, while the previous study has focused on populations already familiar with the concept.

While online clothing rental services encompass a much broader range of garments, it is important to note that our target market mainly comprises females, as they comprise a major part of this market [21]. We identified that mainly women with a medium income level and college or university education use rental services catering to various styles and occasions, such as workwear, special events, and every-day wear. This finding is in line with those of a previous study by Shrivastava et al. [21] in the context of the Indian market.

We discovered that rental services often offer subscriptions with varying numbers of items allowed per rental period and access to innovative designer brands. These subscription models cater to different consumer needs and budgets, and increase familiarity with the service provider. This finding is in line with a previous study [40] stating that this model aims to increase the durability and longevity of clothing while enabling consumers to access the newest designer labels.

As per one respondent,

"I like the subscription model because for the relatively low prices I can enjoy several brands and look different every day".

Environmental impact has been mentioned in the interviews, and it has been noted that it is an important selling point for clothing rentals. These services promote eco-consciousness by reducing clothing waste and extending the lifespan of garments. This finding parallels the prior study by Amasawa et al. [40] who found that consumers prefer renting clothing if they wish to participate in environmental preservation.

As one respondent notes

"I rent because I care about the environment. I believe that I contribute to a better world and save money at the same time".

We further identified that while offering access to designer labels or trendy pieces, rental services need to be evaluated for their cost-effectiveness compared to traditional purchasing. Respondents compare rental fees to retail prices and consider factors such as dry-cleaning costs or damage policies when renting clothing online. This finding is in line with [40], who found that consumers can enjoy high-quality clothing for a fraction of the price when renting clothing online.

According to one respondent:

"Given the cost of dry-cleaning for a garment I own and storage inconvenience, I happily rent a designer brand from a retail outlet, which usually has great damage policies in place for dresses."

We then identified social and experiential aspects. Some rental services cultivate a sense of community or cater to the desire to experiment with different styles. Online services offer styling advice, curated collections, and social media interactions to enhance the user experience. This finding is in line with those of previous literature [26] indicating that enjoyment is one of the motivations for consumers to rent fashion clothing.

According to one respondent:

"The rental services give me a sense of pride in how I look when I wear rented clothing. If I decide to go to the rental outlet, I also receive some advice on styling, which makes me look younger and happier."

We now move towards key themes emerging from our study's findings.

4.1.2. Key Emerging Themes in Fashion Online Rental

The most common emerging themes that have been mentioned by interviewees in making the decision to rent clothing online, or not, were as follows:

(a)   Social representation;
(b)   Innovativeness;
(c)   Familiarity;
(d)   Green value.

When investigating social representation, several categories emerged from the interviews with the respondents:

(1) Acknowledgement that using technology to rent clothing is trustworthy and a suitable option for consumers to perform clothing rental online;
(2) Fun, enjoyment and feeling good when renting clothing online;
(3) Renting clothing online as a necessity.

To illustrate the first category (1: technology use), one respondent indicated:

"Renting a dress online for a special occasion was surprisingly easy! The website had a huge selection, and the reviews helped me pick the perfect outfit".

This quote suggests that technology can positively influence social representation. The ease of use and wide selection offered by the platform might contribute to a more favourable view of online clothing rental. Similarly, positive online reviews of clothing rental services can build trust, making the concept more socially acceptable. According to another respondent:

"I was not sure about renting clothes at first, but then I saw a bunch of influencers I follow doing it on social media. They made it seem like a [. . .] sustainable way to try new styles."

The above quote illustrates how social media can influence social representation. By seeing influencers embracing clothing rental, the participant perceives it as more acceptable and trendier. This finding is in line with previous findings reported in the literature [21,41]. For instance, Shrivastava et al. [21] found that, among consumers in India, social media platforms such as Meta, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram allow consumers to engage with the fashion industry, which in turn enables fashion industry representatives to better understand their consumers. Consumers can express their opinions via blogposts or tweets about various activities happening on social media, such as fashion weeks or live fashion show streams. Another study by Min et al. [42] states that consumer behaviour and consumer intentions are affected by celebrity endorsements, while other studies [43,44] also confirm social media's influence on consumer intentions in the fashion industry.

To illustrate the second category (2: fun, enjoyment), one respondent mentioned that she enjoys browsing catalogues on websites:

"I find trying to find a suitable piece of clothing to be fun and enjoyable because I like browsing the website and then coming back to the same dress again and again before making my final decision which one, I want to wear for my occasion".

Another respondent mentioned that:

"Renting clothes online has been a blast! It is so much fun to try out new styles and designers without breaking the bank."

The majority of those respondents who rent clothing online can be considered as having fun, but some of those respondents rent clothing online out of necessity rather than their curiosity and willingness to try new clothes that are available to rent. This finding is in line with those of a previous study by McKinney and Shin [41], which identified that "fit, garment style and design elements" are important when renting clothing online, and contribute to the "fun" experience when selecting specific garments.

To illustrate the final category (3: necessity), several respondents acknowledged that they did not really enjoy shopping for clothing, as clothing played a very insignificant role in their lives. They acknowledged they would rather spend the time with their children than browsing a department store, and for this reason they prefer renting clothing online:

"I rent clothing because it is necessary as the occasions which I am invited have a special dress code, which requires me to wear a special dress, which I do not want to buy in a department store and then store it in my wardrobe, so I rent it instead".

Yet another respondent who rented closing previously suggested that they would like to own clothes instead of renting them:

"I would not rent clothes [anymore] because I like having my own things. It just feels more waste to keep renting something I do not even own".

This quote suggests a social representation that equates ownership with sustainability. The respondent perceives renting as wasteful, revealing a potential barrier to online clothing rental for sustainable consumption. The above finding is in line with previous research in the context of e-commerce in Italy [45], since online commerce is so widespread that consumers "cannot ignore it anymore" and have to partake in online clothing rental rather than going to a retail outlet to obtain garments.

When attempting to discuss the innovativeness of the respondents, we can state that all respondents belong to an "early adopters" group. Based on the interview results, two sub-groups emerged among respondents:

(1) A more innovative group of early adopters;

(2) A less innovative group of early adopters.

The emergence of these two groups reflects individual differences in personality traits and risk tolerance among consumers renting clothing online.

A more innovative group (1) is more open to new experiences; these individuals are naturally curious and willing to try new things, including online clothing rental services. According to one respondent:

"I think renting clothes is a great idea. It is a sustainable way to stay on trend without having a closet full of clothes I never wear".

Another respondent stated that *"I love the variety of clothes available online. It is so much easier to find unique pieces than in traditional stores."*

Those consumers who we consider to be more innovative tend to rent clothing before their friends or relatives do. An interesting finding to report is that these respondents tend to be eager to start searching for a suitable outfit 3–6 months in advance of their special occasion, contrary to those who attempt to rent a suitable outfit 3–6 days before their special event. To illustrate this behaviour, one of the respondents stated:

"I am keen to start searching for the most beautiful dress several months in advance when my daughter got married".

The less innovative group (2) of respondents can be characterised as a more risk-averse group. These individuals prefer familiar routines of renting clothing at department stores, and might be hesitant to adopt new practices such as clothing rental in an online context. One respondent stated:

"I am not sure about renting clothes online. What if they do not fit well, or what if I get them damaged when trying them on at my house?"

The above finding on innovativeness closely reflects findings from the previous literature (e.g., [46,47]. For instance, a study by Lee and Huang [46] found that innovativeness among consumers and fashion consciousness, among other factors, influence consumer preferences for online clothing rental services in the USA, while a study by Limayem et al. [47] has suggested that the innovativeness of consumers positively influences online shopping intentions.

The familiarity factor most likely stems from its role in reducing perceived risks and uncertainties associated with a relatively new service in the market. When investigating familiarity, or prior experience with rental online services, for some consumers, trying a new service such as clothing rental online can be daunting. The literature [28,40] cites the importance of trust when engaging with clothing rental services, while proposing that a lack of familiarity acts as a barrier to clothing rental adoption [48]. Familiarity with the process or having a positive experience with similar services beforehand can make one feel more comfortable and confident in trying it out. As per one respondent:

"I was hesitant about renting clothes at first, but then a friend told me about their experience with rental service in their town. They had a great time, so I decided to give it a try".

Since online clothing rental involves trusting a service with personal style and fit, familiarity can mitigate anxieties. According to prior literature [28,40], trust helps the service provider to put their clients at ease during service delivery. Prior experience with the service provider allows consumers to assess potential risks such as fit issues or quality concerns more accurately [28,40].

For example, as one respondent stated:

"Because I have rented clothes online before, I know what to look for in terms of sizing and descriptions. If takes the whole process a lot less stressful".

Finally, green/environmental value perceptions have emerged among respondents. The green value criterion refers to the growing consumer willingness to make ethical and sustainable decisions with regard to clothing acquisition, in this case, renting clothing in the context of online environment. According to previous literature [28,40,49], the perceived green value reflects a growing environmental consciousness among consumers as they are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry, particularly regarding waste and resource consumption.

Renting clothes offers a way to participate in fashion without contributing to clothing waste, as per one respondent:

"I feel good knowing that by renting clothes, I am not adding to the massive amount of clothing that ends up in landfills."

Renting clothes can be perceived as having a smaller environmental footprint compared to buying new clothes, especially if the rental service uses sustainable practices in cleaning and shipping, as per one respondent:

"I try to be environmentally conscious, and renting clothes seems like a way to minimize my impact on the environment."

The production of new clothes uses significant resources such as water and energy [49]. Renting allows existing clothes to be used for longer periods, potentially reducing the demand for new clothing production:

"Renting clothes feels like a way to be more responsible with resources. It is like giving clothes a second life."

In summary, the key themes that emerged from the interviews are linked to social representation, innovativeness, familiarity, and green value perceptions among respondents. Respondents found renting clothing online easy, convenient, and accessible, while

acknowledging certain risks when renting clothing online, such as damaging clothes at events. These findings are in line with prior research [28,40,49] in the context of the circular fashion industry.

4.2. An Ad-Hoc Conceptual Model and Propositions

Based on our qualitative results, we propose an ad-hoc conceptual model in the context of renting clothing online. Our ad-hoc conceptual model initially links the innovativeness of an individual, social representation, familiarity, green value, and consumer willingness to online clothing rental (Figure 1).
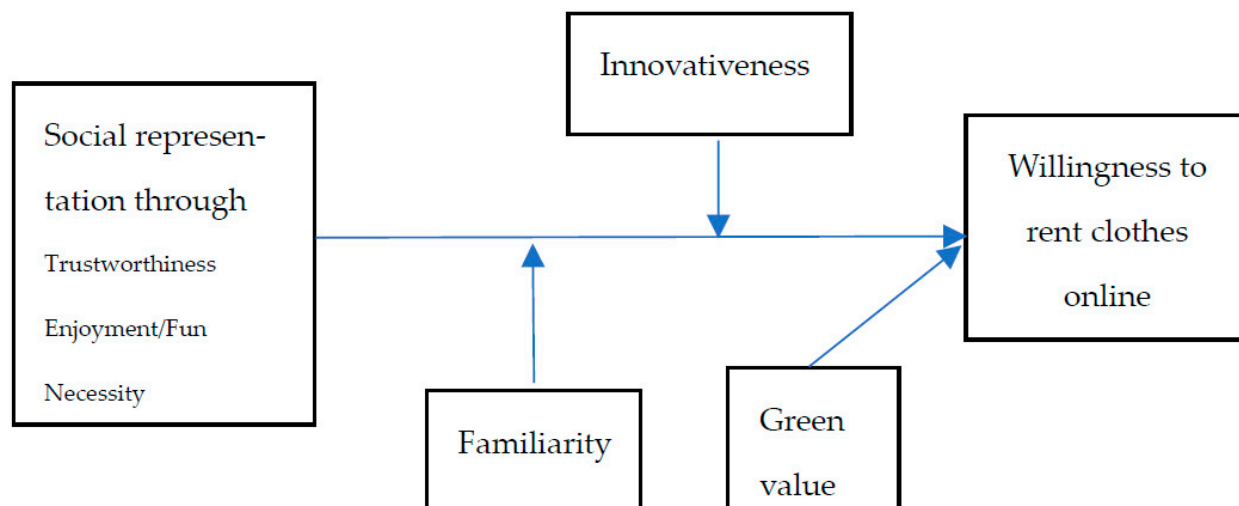

Figure 1. An ad-hoc model of clothing rental online.

In the ad-hoc model, *Social representation* refers to shared beliefs, attitudes, and norms that people have about online clothing rental [16,17]. A positive social representation (e.g., seen as sustainable, trendy) could increase consumer willingness to rent clothing online. Belonging to a community that embraces renting clothes can make consumers feel more positive about the practice [50]. Rental services offer access to a wider variety of clothes, allowing for expression of personal style [51].

Additionally, social representation in our empirical study is linked to three distinct categories:

(1) The role of trustworthiness in using technology;

(2) Fun, enjoyment and feeling good when renting clothing online;

(3) A necessary activity to be performed by an individual to feel good about their appearance.

In other words, renting clothing online can be seen as tech-trendy, aligning with an image that is desirable to some consumers [22]. The ability to try different styles without commitment can be perceived as a fun and engaging experience [27]. Rental services can provide access to high-end or designer labels at a lower cost [28,40], allowing consumers to maintain a stylish appearance without a significant financial investment.

Consumer innovativeness represents a consumer's openness to trying new things [52]. Highly innovative consumers might be more likely to embrace online clothing rental as a novel concept. Innovativeness is proposed as a moderating variable in our ad-hoc model because of two key groups of individuals identified by our results; that is, highly innovative consumers and less innovative consumers. Individuals with high levels of innovativeness are more likely to be receptive to the idea of online clothing rental services, which might be perceived as a new way to access clothing. They might be curious about how this service works and what benefits it offers. Online clothing rental can be seen as an opportunity to explore diverse styles and expand wardrobe possibilities without the commitment of buying new clothes. This finding corroborates the previous finding in the literature [27],

stating that unwillingness to own garments motivates consumers to engage with online rental platforms.

Familiarity, or prior experience with online clothing rental services, can influence willingness to rent [53]. Positive past experiences or increased familiarity with the rental may lead to greater willingness to rent again. Our empirical study enabled us to identify new information that has not previously been presented in the context of renting clothing online; that is, familiarity when renting clothing online, which we also propose as a moderating variable in our ad-hoc theoretical model. We posit that when consumers are unfamiliar with a service, they perceive a higher risk of having a negative experience [48]. Familiarity either through personal experience or positive word-of-mouth can alleviate these concerns and make consumers more comfortable with trying a new service.

Green value refers to the importance a consumer places on environmental sustainability and ethical practices in their decision-making [54]. In the context of clothing rental, green value translates to the perceived environmental and ethical benefits associated with renting clothes instead of buying them. Consumers who hold strong environmental values are often conscious of the negative impact of the fashion industry on the environment. Clothing production is a major contributor to water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and textile waste [2]. By renting clothes instead of buying new ones, consumers can reduce the demand for new clothing production and the associated environmental damage.

These elements are incorporated into the ad-hoc model (Figure 1).

Further, our initial qualitative study also uncovered that individuals do not really think about the "green" value that renting clothing online offers to the environment, as well as the pollution reduction. Although the respondents agreed that renting clothing plays a positive role in reducing pollution and environmental preservation, they tend to rent clothing online due to various reasons (e.g., fun, enjoyment, time-saving exercise, willingness to feel good about themselves) other than contributing to circular consumption. When asked about green value, some of the respondents were surprised, while others stated that they ought to change their habit of purchasing of new clothing and engage with circular consumption more, but public policy-makers and companies must highlight the benefits of such circular consumption among the members of our society. The above findings parallel studies in the literature. For instance, Moeller and Wittkowski [27] found that "possession importance" among consumers has a negative association with the demand for rental services in Germany, while "trend orientation" and "convenience orientation" have positive associations with consumer willingness to rent clothing online. Their study also found that a few of the drivers initially expected to influence rental service demands remain insignificant. These are "experience", "price" and "green value".

Based on the above, below we offer four theoretical propositions.

Social representation is an important characteristic in our contemporary society, where new clothing acquisition is valued more highly than renting clothing online. Consumers perceive renting clothing online as a necessity if they are to be more likeable and presentable among their friends and relatives. If the social group generally views online clothing rental platforms as trustworthy [53] (e.g., secure transactions, payment protection, good quality clothing, reliable return policies, damage fees, return windows, good customer service), this positive social representation can encourage consumer willingness to rent clothes online. Conversely, if the social group expresseses concerns [49] about clothing rental online (e.g., security risks, poor quality garments, unclear conflict resolution policies), this less positive social representation can create distrust in consumers, making them less willing to rent clothes online.

Therefore, we posit that social representation in the form of trustworthiness might have a strong influence on consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

We predict the following:

P1a: Social representation in relation to trustworthiness in using technology will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

Moreover, social representation also links with fun and enjoyment when renting clothing online. If renting clothes is seen as a means towards accepting a wider variety of trendy and unique styles, it can be perceived as a fun way to experiment with fashion and express oneself creatively. Also, the thrill of finding an outfit for a special occasion can make browsing online rental platforms an enjoyable experience, similar to a treasure hunt. Sharing rental outfits and outfit inspiration on social media can contribute to a sense of community and belonging, making the rental experience more enjoyable [53]. However, if renting clothes is associated with being cheap or lacking in taste, it can dimmish the fun factor and make individuals self-conscious [55]. The pressure to constantly keep up with the latest fashion trends can make renting clothes feel overwhelming and obligatory, rather than enjoyable.

Hence, we posit the following:

P1b: Social representation in relation to fun and enjoyment will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

Social representation can also act as a barrier to clothing rental online for some consumers. In many cultures, owning clothes is associated with personal success, status, and individuality [56]. Renting clothing might contradict this perception, making consumers feel they lack possession and control. Renting clothes is a relatively new concept, and some consumers might associate it with being cheap or unable to buy. This social stigma could be discouraging. For special occasions, people often desire the feeling of owning a unique outfit they can keep. Renting might not fulfil this desire for sentimental value [57].

Thus, we posit that social representation in the form of necessity might have a strong influence on consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

We predict the following:

P1c: Social representation in relation to necessity will positively influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

Social representation reflects the shared beliefs and perceptions within a social group as regard clothing rental [16,17]. In the context of sustainability, a positive social representation (e.g., viewing clothing rental as environmentally friendly) could encourage consumers to rent clothes. Innovativeness refers to a consumer's openness to trying new things and their comfort level with unfamiliar experiences [52]. This can significantly influence how consumers react to social representations.

The construct of social representation has mainly been empirically tested in the context of new product adoption among consumers (e.g., Ref. [10,52]). Previous research on innovativeness suggests a gap in the knowledge regarding domain-specific innovativeness, as individuals may be innovative in one product category, but they could be considered as late-adopters in another ([13], p. 354).

We posit that consumers with high innovativeness are naturally more likely to explore new options such as clothing rental, regardless of the prevailing social representation. They might be intrinsically motivated by sustainability or less reliant on external validation [58]. On the contrary, consumers with low innovativeness might be more susceptible to the influence of social representation. A positive social representation can encourage these consumers to overcome their hesitations towards trying something new (i.e., clothing rental) because it aligns with the group's norms and reduces perceived risk [59]. This is in line with previous studies by Lee and Huang [46] as well as Limayem et al. [47], which confirm a positive link between consumer attitudes and online shopping experiences.

For consumers with low innovativeness, the social representation can have a strong impact on their willingness to rent clothing online. If the social group views clothing rental positively, it can significantly increase their likelihood of trying it. For consumers with high innovativeness, the social representation might have a weaker influence. Their inherent openness to new experiences might be the primary driver behind their decision to rent clothes, regardless of social perceptions.

Consequently, we state the following:

P2: Innovativeness will act as a moderator in the relationship between social representation and consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

Next, based on our initial qualitative findings, we identified that familiarity with renting clothing online plays an important role among more innovative consumers. Familiarity refers to a consumer's level of knowledge and experience with online clothing rental services [53]. This can influence how they interpret social representation, which reflects shared beliefs and perceptions about online clothing rental. However, if a consumer is unfamiliar with the rental services, the social representation can have a limited impact. Consumers with high familiarity understand the process, benefits, and potential risks of online clothing rental. Social representation can then reinforce their existing knowledge and potentially lead them towards making a positive decision (positive representation), or away from one (negative representation) [60]. Consumers with low familiarity may struggle to interpret social representation accurately. A positive social representation might grab consumer interest, but without additional knowledge, they might hesitate to rent clothing online due to risks and uncertainties (e.g., quality of clothes, return process). In this case, consumers with low familiarity may be deterred [29] from renting clothing online. For consumers with low familiarity, the social representation can have a stronger influence, but not necessarily in a positive way. A positive representation might spark initial interest, but risks and uncertainties could still act as a barrier. Such barriers as "waiting for their turn to wear garments" [29], for example, may prevent consumers from enjoying the online rental process. For consumers with high familiarity, the social representation might have a weaker influence. They already possess knowledge about online clothing rental, and their decision will likely be based on their own assessment of its benefits and dangers, along with the social representation.

Since familiarity has not been tested in the context of online rented clothing, we propose the following:

P3: Familiarity with renting clothing online will act as a moderator in the relationship between social representation and consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

Based on our qualitative findings, we identified that the green value plays a minor role among individuals when renting clothing online. Consumers who prioritise green value are more likely to view clothing rental as an attractive option due to the perceived environmental benefits (e.g., better for the environment due to reduced resource consumption, less waste) and ethical advantages (potentially avoiding unsustainable practices in the clothing industry) compared to traditional clothing purchases. This finding is rather unexpected, as previous quantitative studies found no influence of green value on consumer rental preferences in the context of the online environment [21]. However, other studies in the context of rental service preferences found that environmental awareness positively influenced consumer choices [46]. Given that our study has qualitative origins, quantitative research is required to further examine the contradictory findings in the literature.

Green value might act as a key motivator for consumers to choose an online clothing rental service. Consumers with high green value are more likely to be attracted to online clothing rental for several reasons. Clothing production has a significant environmental footprint [54]. Renting clothes allows consumers to access a variety of styles without contributing to the environmental costs of new clothing production. Online clothing rental platforms extend the lifespan of garments by allowing them to be worn by multiple people [40]. This aligns with the principles of a circular economy, minimising waste and resource consumption. Also, some consumers might be concerned about labour practices within the clothing industry [61]. Renting clothes can offer an alternative that does not directly support these practices, aligning with their ethical values. Consumers with high green value might see clothing rental as a way to integrate sustainable practices into their daily lives and express their environmental consciousness. Given the link between environmental awareness that consumers have in the USA [46] and green value perceptions among online clothing rental shoppers in the UK, our results indicate a promising area for future research, which will seek to further the strengths of green value's effects on

online clothing rental behaviour. Choosing sustainable options can enhance a consumer's self-image and sense of environmental responsibility.

Since green value has not yet been considered in the context of online-rented clothing, we propose the following:

P4: The green value dimension will positively affect consumer willingness to rent clothing online.

As can be seen in the preceding section, the findings of our qualitative research on the rental and second-hand clothing market provide us with specific factors influencing consumer willingness to rent or purchase second-hand clothing online. This aligns with the principles of circular fashion consumption, which aims to extend the lifespan of garments and minimise waste. Based on our findings, we propose four hypotheses, which link specific factors to consumers' decisions to buy second hand or rent clothing online, instead of buying new clothes. By understanding these factors, we gain valuable insights into the promotion of sustainable fashion practices through online rental and second-hand clothing sales platforms.

5. Conclusions

Our proposed ad-hoc model offers a framework for understanding consumer willingness to rent clothing online. We have proposed four factors that influence consumer willingness to rent clothing online. Factors such as social representation, innovativeness, familiarity, and green value play a certain role in consumer willingness to rent clothing online in the context of circular consumption. Consumers who view clothing rental positively and perceive it as a sustainable practice are more likely to be willing to rent clothes online.

Social representation refers to how consumers perceive online clothing rental within their social circles. Positive social representation (e.g., seen as trendy, environmentally conscious) might influence a consumer's willingness to rent clothing online. Online clothing rental might be seen as more fashionable or trendy compared to the perception of second-hand clothing, which can sometimes be associated with being outdated or used.

Another factor relates to familiarity, which is understood as the consumer's level of comfort and knowledge about online clothing rental platforms and how these influence their willingness to use them. Purchasing second-hand clothing online is likely a more familiar concept for many consumers compared to renting clothes online.

Innovativeness is yet another factor, which refers to consumers being opened to new experiences, and technologies can play a role. Those with a higher tendency towards innovation might be more receptive to online clothing rental. Such consumers are more likely to embrace online rental. Both online clothing rental and second-hand clothing purchases can be seen as innovative consumption practices compared to traditional retail models. However, online clothing rental might be perceived as a more cutting-edge approach.

Green value factor refers to consumers' environmental concerns and their perceptions of online clothing rental as a sustainable practice, which can influence their decisions. Consumers who place a high value on green benefits and environmentally friendly practices are more likely to be drawn towards online clothing rental services as a sustainable consumption option. Both online clothing rental and second-hand clothing purchases promote sustainability by extending the life cycle of garments. However, online clothing rental services might offer a more sustainable model by minimising packaging waste and transportation compared to individual second-hand purchases.

The ad-hoc model aims to predict the likelihood of consumers choosing to rent clothing online instead of other purchasing options (including second-hand). This ad-hoc model can be used by online clothing rental platforms. Understanding these factors can help them develop marketing strategies that target specific demographics and address potential concerns related to familiarity, social representation, and green value.

Future research would be required to test the model. Conducting quantitative research (e.g., surveys) with a larger and more diverse sample to test the proposed ad-hoc model statistically and determine the relative strengths of each antecedent in influencing willingness to rent clothing online is necessary. Exploring additional factors not included

in this model, such as price sensitivity, variety and quality of clothing offered on rental platforms, convenience factors (e.g., easy returns), and trust in online services, might be useful. By examining these factors, the ad-hoc model provides a valuable framework for understanding consumer behaviour related to online clothing rental and its position within the broader context of second-hand clothing options.

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Implications for theory. The study offers a set of variables that have not been previously combined into one theoretical model in the literature. Our study introduces a novel ad-hoc model that sheds light on the factors influencing consumer willingness to rent clothing online in the context of sustainable consumption behaviour. It goes beyond traditional models by incorporating the concept of social representation (shared beliefs about an object), innovativeness, familiarity, and their interaction with consumer willingness to rent clothing online when seeking green/environmental benefits (environmental priorities). This provides a more comprehensive understanding of how societal perceptions and personal choices influence sustainable consumption choices [62]. The concept of innovativeness, presented here as a moderator, is a key strength of the shift towards online clothing rental. It highlights that consumers' openness to trying new things (innovativeness) can influence how social representations and green value translate into actual behaviour (i.e., renting clothes online). This sheds light on the psychological factors that bridge the gap between positive attitudes and sustainable consumption actions.

The ad-hoc model highlights how social representation (perceptions and shared beliefs about clothing rental), innovativeness (openness to new ideas) and familiarity (experience with rental services) can influence the willingness to rent clothing online. By introducing the content of green value (environmental concern), the ad-hoc model expands the theory of innovation to incorporate value-driven factors related to adopting a circular consumption practice in the fashion industry.

The ad-hoc model also highlights the importance of social representation in shaping consumer perceptions of online clothing rental. This aligns with social representation theory, which emphasises how shared beliefs and understanding influence behaviour. Social representations are dynamic and can be modified through social interaction and exposure to new information. Our ad-hoc model suggests that interventions promoting the green value and social aspects of clothing rental could positively influence social representations and increase adoption.

By proposing a novel ad-hoc theoretical model and research propositions, this study increases our understanding of consumers' motives and their willingness to rent clothing online, and it also contributes to knowledge in the marketing ethics and consumer behaviour fields.

Implications for practice. Our proposed ad-hoc model could be useful to online clothing rental services marketers or second-hand clothing retailers, as well as public policy-makers. Understanding the factors influencing online clothing rental can help them influence the perceptions of society, and thus position their offerings more effectively.

(1) *Marketing practitioners,* when offering to rent clothing online, should (a) consider developing a labelling system that clearly communicates the environmental benefits of using clothing rental services online compared to traditional clothing purchases, such as attaching a tag on the order informing consumers about the positive contribution of their actions to the environment, and encouraging their consumers to consider benefits to the environment when choosing online rental service versus purchasing new clothing; (b) focus on the positive aspects of renting clothes, such as access to diverse styles, finding unique pieces of clothing, affordability, and extending the lifespan of garments; (c) develop information resources that educate consumers about the various online clothing rental services available and how they work; (d) implement pilot programs in partnership with clothing rental services, offering subsidized memberships or discounts to introduce consumers to

the online clothing rental services; (e) offer special promotions or discounts to targeted demographics, such as students or young professionals.

(2) *Public policy-makers* need to (a) highlight the importance of circular consumption to society and insist on the need to educate individuals from an early age on how over-consumption in the fashion industry results in carbon dioxide, which damages our planet and increases pollution in our environment; (b) warn citizens about the dangers of the fast fashion industry and persuade individuals consider clothing rental online in their decision-making; (c) launch public awareness campaigns that highlight the environmental and social benefits of clothing rental services and support the circular economy; (d) partner with influencers and sustainability advocates to promote a positive image of the industry; (e) consider supporting companies by providing grants or tax breaks to those who offer online clothing rental services, as these are not as profitable as the resource management institution (e.g., WRAP in the UK) had forecasted several years ago. For this reason, companies need to be compensated by public policy-makers for their efforts to create new services in the online context regarding more sustainable clothing consumption.

By implementing the above recommendations, marketers and policymakers can play a crucial role in shifting public perceptions and changing social representations of online clothing rental from a novelty to a mainstream circular consumption choice in the fashion industry.

5.2. Research Limitations

As with all research, our study has several methodological limitations. First, the way we recruited participants might have introduced selection bias. We relied on purposive convenience sampling, and for this reason, we might have excluded individuals with different viewpoints or experiences regarding second-hand clothing. Second, while qualitative research provides valuable insights into the experiences of individuals, it does not allow for the generalisation of findings, or for quantifying the relative importance of identified factors (social representation, innovativeness, familiarity, and green value). Third, the study having been conducted solely in the UK limits the applicability of the findings to other countries with potentially different consumer habits and market landscapes. Finally, due to interviews being conducted in-person, the participants might have provided answers they perceive as more socially desirable. These limitations pave the way for future research.

5.3. Future Research

Further studies may test our propositions to uncover antecedents of consumer willingness to rent clothing online in the context of circular fashion using a large-scale survey. Other research could further investigate the conflicts between innovation and green value acquisition in decision-making in the context of circular consumption. By understanding the interplay between social representations, green value, and innovativeness, it is possible to encourage a cultural shift among consumers towards valuing sustainable alternatives, such as online clothing rental or second-hand clothing acquisition.

Appendix A

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Gender of Each Participant:	Age	Education:	Income Level:
Female	25	University education	Medium
Female	28	College education	Medium
Female	30	University education	Medium
Female	30	College education	Medium
Male	28	University education	Medium
Female	32	College education	Medium
Female	36	College education	Medium
Male	28	University education	Medium
Female	32	College education	Medium
Male	45	Secondary education	Medium

Appendix B

Introduction:

Are you familiar with renting clothing online service offered by department stores, boutiques, and outlets? When have you started renting clothing? Do you shop for second-hand? How often? Are you interested in fashion?

If so, how often do you rent clothing online? What is the purpose of renting clothing online/shopping for second-hand clothing?

Q1   Innovativeness of consumers:

How important it is for you to try new things?

How do you perceive renting clothing online service? Is it a new thing for you? If so, why? If not, why not? When you rent clothing, are you the first among your friends to rent clothing or are you the last?

Q2   Social representation:

How do you think how many outlets offer clothing rental online?

Do you think renting clothing online is safe? Why or why not? Do you have any doubts about renting clothing online? If so, what are they? If you have doubts, would you prefer purchasing new clothing rather than renting clothing online?

What do you think about the potential of renting clothing online service? Would you agree that not using such service (i.e., renting clothing online) is no longer acceptable? Why or why not? Do you care about how clothing is produced and what societal and environmental impact it has? Why or why not?

Do you value things being in accordance with nature? How do you feel when you wear rented clothing? What emotions do you experience when renting clothing online? Would you consider wearing only rented clothing in your daily activities (e.g., going to work)?

Q3   Willingness to rent clothing in the future:

Do you enthusiastically rent clothing online? What do you think about the future of renting clothing online? Will it become widely widespread among your friends and relatives? Among other members of society? Why or why not?

Q10 Demographics

Age_____; Gender: Female/Male/Other; Education: Primary education/ Secondary education/College education/University education/Doctorate; Income level: low/medium/high.

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