

AN EXPLORATION OF CONSUMERS' FASHION SHARING EXPERIENCES

by

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A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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October 2023

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore consumer's fashion sharing experience through the lens of identity theory. This research defines fashion sharing as a sociocultural and economic activity, allowing individuals to temporarily access fashion items. To reach the research purpose, this research adopted a qualitative research design. Specifically, 40 semi-structured online interviews with photo-elicitation and thematic data analysis were conducted.

The findings shed light on the nature of fashion sharing and its eight characteristics, which are as follows: benefit exchange, identity engagement, temporary material possession, sociality, trust, digitalisation, sustainability and de-ownership. The findings, in particular, highlight three types of benefits that people can derive from their fashion sharing practises: social benefits, utilitarian benefits, and hedonic benefits. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how individuals' sustainability concerns interact with the entire process of their fashion sharing experiences. The findings show a complex and profound relationship between fashion sharing and consumer identity. Finally, this research contributes to the development of practical implications for fashion sharing platforms/companies' managers as well as research directions for future studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is never easy to pursue a Ph.D. degree. It is a long and alone journey but full of surprises and fun. I want to express my gratitude to many people around me because these people are pillars to support my dream.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Caroline, Isabelle and Doğa. Thanks for your visionary guidance, unwavering support throughout the journey and witnessing my growth. Our monthly supervision meetings are what I look forward to most every month. You are not only my supervisors, but also my mentors and therapists. Besides, I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Achilleas, Emma, Finola, Inci, Jared, Jimmy, Lucia, Mike, Rohit, Rui, Sheena and all the other wonderful people in our department. Your support has been invaluable to me. Particularly, thanks to my external and internal examiners, Claudia and Alessandro.

To my partner, Yang (ccb), your enduring love, patience, encouragement and understanding have been my backbone. Thank you for always being willing to listen to my PhD project, and I enjoyed seeing your expression of admiration afterwards (joking). I am very happy to progress with you; you are my best friend. I hope you can become the person you want to be.

I want to say “thank you” to my family and friends. Thanks to my grandparents and parents, for your support in every way. Thanks to my besties for always sharing your happiness and stories with me. And thanks to every person, appearing in my life and giving me love, care and support. I wish nothing but health and happiness for you all.

Special thanks to my four-legged friends, Apple, Tata, JoJo, Dobby, MeiMei and Dolce. Thank you all for every cuddle and kiss, every meow and woof, and every moment in my life. I love you all and forever.

I am deeply grateful to all of the research participants who generously shared their experiences, stories, and insights. This research would have been incomplete without their contributions, which were its heart.

Finally, a word of thanks to the person I see in the mirror every day. Thank you, Kelly.

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Chapter 1-Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Sustainability and conscious consumerism are now at the forefront of societal discourse, and traditional models of ownership are being challenged due to their significant environmental impacts. Thus, sharing, as a taken-for-granted practice (Belk, 2010) and an under-researched topic, is the focus of this research. Individuals' sharing experiences, perceptions and motivations are explored specifically in relation to the context of fashion sharing. This is because fashion is known for its negative environmental impacts and this industry is responsible for significant problems related to over-production and over-consumption. Thus, understanding fashion sharing has become critical in terms of its transformative potential and broader implications for industry and society as they navigate this changing landscape.

The purpose of this research is to explore individuals' fashion sharing experiences. This chapter aims to introduce the research topic and questions. Specifically, Section 1.2 unveils the research problem. Section 1.3 explains the research context and introduces the research questions and objectives. Section 1.4 outlines the structure of this thesis, followed by a chapter summary in Section 1.5.

1.2 Research Problem

Sharing is a longstanding practice, which has been deeply embedded in society. Historically, the act of sharing clothing and accessories has been an essential social practice, rooted in community living, resource optimisation and cultural traditions (Paramita et al., 2022). This sharing emerged from both necessity and tradition. Community living was the norm in many

cultures, where resources were pooled and shared among members (Giorgi, 2020). This included food, tools, and living spaces in addition to clothing. Sharing clothes, in particular, served to strengthen communal bonds and collective identity while also reinforcing mutual trust and cooperation (Brownie and Stevenson, 2012). Besides, in times when clothing was handcrafted and took considerable time to produce (Steele and Major, 2023), individuals did not own many clothes. Instead, clothes were often shared among family members or even the broader community (Belk, 2010), particularly for special occasions or ceremonies.

The emergence of industrialised production methods has made many forms of sharing seem less necessary, especially in the case of fashion sharing. With the rise of consumerism and fast fashion, the fashion industry has been implicated in a myriad of social and environmental issues, ranging from unsustainable production practices to questionable labour conditions (Henninger et al., 2016; Pucker, 2022). From an environmental perspective, the fashion industry is one of the largest water consumers, requiring approximately 2,700 litres of water to produce a single cotton shirt, which is equivalent to what an average person drinks over a 2.5-year period (European Environment Agency, 2023). Furthermore, fashion accounts for approximately 10% of global carbon emissions, outnumbering international flights and maritime shipping combined (UNFCCC, 2018). Beyond water consumption and carbon emissions, the industry's wastefulness, driven by a fast fashion model, results in millions of unsold garments being discarded each year, with less than 1% of the material used in clothing being recycled into new garments (Algama, 2019). On the social front, the fashion industry has frequently been associated with questionable working conditions. The Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, which killed over 1,100 garment workers, brought to light the often-hazardous working conditions and lax regulations that many garment workers face (Van Buren

and Schrempf-Stirling, 2022). Furthermore, child labour remains a major concern in several countries, exacerbated by the industry's demand for low-cost, quick production (Turker and Altuntas, 2014). At the consumer level, the most severe issue is fashion over-consumption, particularly with the rise of fast fashion. The allure of inexpensive, trendy clothing, fuelled by relentless marketing campaigns and the constant churn of fashion seasons, has conditioned many consumers to regard clothing as disposable, resulting in the throw-away fashion situation. According to Coyle (2022), in the UK, over 360,000 tonnes of used clothing are discarded each year. Furthermore, clothing consumption accounts for approximately 5% of the UK's total annual carbon and water footprint (Ellson, 2018).

As these concerns have come to the fore, fashion sharing has emerged as a significant practice again, intertwined with sociocultural desires for varied self-expression, economic pragmatism in an age of financial constraints and a growing commitment to environmental sustainability (Chang, 2020; Pang et al., 2022; Farzin et al., 2023). Increasingly, scholars and industry experts have championed non-ownership fashion consumption, such as fashion rental (Conlon, 2020; Mukendi and Henninger, 2020; Bodenheimer et al., 2022), as a potential remedy to the issues caused by the fashion industry's unrestrained growth, particularly environmental ones. A few online platforms and companies have also leveraged the sharing economy and sustainability concerns to launch their fashion sharing services, such as Rent the Runway in the US and By Rotation in the UK. However, this shift towards non-ownership, while economically and environmentally commendable, brings with it a host of unexplored dimensions and experiences. For example, many studies have addressed the motivations behind non-ownership fashion consumption or its economic and environmental implications (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Henninger et al., 2017; Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019; Won and Kim, 2020; Bodenheimer et al.,

2022). However, a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and benefits that consumers derive from fashion sharing is notably absent. As mentioned earlier, fashion encompasses more than just clothing; it involves how people respond to societal norms and values and convey their desires or preferences. Further, the role of fashion sharing in consumer identity projects is under-researched. Fashion, as a tool for self-expression, plays a pivotal role in identity construction. There have been studies focusing on exploring identity construction in ownership-involved fashion consumption (Davis, 1994; Marion and Nairn, 2011; Parmentier and Fischer, 2011; Crane, 2012; Dantas and Abreu, 2020), while research on the role that non-ownership fashion consumption can play in identity construction is still in its infancy (Loussaïef et al., 2019; McNeill and Venter, 2019; Sörum and Gianneschi, 2023). As consumers increasingly choose non-ownership consumption, understanding this dynamic role is important, to identify how these practices change, reflect or even challenge traditional concepts of the self. This investigation may yield insights into changing consumer beliefs, behaviours and practices.

Furthermore, existing research has confirmed the positive role of non-ownership consumption in contributing to sustainability (Fletcher, 2012; Jung and Jin, 2014; Lueg et al., 2015; Poppelaars et al., 2018; Iran, 2018; Marriott, 2020; Mukendi et al., 2020). However, the sustainability meanings, motivations, values and behaviours that consumers attach to, and create through, fashion sharing are not well understood. Thus, further exploration of these issues is needed in the context of increasing global environmental concerns. Because the fashion industry is a major contributor to environmental degradation, industry-wide changes towards eco-friendly practices can be influenced by consumers' views on sustainability in fashion sharing.

Given these considerations, there is an urgent need to explore fashion sharing practices. This study aims to address the knowledge gaps identified above by focusing on the nature of fashion sharing, its role in identity construction, the multifaceted benefits that consumers derive from fashion sharing and its sustainability meanings.

1.3 Research Context, Questions and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to explore individuals' fashion sharing experiences. There are four research questions guiding the whole research:

- *RQ1*: What are the nature and characteristics of fashion sharing?
- *RQ2*: What are the experiential differences between owning and sharing fashion items?
- *RQ3*: What benefits do consumers derive from their fashion sharing practices?
- *RQ4*: How do consumers' sustainability concerns engage with their fashion sharing experience?

To answer these research questions, various research objectives are proposed for each of them.

RQ1 aims to understand the characteristics of fashion sharing practices with the following objectives:

- To explore contemporary definitions of fashion sharing in order to comprehend its ever-changing nature.
- To identify the various forms and modalities of fashion sharing currently.
- To investigate the sociocultural, economic, and environmental factors that influence consumers' fashion sharing behaviours.
- To investigate the influence of technology and digital platforms on the characteristics of current fashion sharing.

- To look into the emotional, social and practical aspects of fashion sharing.

RQ2 seeks to identify the experiential differences between owning and sharing fashion items with the following research objectives:

- To explore the usage feelings, emotional connections and attachments individuals form with the fashion items they own versus those they share.
- To understand the potential anxieties or concerns individuals might have with sharing versus owning, such as hygiene concerns, wear and tear or fear of damage.

RQ3 aims to identify the benefits derived by consumers from their fashion sharing practices through the following research objectives:

- To investigate the motivations and benefits of fashion sharing for consumers
- To explore the role of fashion sharing in consumers' identity expression and construction.
- To delve into the experiential aspects of fashion sharing, capturing emotions, feelings and memorable moments.

RQ4 looks to examine the role of consumers' sustainability concerns in their fashion sharing experiences through the following research objectives:

- To explore consumers' understanding and perceptions of sustainability within the context of fashion sharing.
- To investigate the sustainability motives that drive consumers to participate in fashion sharing.

- To assess the perceived benefits concerning the sustainability of fashion sharing from a consumer perspective.

To address these research questions and objectives, this research employs a qualitative research design with an exploratory nature. The four research questions are addressed by employing semi-structured online interviews and photo-elicitation to gain in-depth insights into consumers' fashion sharing experiences.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, including this introduction (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 examines the evolving definitions of sharing, moving beyond the traditional reciprocity-based view. It introduces a wider spectrum of sharing dimensions, highlighting both its economic and social aspects. The chapter differentiates sharing from related concepts, including the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption. This differentiation is based on characteristics such as platform mediation and peer-to-peer interactions. This chapter also explores and compares diverse motivations for sharing in contexts such as car, space, food and fashion sharing.

Chapter 3 explores the evolution and various forms of fashion sharing, tracing its historical journey to modern interpretations. It identifies eight types of fashion sharing, categorised into traditional and novel, shaped largely by the Internet's development. Despite the rapid growth of online fashion sharing, traditional forms remain prevalent. Existing research often neglects traditional fashion sharing, favouring newer models. Thus, this research aims for a holistic

understanding of both. Additionally, the chapter delves into under-examined areas, such as the factors influencing individual fashion sharing experiences.

Chapter 4 delves into identity theories as an enabling theoretical perspective for this research. This chapter investigates the self in relation to consumption and the relationship between individuals' identities and their fashion sharing behaviours. Unlike previous research, this work foregrounds the inherent materiality of fashion sharing, arguing that it is still about material possessions, albeit temporary possessions, which influence identity construction in the same way that ownership-based consumption does. The 'identity project' is central to the discussion in this chapter. This chapter delves into the role of fashion sharing in shaping one's identity project but points out that managing an identity project is not the sole explanation for every individual's fashion sharing practice.

Chapter 5 explains my philosophical position as an interpretivist researcher by adhering to a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. My insider role in this research and the importance of reflexivity to manage biases are also discussed. Further, this chapter explains the qualitative research approach, aligned with my philosophical views and the research purpose.

Chapter 6 delves into the study's research design, sampling, data collection, analysis and ethical considerations. I conducted 40 semi-structured online interviews with photo-elicitation and utilised purposive, convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants for the research. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in fashion sharing practices. The study highlights three primary benefits derived from fashion sharing: social, utilitarian and hedonic. Further, this chapter explores fashion sharing within different types of relationships and how

consumers' sustainability concerns and their fashion sharing experiences interinfluence with each other. This research also explores inter-generational, intra-generational, inter-gender and group sharing practices, identifying both healthy and toxic sharing relationships, with the former encouraging continuous sharing and stronger bonds and the latter having the opposite effect.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings from the research, outlining eight defining characteristics of fashion sharing and explaining the meanings of them in this research. Next, the chapter establishes the relationship between fashion sharing and identity, explaining that sharing aids in identity exploration, reinforces existing self-identity and blends sharers' identities.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, addressing the four research questions and highlighting this research's theoretical and practical contributions. A refined definition of fashion sharing, its characteristics and the benefits consumers derive from it are among the key theoretical contributions. Moreover, this research offers limitations and areas for future research, as well as marketing implications for fashion sharing platforms/companies, emphasising the importance of trust-building and leveraging the identified fashion sharing benefits.

Chapter 2-Literature Review I: Sharing

2.1 Introduction

Existing as long as human history, sharing is an essential behaviour that helps to connect individuals and communities (Godelier, 2011; Price and Belk, 2016). Sharing is also a dynamic phenomenon as human practices constantly evolve, so it is important to review existing relevant literature on sharing so that an updated understanding of sharing behaviours in the context of consumption can be achieved. Therefore, Section 2.2 discusses definitions of sharing in existing research from different disciplinary perspectives and a definition of sharing is proposed. In Section 2.3, this chapter compares sharing from related concepts, namely the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption, differentiating and clarifying them further based on their characteristics. In Section 2.4, three main types of reasons explaining why individuals engage in sharing activities are discussed, including social, cultural, economic and hedonic reasons. The chapter selects these types of reasons due to their close relevance to why individuals share fashion goods. At last, Section 2.5 summarises the content of this chapter.

2.2 Definitions of Sharing

Definitions of sharing reflect different disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, psychology and economics. Sharing is frequently defined sociologically as a cooperative activity that fosters social cohesion and improves interpersonal relationships (Trivers, 1971; Tomasello, 2009). Sharing strengthens community ties and social fabric by promoting reciprocity and decreasing social inequality (Bruhn, 2011).

From a psychological standpoint, sharing is an act of altruism, indicative of prosocial behaviour, empathy and moral development (Eisenberg et al., 2013). This view emphasises the internal reward systems associated with sharing, such as the increased happiness and contentment derived from helping others (Dunn et al., 2008).

Sharing is an important mechanism for resource distribution and utilisation from an economic perspective. It permits more efficient utilisation of goods, thereby reducing costs and waste (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). In recent years, this perspective has taken prominence due to the rise of the ‘sharing economy,’ which contributes to leveraging technological advancements to create new models of resource sharing (Hamari et al., 2016; Eckhardt et al., 2019).

In consumer research, Benkler (2004) considers sharing as ‘nonreciprocal pro-social behaviour’, which was agreed by Belk (2010) and overlaps with its meaning in the sociology discipline. In addition, Belk (2007, p. 126) argued that sharing is “*the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use.*” In other words, sharing can be viewed as an aggregated form of consumption in which goods and services are not individually owned but are utilised collectively, without expectations of reciprocity. This form of sharing is frequently viewed as being in opposition to market exchange, in which goods and services are exchanged for money or other goods. Both tangible and intangible goods, such as physical objects (e.g., fashions, cars), a space (e.g., public parks) and experiences or services (e.g., carpooling, membership) can be shared (Rudmin, 2016).

Belk (2010, 2007) positioned sharing as an antithesis to market exchange, implying a dichotomy between collective usage and individual ownership. This dichotomy has been criticised by a number of academics for oversimplifying the complexity of sharing activities. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) contended that Belk's approach fails to capture the heterogeneity of sharing practices; they propose that sharing experiences are complex and multifaceted, reflecting both exchange and communal consumption.

Arnould and Rose (2016) agreed that sharing is the circulation of consumption resources; however, they argued that Belk's (2010) concept of sharing is insufficient to separate it from other types of exchange, such as contractual exchanges or gift giving. Arnould and Rose (2016) also stated that Belk's (2010) nonreciprocity in sharing can be seen as a 'perfect altruistic gift', which reflects an underlying conflict between altruism and human activities' self-interest nature (Carrier, 1991). Thus, Arnould and Rose (2016) proposed the concept of mutuality to substitute for Belk's 'sharing'. Specifically, mutuality can be understood as a "*generalised exchange*" (Arnould and Rose, 2016, p. 75). In mutuality, individuals who accept shared goods are expected to act in a similar and mutual way that they are treated within the common social framework, such as kin and colleague. For instance, one, sharing his umbrella with others, expects that he will receive others' kindness if he forgets his umbrella on a rainy day. Thus, sharing is not altruistic behaviour (Arnould and Rose, 2016). Belk (2016) rejected Arnould and Rose's (2016) comment about his concept of sharing as being equal to the 'perfect altruistic gift'. This is because he believed the 'perfect altruistic gift' involves a sacrifice that benefits the recipient. As Belk (2016) argues, sharing is more likely to contain ordinary objects in everyday life, is not offered ritually, and is not tailored to a specific individual (Belk, 2016). Based on their discussion, Arnould and Rose's (2016) mutuality can be seen as a subset of the sharing

concept; one which expects reciprocity. The current study acknowledges the differences between concepts and sets aside these conceptual disagreements, viewing sharing as a more inclusive concept. This is because this research is more about interpreting what sharing is from the consumer's perspective, as Reich and Yuan (2019) did, to some extent as discussed below.

Compared to the theoretical discussions concerning the definition of sharing presented by Belk (2007, 2010 and 2016) and Arnould and Rose (2016), Reich and Yuan (2019) focused on consumers' perspectives and understanding of sharing. Reich and Yuan (2019) found that consumers may have different definitions of 'sharing'. Three common features of sharing were agreed upon by consumers, including ethereal (intangible and technological), communal and reciprocal. The ethereal component, in particular, prioritises mobile-mediated or web-based sharing business; the communal dimension emphasises community and synergy; and the reciprocal dimension emphasises a balanced allocation of resources (Reich and Yuan, 2019). The finding about the 'reciprocal' feature of sharing shared by consumers was contradictory to Benkler's (2004) and Belk's (2010) 'non-reciprocal' sharing. Therefore, consumers, in Reich and Yuan's (2019) research, expect the reciprocal benefits of sharing.

Additionally, Rudmin (2016) paid more attention to material relationships in sharing by introducing three types of material relationships proposed by Litwinski (1942, 1947), including occupancy, possession, and ownership. In the context of sharing, there is ongoing debate regarding whether emphasis should be placed on occupancy or possession. According to Rudmin (2016), occupancy refers to the transient and frequently serendipitous utilisation or control over a resource. On the other hand, possession signifies the deliberate preservation of a resource, predicated on the anticipation of its prospective usefulness to oneself. Sharing exhibits

certain characteristics of both occupancy and possession. Firstly, sharing is a behaviour that involves temporarily accessing some resources, such as cars, fashion items and space (Belk, 2014b), though it does not have to be temporary in other situations, such as food. Secondly, sharing also contains the preservation of resources; individuals engaging in sharing are more likely to expect the preservation of the usefulness of the shared resources. Therefore, temporary possession is more suitable to describe the material relationship that occurs in sharing within the fashion context of this research.

Further, John (2013) pointed out that the increasingly digital nature of shared goods, such as shared streaming services or online digital content, is further complicating the definition of sharing in consumer research. In the Internet age, sharing appears to have bypassed several steps traditionally required prior to sharing, such as getting to know someone and establishing trust. Instead, it has become more direct and objective. Given the ongoing evolution of the sharing phenomenon, it is appropriate for researchers to adopt a more flexible view of the concept of sharing, one that can capture the current characteristics and dynamics of this practice while also fitting into relevant research contexts. Therefore, this research generates an updated definition of sharing, complementing existing research and extending the boundary of ‘sharing’ in existing extant empirical research and theory.

Before introducing the definition of sharing in this research, several statements concerning the definition and usage of terminology should be clarified. First, this research agrees that the economic nature of sharing is the circulation of consumption resources. Sharing has historically been used by societies to optimise resource use, ensuring that goods are used more frequently and by more people, reducing redundancy and waste (Benkler, 2004). This principle applies

from ancient barter systems to today's sharing platforms, which use underutilised assets to improve economic efficiency (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

Second, some concepts, such as access-based consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Gruen, 2017; Albinsson and Perera, 2018; Kerkelä, 2018) or collaborative consumption (Belk, 2014b; Benoit et al., 2017; Iran, 2018; Gopalakrishnan and Matthews, 2018), emphasise the means of resource circulation and economic exchange, which is also important for the research object, sharing, of this study. However, this research goes beyond the sole focus on the means of resource circulation and economic exchange and adopts additional dimensions of sharing behaviour, such as viewing sharing as a temporary possession and acknowledging how sharing helps construct the bond of social groups (Lessig, 2008; Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015). Thus, this research uses the term *sharing*, rather than others, because of the different foci of these terms, which will be explained further in Section 2.3.

Thirdly, with ongoing changes in society and the economy, sharing is no longer simple and easy to define as reciprocal or altruistic. As Reich and Yuan (2019) mentioned, different consumers may have different understandings of sharing and the purposes of sharing have become more diverse. Therefore, when defining sharing, attention should be paid to the 'original intent,' instead of the reciprocity outcome of sharing. This is because the meaning of sharing can be very different when discussing intentions rather than just results.

Fourth, attention needs to be paid to forms of sharing. Sharing certainly requires interaction among individuals and P2P exchange is the most ubiquitous and fundamental form of sharing, particularly within "*the interior world of the home*" (Belk, 2010, p. 716). This does not mean

that P2P sharing is the only form of sharing. Other forms, such as community sharing or business-to-consumer (B2C) sharing, also exist. For example, people in a village may have needed to share a well to access water. Therefore, sharing can occur between different subjects (individuals or entities), both online and offline.

Based on the existing literature reviewed above, for the purposes of this research, sharing is defined as a circulation of consumption resources with temporary possession in nature, relying on fundamental social interactions to be realised and bonding people together. The original intent of sharing includes but is not limited to reciprocity or altruism. The forms of sharing can vary but require individuals' engagements.

2.3 Sharing and Related Concepts

Existing studies have discussed the relationship between sharing and related concepts, but they may not have adequately clarified their distinctions (Frenken and Schor, 2017), which can be seen as a theoretical gap. In this section, therefore, three concepts of sharing that are highly comparable are critically examined: the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption. The aim of this examination is to differentiate sharing from these concepts.

2.3.1 The Sharing Economy

Similar to sharing, definitions of the sharing economy are various; thus, there is no widely accepted definition of the sharing economy. Lessig (2008) first proposed the concept of 'the sharing economy' and defined it as a cultural trend which is based on social relationships to stimulate a cooperative production system. Despite the ambiguous description of the sharing

economy, which may be a result of the limited practice of the sharing economy at that time, Lessig (2008) emphasises the important role of the Internet in the sharing economy while Wang and Zhang (2012) and Eckhardt et al. (2019) are in line with this point. Moreover, Botsman (2013) defined the sharing economy as a socio-economic ecosystem based on sharing underutilised assets (involving the sharing of human, physical, and intellectual resources) for monetary or non-monetary benefits, primarily concerning P2P marketplaces but also applicable to B2C models. Botsman's (2013) definition of the sharing economy is considered comprehensive. Although there have been subsequent definitions of the sharing economy from other researchers, such as Hamari et al. (2016), Böcker and Meelen, (2017), Eckhardt et al. (2019), Benjaafar et al. (2019) and Gerwe and Silva (2020), they do not differ significantly from Botsman's (2013) definition.

According to Botsman (2013), the sharing economy is heavily reliant on the mediation role of a technical platform, which allows direct interaction between product or service suppliers and customers (Möhlmann, 2015). However, for sharing, particularly traditional sharing, platform mediation is not a necessary condition; on the contrary, direct interaction between individuals is the mainstream approach (Belk, 2010). Besides, in the sharing economy, 'sharing' is not necessarily selfless or free. The sharing economy often involves transactions where resources are rented out, often for profit (Sundararajan, 2016). At a basic level, sharing, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, implies the mutual and gratuitous distribution of resources or services, typically guided by fundamental social principles, such as trust and a sense of community (Belk, 2010). A monetary transaction would not be a prominent point in sharing.

Additionally, Eckhardt et al. (2019, p. 5) proposed other characteristics of the sharing economy: “*temporary access, expanded consumer role, crowdsourced supply, reputation systems and P2P exchanges.*” These characteristics overlap with features of sharing. First and foremost, it is undeniable that both sharing and the sharing economy emphasise temporary access instead of ownership (Markman et al., 2021). But there are distinctions in how ‘temporary access’ is emphasised in each case. In the traditional sense, sharing often implies a form of collective usage or consumption, where resources are divided among individuals without changing ownership (Belk, 2010). This can include sharing a meal with friends, a family car or a communal space. The temporary nature of access in such cases is often incidental, depending on the nature of the shared resource and the social dynamics of the individuals involved. In contrast, contemporary conceptualisations of the sharing economy tend to emphasise the temporary nature of access more explicitly. Users frequently pay for short-term access to goods or services in the sharing economy, such as a ride (Uber) or a place to stay (Airbnb) (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Sharing in the context of the sharing economy refers to the provision of temporary access to underutilised resources (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015).

Second, the sharing economy emphasises the expanded consumer role, termed ‘prosumer’, that individuals can be both consumers and service/product producers (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). However, this expanded role is not unique to the sharing economy as an economic phenomenon. However, in sharing, it is more suitable to describe individuals having fluid roles because they can be both providers and recipients of resources. In sharing, individuals may not directly engage in producing the shared resources, but they can be providers of them. It is even difficult to find the one only sharing items in (such as borrowing) or out (such as lending) (Belk, 2010). This communal dimension promotes active participation and reciprocity among individuals.

Let us use an example to distinguish between a fluid role in ‘sharing’ and an expanded role in ‘the sharing economy’. In ‘the sharing economy,’ for example, a person can make a dress and share it with others, thereby becoming a prosumer. In the context of ‘sharing,’ however, this person can share a dress, which they made, bought or even borrowed, with others.

Third, existing research, such as that of Kranzbühler et al. (2019), suggested that both tangible and intangible resources are likely to be crowdsourced from individuals, such as Uber drivers. The prerequisite for crowdsourced supply is the role of mediation played by businesses and platforms. As sharing does not rely on platform mediation, crowdsourced supply is a characteristic of the sharing economy that sharing may not possess.

Fourth, reputation systems are mechanisms for fostering trust and mitigating risk, but their function and applications differ between sharing and the sharing economy. In sharing, reputation is often built on direct interpersonal relationships and repeated interactions within a community (Liang and Shi, 2005). A person’s reputation within a community is determined by their past actions, contributions, and interactions with other community members. Social sanctions and rewards assist in regulating behaviour and fostering participant confidence (Coleman, 1990). However, the size and cohesiveness of the community, as well as the availability and veracity of information about individuals’ past behaviours, can limit the effectiveness of these traditional reputation systems (Resnick et al., 2000).

In contrast, digital platforms facilitate interactions between strangers in the sharing economy (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Formalised reputation systems are indispensable for trust-building because they enable participants to infer the trustworthiness of others based on their

past performance or conduct. Platforms such as Airbnb, Uber, and eBay have implemented rating systems in which users can rate one another following a transaction, thereby contributing to an aggregated reputation score (Edelman and Luca, 2014). These reputation systems have become a pillar of the sharing economy, mitigating risks and uncertainties associated with P2P transactions in particular (Basili and Rossi, 2020). However, they are not devoid of obstacles. Buhalis et al. (2020) have identified problems such as rating inflation, in which users feel pressured to give positive reviews, reducing the discriminatory power of the system. There are also concerns regarding privacy, equity, and the possibility of discrimination (Basili and Rossi, 2020) based on such reviews.

In terms of 'P2P exchanges' in Eckhardt et al. (2019), not every study supports it as the only sharing mode for the sharing economy. They support a broader range of practices in the sharing economy which happen through P2P; person-to-business (P2B); business-to-person (B2P); and business-to-business (B2B) (Markman et al., 2021). These non-P2P exchanges with transactions have been criticised for transforming the sharing economy into a form of commerce disguised as sharing (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015). Schor and Fitzmaurice (2015) argued that by commercialising activities traditionally performed within non-monetary social relationships, the sharing economy may contribute to the erosion of social capital. Concerning sharing, regardless of the form, individual engagement is necessary, whether it is P2P or B2C.

Based on the above discussion of the definition of sharing and the sharing economy and their different features, the sharing economy may represent an evolution of the concept of sharing, adapting it to the digital age and globalised economy because they share many dimensions, such as temporary access and an emphasis on reputation systems. However, the continuous

development of the sharing economy concept and modes has surpassed the scope of sharing and acquired characteristics that sharing lacks, such as a focus on economic transactions and crowdsourced supply. The sharing economy is more concerned with representing a new economic model that leverages digital technologies to facilitate P2P or other forms of transactions, whereas sharing is fundamentally a social activity ingrained in human interactions.

2.3.2 Access-based Consumption

As proposed by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), access-based consumption is a relatively novel term, compared to sharing. Access-based consumption is defined as “*transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place*” (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881). Individuals could participate in access-based consumption via renting, sharing or borrowing from each other, public services and marketplaces (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). This means access-based consumption can be P2P and B2C. Examples include car rental services and subscription services such as Netflix.

Similar to the sharing economy, access-based consumption focuses on ‘commercial transaction’ and ‘non-ownership transfer.’ Trust in access-based consumption is largely facilitated by the platform’s rules and regulations, user agreements and reputation systems (Poppelaars et al., 2018). Based on the similarities between access-based consumption and the sharing economy, there have been studies, such as Barbu et al. (2018), Dion et al. (2023) and Khalek and Chakraborty (2023), that consider access-based consumption as a type of economic activity in the sharing economy. But unlike the sharing economy, born from Web 2.0 and heavily relying on the Internet, access-based consumption can take place both online and offline (Battle et al., 2018), which is similar to sharing. Therefore, both the concept and forms of access-based

consumption extend beyond the sharing economy in terms of temporary resource access methods.

Access-based consumption focuses on the use value of accessed items or services (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Khalek and Chakraborty, 2022). However, existing research indicates that sharing is a multi-benefit activity, with social benefits potentially being its core aspect.

2.3.3 Collaborative Consumption

Among the four concepts discussed in this section, collaborative consumption is the oldest concept in the field. Felson and Spaeth (1978) defined collaborative consumption as the consumption of economic goods or services by one or more individuals while participating in joint activities with one or more others. Collaborative consumption takes place in various forms, including but not limited to flea markets, swap meets, garage sales, car boot sales and second-hand shops (Belk et al., 1988; Stone et al., 1996). Although Felson and Spaeth's (1978) definition emphasises joint activities involving consumption, Belk (2014) argues that this definition is too broad and insufficiently centred on the individual acquisition and distribution of the resource. Botsman and Rogers (2010, para.1) considered the concept to include “*traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping.*” However, Belk (2014) believed their definition was too broad because it combined marketplace exchange, gift-giving, and sharing. Therefore, Belk (2014, p. 1597) redefined that “*collaborative consumption is people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation.*” However, he neglected to point out how people coordinate and distribute the resources. In addition, some collaborative consumption behaviours have been confirmed to be motivated not only by economic benefits but also by enjoyment, reputation and a concern

for environmental sustainability (Hamari et al., 2016). Therefore, this research adopts the definition of collaborative consumption from Ertz et al. (2016, p. 1), who consider collaborative consumption as *“the set of resource circulation systems which enable consumers to both obtain and provide, temporarily or permanently, valuable resources or services through direct interaction with other consumers or through a mediator.”*

Based on Ertz et al.'s (2016) definition, collaborative consumption shares some common features with the previously discussed concepts. Specifically, sharing, the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption are all ways to optimise resource allocation and shared use. All four concepts are possible with platform mediation; but for the sharing economy, platform mediation is a prerequisite. Moreover, compared to the other three concepts, collaborative consumption is a broader and more inclusive concept that contains more forms. For example, within different definitions of collaborative consumption, ownership or usership of assets could be transferred, which could be temporary or permanent, both online and offline (Ertz et al., 2016; Benoit et al., 2017). However, Khalek and Chakraborty (2023) categorised collaborative consumption as a type of activity that takes place within the sharing economy, which is debatable. The debatable point is that although collaborative consumption is a concept whose meaning is constantly evolving, it is clear that, as a concept that predates the presence of elements such as the internet or platform mediation, its meaning clearly extends beyond the sharing economy. Therefore, Khalek and Chakraborty's (2023) categorisation method might not be tenable.

In a concise delineation of the four concepts, sharing is distinct from the sharing economy in that it eschews the emphasis on monetary transactions, platform intermediation, crowdsourced

supply and economies of scale (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Furthermore, sharing diverges from access-based consumption in that it does not solely underscore the transference of economic and use value of goods or services. In comparison with collaborative consumption, the salient distinction is that, within this research context, sharing does not encompass the transfer of ownership, whilst collaborative consumption inherently does. The comparison of the similarities and differences among these four concepts is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Comparison of Characteristics of the Four Concepts

	Transfer of usership	Transfer of ownership	Platform/company mediation			Forms			Economies of scale	Expanded consumer role	Focus on transfer of economic value	Crowdsourced supply
			Online	Offline	None	B2C	P2P	Other forms				
Sharing	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Sharing economy	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collaborative consumption	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Access-based consumption	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					

Although there are many differences among these four concepts, fashion practices can be found across all of them, especially in the current and rapidly growing sharing economy. The existence of fashion sharing appears to be more discreet, however. Therefore, this research aims to unveil individuals' fashion sharing experiences in the following chapters.

2.4 Why Consumers Engage in Sharing

Research on the reasons why people engage in sharing has a long history. Individuals engage in sharing for various reasons which are likely to vary from person to person and from context

to context. In general, people engage in sharing due to social, cultural, economic and hedonic reasons. These are the reasons that are discussed and focused upon next, as they tend to be the most relevant reasons for individuals to engage in fashion sharing. Nevertheless, such reasons demand further empirical and theoretical research to provide new insight into fashion sharing behaviours. This section reviews existing research on sharing motivations.

2.4.1 Social and Cultural Reasons

Sharing behaviours constitute a fundamental component of human interaction, underpinned by an intricate web of social and cultural motivations. Scholars have variously interpreted these motivations, offering insights from sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. John (2013b) pointed out that sharing is a natural prosocial human behaviour. By the age of three, children begin to adhere to culturally shaped social standards because they develop an understanding of these social standards at this early age (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Schroeder et al., 2015). Schroeder et al. (2015) added that sharing, particularly food sharing (Harvey et al., 2020b), is also the result of biological evolution, where both natural and social selection have operated and continue to operate against those who do not share with others, balancing humans' innate self-serving tendencies with altruistic impulses (Schroeder et al., 2015). This may be why Belk (2010) agreed with Douglas and Isherwood (1979, p. 66-67) that it is uncommon to see a person who *“wolfs or bolts down his food, likely while standing by the refrigerator in his overcoat.”*

Sharing behaviours significantly contribute to the formation and maintenance of social bonds. Mauss (1954) posited that reciprocal sharing is not merely a transaction but a socially binding act and this is also supported by Harvey et al. (2020). Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity further supports this notion, suggesting an explicit or implicit expectation that one person shares

with another. This is frequently based on the principle of reciprocity, which implies that sharing is a mutual, two-way process (Arnould and Rose, 2016). This is not necessarily a direct or immediate reciprocation. It can occur over a longer time frame, with different resources, or with other members of society, establishing a cycle of sharing and reciprocation.

This reciprocity expectation is fundamental to many social interactions and relationships, as it fosters social bonds, builds trust and promotes cooperation. By giving and receiving, individuals connect to each other in a network of mutual support and obligation. In addition, the act of sharing implies a level of trust in the other person's willingness to reciprocate, and when reciprocation occurs, this trust is strengthened (Gouldner, 1960; Wu et al., 2009). Additionally, repeated sharing interactions can strengthen trust over time (Coleman, 1988). Sharing fosters cooperation because it demonstrates the benefits of collective action and mutual support. All participants have the potential to benefit from shared resources, creating a potent incentive for cooperation. It has been suggested that cooperative behaviours, such as sharing, were crucial to the evolutionary success of humans by enhancing group survival and cohesion (Tomasello, 2009). Therefore, John (2013b, p. 113) summarised a series of underlying values in sharing, including “*equality, mutuality, honesty, openness, empathy and an ethic of care,*” which maintains and develops reciprocal relationships among sharers.

Sharing is essential for establishing and strengthening group identity and cohesion. The act of sharing can foster a sense of belonging, mutual understanding, and unity, thereby strengthening group dynamics and promoting social cohesion. For example, Bingley et al. (2022) found that information sharing, such as keeping secrets within a small group, can result in social cohesion and foster the process of identification. They explained that groups that share knowledge among

themselves while keeping it secret from outsiders may be more effective at acting collectively. Furthermore, shared social identity enhances sharing behaviour. Neville et al. (2022) found that a shared social identity leads to increased ease in social interactions and sensual connections, which increase individuals' chances of sharing things with others.

Sharing behaviours are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of societies and can be shaped by cultural norms, practices, values and the wider socio-cultural context. In many societies, cultural norms are closely tied to community and kinship structures, which often dictate sharing practices. According to Peterson (1993), in indigenous Australian communities, strict rules and obligations regulate the distribution of resources among relatives, thereby strengthening social bonds and preserving group harmony. Spiritual and religious beliefs also have a significant impact on sharing practices. Many religious traditions emphasise values like compassion, generosity and altruism, encouraging sharing behaviours.

Sharing is often an integral part of cultural rites and rituals. For example, sharing sacrificial food, such as meat, is common in many cultures (Fischler, 2011). It is frequently used to express gratitude, respect, and reverence for deities or ancestors during religious or ceremonial occasions. This act of sharing the sacrificed food fosters a sense of community and oneness among the cultural event's participants (Jönsson et al., 2021). But with the general decrease in the sense of community nowadays (Putnam, 2001), some rituals involving sharing, such as Halloween trick-or-treating, are vanishing, particularly in non-gated communities due to more distant interpersonal relationships (Belk, 2017).

Further, the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism significantly influence sharing behaviours within different cultural contexts. Collectivist cultures emphasise group harmony, family values and societal needs over individual aspirations (Wu et al., 2021). In contrast, individualistic cultures prioritise personal autonomy, independence, and individual rights (Shavitt and Barnes, 2020). Individuals' sharing journeys can be different under these two types of cultures.

Sharing resources, whether tangible goods or intangible knowledge, is not only a virtue in collectivist cultures but also a social obligation (Triandis et al., 1988). Individuals in collectivist cultures are generally more willing to share (Yu, 2014), compared to those in individualistic cultures. Further, sharing in collectivist societies is deeply entrenched in relational ties and is easier to preserve as part of a collective identity. In contrast, in societies that stress individualism, the act of sharing is frequently motivated by personal volition rather than a sense of obligatory duty (Belk, 2010). According to Bellah (1992), individuals within these cultures may engage in sharing behaviours due to altruistic motives, personal gratification, or even social acknowledgement rather than being solely influenced by societal pressure. Further, Belk (2010) highlighted that sharing within individualistic societies tends to be primarily transactional in nature. P2P sharing networks, exemplified by instances where transactions frequently involve monetary exchanges, indicate this prevailing pattern. However, with globalisation, the lines between collectivist and individualistic cultures are blurring. Oyserman et al. (2002) pointed out the possibility of individualistic qualities emerging in traditionally collectivist cultures, as well as the reverse phenomenon. As a result, the adoption of sharing behaviours is progressively shaped by a combination of many values.

2.4.2 Economic Reasons

Concerning economic reasons, the predominant one is the cost-effectiveness of sharing. Individuals can reduce costs and improve financial efficiency through sharing activities (Hamari et al., 2016). Renting or borrowing goods or services instead of purchasing them outright can save consumers a significant amount of money, particularly for infrequently used goods or services. Therefore, sharing is seen as a way to allocate resources efficiently, which minimises waste or inefficiency (Böcker and Meelen, 2017).

Sharing allows individuals to gain access to goods, services, or experiences without needing to own them. This flexibility enhances consumer freedom and convenience (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), which helps them escape the burden of ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). It allows consumers to access higher-quality or more diverse goods and services than they might otherwise be able to afford (Möhlmann, 2015). However, not all research supports that sharing is free from burden. Hazée et al. (2017) argued that consumers may worry about compatibility, contamination and responsibility of shared items. Rosenberg et al. (2023) stated that shared items put more caregiving pressure on sharers because the things are not their own. Additionally, various usage schedules of shared objects impose stress on individuals and foster a sense of urgency (Seregina and Weijo, 2017).

Sharing activities can also provide a buffer or economic resilience against economic uncertainties, like recessions or job loss. By turning idle assets into income, consumers can create additional revenue streams (Trabucchi et al., 2021). For example, renting out a spare room on Airbnb can generate supplemental income (Guttentag, 2015).

2.4.3 Hedonic Reasons

Participation in sharing activities can be intrinsically enjoyable, providing entertainment or fun, particularly in the era of the Internet. Alzamora-Ruiz et al. (2020) found the joy of sharing as the most recurrent intrinsic motivating factor for individuals to share with others, which includes three dimensions: ‘personal satisfaction,’ ‘personal challenge’ and ‘enjoyment’. Specifically, Rosenberg et al. (2023) explored sharing behaviour within the context of fashion libraries. They found that fashion libraries for consumers are places to “*have fun*”, be “*playful*” and have “*wonderful experiences*” (Rosenberg et al., 2023, p. 11).

One source of the enjoyment of sharing is social interaction and connectedness. Sharing goods or services can engender interactions that cultivate friendships and strengthen social connections (Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010), which provides individuals with happiness via their shared experience (Boothby et al., 2014), social support (Cohen and Wills, 1985) and mitigation of loneliness (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010). Particularly, when individuals’ sharing behaviours are intentional and they consciously and purposefully opt to participate, the happiness of sharing may last longer (Dunn et al., 2008).

Additionally, one of the hedonic reasons individuals engage in sharing is the allure of novelty. Engaging in sharing activities provides individuals with a plethora of novel experiences, breaking the monotony inherent to singular ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Whether it is accessing varied assets like cars or immersing oneself in diverse cultural contexts through platforms like Airbnb, sharing introduces individuals to novel experiences that might not be available through standardised modes of consumption (Guttentag, 2015). Beyond tangible assets, sharing promotes collective learning and broadens one’s social horizons, fostering interactions that range from skill acquisition to forming unexpected bonds (Belk, 2010;

Leonardi et al., 2013). The dynamism and diversity encapsulated in sharing platforms ensure that participants are continually exposed to new perspectives, sensory experiences and emotional landscapes, emphasising the value of shared experiences over mere possession (Hamari et al., 2016).

Sharing is increasingly being adopted as a means of embracing alternative styles of consumption. Wilson and Bellezza (2022) highlighted three dimensions of minimalism in consumption. A central one of them is the ‘number of possessions,’ whereby minimalism is exemplified by the ownership of a limited quantity of items (Wilson and Bellezza, 2022). Sharing naturally becomes the way that individuals embrace minimalism in consumption. Further, Degli Esposti et al. (2021) argued that sharing, such as ridesharing, has become a form of responsible consumption among young people. However, it should be noted that sharing is not the only way for individuals to embrace new styles of consumption. Sharing is typically considered a component of the consumption portfolio.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed existing research concerning definitions of sharing. It has updated the definition of sharing for the purposes of this thesis and pointed out that attributing simple reciprocity as the reason for individuals’ engagement in sharing is no longer consistent with current sharing practices. Therefore, a more diverse range of sharing dimensions is being proposed, which includes but is not limited to reciprocity or altruism. In addition, this chapter has identified the economic (temporary possession and circulation of consumption resources) and social nature (social interactions and bonding) of sharing, based on the discussion of existing research. This chapter also emphasises that, rather than exploring the meaning of

sharing through various theories, a more consumer-oriented interpretation of sharing is needed, thus highlighting the need for further research in this area.

Furthermore, this chapter has distinguished and compared sharing and related concepts, including the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption. The foundation for distinguishing between various concepts is rooted in their distinct characteristics, which encompass factors such as the necessity of platform mediation, the presence of P2P interactions and the transfer of ownership.

Lastly, this chapter has explained the social, cultural, economic and hedonic reasons why individuals share within different contexts, such as car sharing, space sharing, food sharing and knowledge sharing. Nevertheless, many of these reasons also resonate with fashion sharing practices and therefore demand further research.

The subsequent chapter provides a deeper and more comprehensive explanation of the concept of fashion sharing and its consumers.

Chapter 3-Literature Review II: Fashion Sharing and Consumer Experience

3.1 Introduction

Despite its existence throughout history, our understanding of fashion sharing is incomplete and limited. This chapter seeks to review existing knowledge on fashion sharing from a limited body of research. Section 3.2 provides a brief historical overview of fashion sharing and a detailed discussion of eight forms of fashion sharing. Section 3.3 introduces the factors that influence fashion sharing experiences by discussing the components that make up these experiences.

3.2 Fashion Sharing — Its Development and Forms

Fashion sharing allows consumers to temporarily access fashion items. With the growing interest in environmentally friendly and cost-effective consumption experiences, the fashion industry has seen the rise of ‘fashion sharing’ (Joy et al., 2012). This section aims to clarify understanding of fashion sharing, its historical origins and current forms.

3.2.1 Fashion Sharing in History

Fashion sharing, as a concept, has a much longer history than the modern, tech-driven sharing economy. Understanding the historical development of fashion sharing provides critical insights into the evolving values, economic drivers and cultural shifts of societies over time. Historically, garment sharing might be a more accurate term, compared to fashion sharing as fashion was a luxury for most people in the past (Steele, 2010).

Garments were regarded as valuable assets in many ancient cultures due to the labour and resources required for manufacturing them (Steele and Major, 2023). Through sharing, the value of labour and materials invested in making clothing can be appropriately utilised (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Royal garments, for example, were frequently passed down and repurposed through generations in the courts of mediaeval Europe (Breward, 2003). Clothing was not only passed down through the royal family. Working-class people, particularly during times of economic hardship, would frequently mend, modify and pass down clothing to younger family members, demonstrating an early form of sustainable fashion practices (McNeil, 2010).

During the two World Wars, clothing sharing or swapping became more common in Europe, particularly in Britain. Rationing of clothing during WWII gave rise to ‘Make Do and Mend’ campaigns (Hackney, 2006). These government-led initiatives encouraged the public to reuse and share their clothing in order to conserve resources (Strasser, 1999).

Aside from the utilitarian aspect of sharing and mending, communal clothing has a long history in various cultures. In some African and Asian traditions, communal garments were shared and worn for specific ceremonies, rituals or dances, fostering a sense of unity and collective identity (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992).

With the counterculture and anti-consumerism spirit, the 1960s and 1970s saw a revival of these sharing practices in the West. Vintage clothing stores, which are now commonplace, began to sprout up, celebrating the allure of the ‘old’ and ‘used’ (Clark and Palmer Alexandra, 2004). Fast forward to the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and the concept of fashion sharing has

been digitised and commercialised, becoming an industry in its own right. According to Biehl-Missal (2013), while the new forms of fashion sharing are unique in many ways, they echo past sentiments such as sustainability, community and a questioning of the value of ownership.

Hence, fashion sharing has undergone continuous transformations across historical epochs and cultural contexts. This research has been prompted by the limited investigation into current practices of fashion sharing.

3.2.2 Forms of Fashion Sharing

Given a lack of sufficient literature discussing fashion sharing, this section draws on literature addressing related concepts such as the sharing economy, access-based consumption and collaborative consumption to conceptualise fashion sharing. Due to overlapping characteristics of these concepts as discussed in the previous chapter, diverse forms of fashion sharing can be identified including traditional fashion sharing and the novel fashion sharing forms which have emerged with online platforms. These different forms of fashion sharing have co-existed in contemporary society, which is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Two Categories of Fashion Sharing and Their Related Forms

Categories	Forms
Traditional Fashion Sharing Forms	Lending/Borrowing
	Temporary Fashion Swapping
	Co-purchasing
	Traditional B2C Fashion Rental
Novel Fashion Sharing Forms	Online B2C Fashion Rental
	Online P2P Fashion Rental
	Online Hybrid Fashion Rental
	Subscription-Based Fashion Rental

In terms of lending/borrowing, Belk (2007) argues they involve sharing with the anticipation that the item or a similar one will be given back, and in many linguistic contexts, lending/borrowing can be seen as a polite way of permitting or asking to share. Therefore, ‘lending/borrowing’ can also be seen as ‘sharing out’ and ‘sharing in’ (Belk, 2010).

Two significant characteristics of lending/borrowing are everydayness (Salomonsson, 2021) and typically the lack of monetary compensation. Everydayness reveals the prevalence of this form of fashion sharing embedded in our society and suggests lending/borrowing is the most common form of fashion sharing. Trenz et al. (2018) called this ‘traditional sharing.’ Fashion sharing within the household or among acquaintances, without monetary transactions, remains the most typical scenario for lending/borrowing yet the least researched form of sharing (Klepp and Laitala, 2018). Traditional fashion sharing often occurs without monetary compensation because the motivation behind such sharing is often practical or social, rather than commercial (Golle et al., 2001). Concerning the motivation for lending/borrowing, Klepp and Laitala (2018) explained that it provides flexibility on some occasions, such as attending certain leisure and sports activities, for some consumers, particularly low-income consumers. For others with relatively higher incomes, lending/borrowing is more likely to be a moral choice (i.e., doing the “right” thing), a way that they can make better use of resources (Klepp and Laitala, 2018).

Some studies, such as Salomonsson (2021), suggest the popularity of fashion lending/borrowing is not what it used to be. The decline in this fashion sharing form is attributed to two main factors. First, the growing social interaction distance, brought by social stratification, makes people hesitate to ask others around them to share when they can easily

buy fashion products at a store (Belk, 2017). Bourdieu's (2006) exploration into social stratification suggests that increased societal divisions lead to a heightened sense of individualism, thereby reducing collective practices such as fashion sharing.

Second, in the twenty-first century, the overall improvement in people's financial circumstances has challenged the necessity of borrowing/lending. Along with this came the rise of consumerism which is characterised by an intensified proclivity towards ownership and the allure of novelty (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015). As a result, purchasing brand-new fashion items is more in line with many people's minds in this context (Wei et al., 2022). Rooted in consumerist ideologies, personal acquisition is valorised, acting as an emblem of socioeconomic prestige, thereby engendering a predilection for individual procurement of distinct fashion commodities over shared or communal alternatives (Baudrillard, 2016). These conditions are further accentuated by the fast fashion sector, which, by perpetuating ephemeral trend cycles, not only incentivises constant consumption but also frequently compromises garment durability, rendering them less amenable to shared usage (Joy et al., 2012). As fashion increasingly serves as a conduit for individual identity expression, the premium ascribed to novelty and exclusive ownership can eclipse the perceived merit of communal or pre-owned items, attenuating the propensity for fashion sharing (Entwistle, 2023).

However, due to the growing concern in recent years about the environmental and social issues associated with the fashion industry, there has been an increased emphasis on how to reform the fashion industry by changing its harmful consequences (Beyer and Arnold, 2022; Di Vaio et al., 2022; McGovern and Barnes, 2022), such as overconsumption. Therefore, the importance

of traditional fashion lending and borrowing has re-emerged in individuals' lives but with different motivations, such as seeking sustainability (Gibson and Stanes, 2010).

Like the other two common forms of fashion sharing, swapping without ownership transfer (temporary fashion swapping) and co-purchasing have rarely appeared simultaneously in existing research (Iran et al., 2019). Concerning temporary fashion swapping, Karpova et al. (2022) identified it as the fashion items exchange arrangement between two individuals without the transfer of ownership or monetary compensation, which is in line with Matthews and Hodges (2016). These two forms of fashion sharing also share characteristics with lending/borrowing such as everydayness, temporary material possessions and non-monetary compensation (Karpova et al., 2022). It is worth noting that when discussing fashion swapping, some studies, such as Matthews and Hodges (2016), suggest a link with the discarding stage of the items. For example, Matthews and Hodges (2016) agreed with Albinsson and Perera (2009) that consumers participate in clothes-swapping activities primarily to dispose of worn goods for utilitarian reasons. However, fashion swapping with the disposal of items and transfer of ownership is not the focus of this research. Therefore, only temporary fashion swapping is included in the current discussion. Although it has existed in our society for a long time, temporary fashion swapping, as an informal consumption practice, has been under-researched (Karpova et al., 2022). Co-purchasing, alternatively referred to as “*shared purchase*” (Loussaïef et al., 2019, p. 263), appears to have garnered the least amount of scholarly attention (Caprariello and Reis, 2013; Gilovich et al., 2015; Fedosov et al., 2018; McNeill and Venter, 2019). Fashion co-purchasing refers to two or more people purchasing a fashion item together, typically clothing or accessories, with the intention of sharing ownership and usage. This arrangement can take several forms, such as financial contributions from each participant or

shared use of the purchased fashion piece. It frequently involves a sense of shared decision-making, cost-sharing and equitable access to the fashion item among the participants (Shreeves, 2018).

When compared to the previous three forms of traditional fashion sharing, the models of fashion rental are more diverse and complex. Fashion rental is not a new concept, but its forms have become more diverse as a result of the emergence of concepts such as the sharing economy, collaborative consumption and sustainable consumption (Dover, 2018; Conlon, 2020; Mukendi and Henninger, 2020).

B2C fashion rental is divided into two types: traditional B2C fashion rental and B2C fashion rental born from the Internet, abbreviated as online B2C fashion rental. The traditional fashion rental model arose from the need for specialised attire for specific occasions, such as weddings or black-tie events (Iran and Schrader, 2017). This model offered a solution to the impracticality of purchasing high-end garments for infrequent use (Sczyka, 2020). Ruan and Xu (2018) further explored the consumer motivations driving luxury fashion rentals in recent years. They discovered that sustainability and the enjoyment of smart shopping are key motivations for renting luxury fashion. Their findings go beyond the finding that consumers rent clothing for special occasions.

Traditional B2C fashion rental has long been a staple of the fashion industry (Choufan, 2022). It primarily operates through physical stores, giving customers the tactile experience of touching, feeling and trying on garments before renting (Tripathi and Agrawal, 2015). With their tailored fittings and consultations, brick-and-mortar rental shops may inadvertently

exclude a segment of the population who cannot afford such bespoke services (Friese, 1997). This calls into question the traditional rental space's exclusivity and accessibility. Furthermore, the selection is frequently limited to the store's current inventory, potentially limiting options and forcing compromises.

The rise of online B2C fashion rental platforms has undeniably changed the fashion landscape, providing consumers with unprecedented access to a diverse range of styles and brands. Platforms such as Rent the Runway, for example, allow consumers to wear designer pieces without making a purchase commitment (Lang et al., 2020). The important advantage of online rental for consumers is the sheer breadth of choice (Ruan et al., 2022). Geographical limitations are dispelled by digital platforms, allowing access to global fashion trends and niche brands (Mishra et al., 2021). Consumers can enjoy the convenience of browsing, selecting and renting garments from the comfort of their homes, especially in an increasingly digital age (Piazza et al., 2015).

However, the digital nature of B2C fashion rental introduces inherent challenges, and some of them are similar to online fashion purchasing. The inability to physically try on garments prior to renting can result in dissatisfaction due to fit and feel issues. While many platforms have integrated virtual try-ons and detailed size guides, many consumers are still concerned about the element of uncertainty (Hansen and Møller Jensen, 2009). This is exacerbated by brand sizing variability and the often deceptive nature of online imagery, which may not always accurately represent the garment's true colour or texture. Gyde and McNeill (2021) argued that logistics are also a problem and may negatively influence the consumers' trust in the platforms. The anticipation of shipping, particularly for time-sensitive events, can be stressful. Delays,

damage during transit, or even lost packages can all have a negative impact on the customer experience (Lang et al., 2020). Furthermore, when considering the carbon footprint of expedited deliveries, the environmental implications of shipping raise sustainability concerns (Conlon, 2020). Due to the early stages of some fashion rental platforms, the limited availability of diverse styles poses challenges for consumers in selecting appropriate fashion pieces (Toivanen, 2021).

Online P2P Fashion Rental platforms, such as Depop, Poshmark and Tulerie, have emerged as a significant trend in the fashion industry, allowing consumers to rent out their own clothes to others (Philip et al., 2015; Arrigo, 2022). This model empowers individuals to monetise their wardrobes and provides renters with access to a diverse range of styles without the need for purchase (Belk, 2014b).

Online P2P platforms provide a distinct advantage to consumers: the authenticity of real-world fashion. Unlike traditional rental platforms, which may stock commercial or in-demand items, online P2P platforms frequently feature eclectic collections that reflect the personal preferences of individual lenders (Moeller and Wittkowski, 2010). This can provide renters with unique, offbeat styles that they may not find elsewhere.

However, the decentralised nature of P2P platforms creates a slew of issues. Quality control becomes a major concern. In contrast to traditional or online B2C models, where fashion items are subjected to stringent quality checks, P2P platforms rely heavily on individual lenders to ensure items are in good condition (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). As a result, according to Xu et al. (2022), there may be inconsistencies in garment quality, with renters occasionally

receiving items that are worn out or not as described. Another critical issue is trust (Möhlmann, 2016). P2P platform transactions are inherently based on trust between individual lenders and renters. While many platforms have review systems in place to foster trust, the risk of fraudulent listings, misrepresented items, or untrustworthy renters/lenders remains (Ertz et al., 2016).

Similar to the B2C model, logistics and customer service are further challenges. Traditional models rely on centralised logistics to ensure on-time deliveries and returns (Hübner et al., 2016). P2P platforms, on the other hand, are dependent on individual lenders for shipping, termed “*P2P logistics*” (Carbone et al., 2018, p. 576), and may experience delays or complications. Furthermore, because there is no centralised customer service entity, resolving disputes or issues may be more difficult. While P2P platforms promote sustainable consumption by extending the lifecycle of individuals’ garments (Amasawa et al., 2023), the environmental cost of individualised shipping—which frequently lacks the economies of scale seen in larger operations—can offset some of these benefits (Iran and Schrader, 2017).

The online hybrid fashion rental model in this research refers to a combination of the online B2C and P2P models, with the goal of leveraging the strengths of both while mitigating their respective challenges. Platforms that follow this model, such as ThreadUp, Vestiaire Collective and By Rotation, provide a curated mix of commercial inventory in addition to listings from individual users (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Existing research on this type of model is scant compared to research on B2C or P2P fashion rental (Tang, 2022).

A subscription-based fashion rental model, also known as a ‘fashion library,’ allows consumers to access a rotating wardrobe for a fixed fee over a set period of time, usually monthly. The

early fashion libraries functioned similarly to traditional libraries. Members paid a subscription fee to borrow items for a set period of time (Pedersen and Netter, 2015). These spaces served as community hubs as well as commercial enterprises, promoting sustainable fashion practices, offering workshops, and hosting events (Pedersen and Netter, 2015; Battle et al., 2018). Cities, such as Amsterdam, saw fashion library pioneers such as LENA emerge, which not only rented clothing but also emphasised the importance of quality and durability in fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016). The fashion library concept naturally transitioned online with the digital revolution. Online fashion libraries, such as Rent the Runway's 'unlimited' service, take advantage of the convenience of online shopping by providing features such as home delivery, return pickups and virtual try-ons (Tao and Xu, 2018). Although fashion libraries enable consumers to access different fashion styles or items without any purchase commitment, they still raise concerns which are similar to other fashion rental forms. These concerns include hygiene issues (Myin et al., 2023), complex two-way logistics, deteriorating quality of rent-out fashion goods and a poor perceived price-performance ratio of fashion rental (Bodenheimer et al., 2022).

These emerging fashion sharing forms also face another issue, which is being criticised as pseudo-sharing (Belk, 2014a). Critics argue that these platforms, with their evident profit motives, lack the genuine community spirit that is intrinsic to traditional sharing (Belk, 2014a). However, profit motives and genuine sharing are not mutually exclusive. The modern interpretation of sharing, especially within digitalised sharing, has evolved to intertwine with profit motives. Historically rooted in mutual aid and reciprocity, current fashion sharing platforms, such as Rent the Runway or By Rotation, have commercialised sharing to sustain and grow their operations. This commercialisation not only ensures platform viability but also

incentivises quality assurance and participation, leading to enhanced user experiences and efficient resource utilisation (Sundararajan, 2016). Furthermore, by monetising underutilised fashion assets, these platforms contribute to relieving overconsumption issues and create economic opportunities, demonstrating that profit-driven sharing can coexist with, and even enhance, the foundational principles of online sharing community and sustainability (Frenken and Schor, 2017). This is because traditional sharing typically happens among reliable sharers while novel fashion sharing practices are more likely to occur among strangers. The transaction is more likely to be “*part of the arrangement*” (Frenken and Schor, 2017, p. 4), to ensure that sharing activities run smoothly among strangers.

With regards to another critique of emerging fashion sharing forms, namely the lack of community, early online fashion sharing platforms may not have provided users with abundant opportunities to build communities (Vaskelainen and Piscicelli, 2018). But with the development of social media, platforms make use of them to nurture a sense of community or build online communities (Stoiciu, 2019). For example, many fashion rental platforms have their official account on Facebook, Instagram and other social media and encourage users to post relevant information with the hashtag containing the name of the platforms. Social media, in this context, are not detached commercial tools but media that amplify and foster the communal spirit. These platforms use social media to create spaces for users to communicate, share styling tips, and provide feedback, though these spaces may differ from traditional communities (Parrott et al., 2015). Further blurring the lines between online and offline communities, some platforms host real-world events, pop-up shops or workshops, such as By Rotation’s pop-up store in London and Belgravia. These events, often promoted and celebrated

on social media, offer tangible spaces for users to connect, share and engage beyond their screens.

3.3 Factors Influencing Consumers' Fashion Sharing Experiences

With the exception of Lundblad and Davies (2016), Ruan and Xu (2018), Lang (2018), Lang et al. (2019), Won and Kim (2020) and Ruan et al. (2022), limited existing research has focused on examining the motivations and barriers to fashion sharing, especially in the context of online commercialised fashion sharing. There is little research that shifts its focus back to other forms of fashion sharing, particularly for those occurring in everyday life (Klepp and Laitala, 2018). Yet, research in this area can help us understand how fashion sharers interact with fashion and their fashion sharers in their daily lives. It enables us to determine what makes these interactions positive or negative, resulting in more convenient and enjoyable interactions and experiences.

Definitions of consumer experience are varied and continually evolving. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 112) defined consumer experience as an individual's subjective state, *"covering a range of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses and aesthetic criteria"*, while Schwager and Meyer (2007) regarded it as the internal and subjective response of customers to any direct or indirect encounter with a firm. The underlying cause of conceptual uncertainty about the consumer experience definition is that the variables that comprise consumer experience have varied origins (Scussel, 2019). More importantly, customers play a significant part in the formation of their own experiences (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), particularly in individuals' fashion sharing experiences. This is because fashion sharing includes but goes beyond the interaction between individuals and companies. As discussed in the last section, fashion sharing practices occur among individuals, particularly among families and friends, and

still are the main form of fashion sharing. In today's fashion sharing landscape, understanding the factors that influence individuals' experiences largely involves examining their reactions to the various stages of their fashion sharing journey (Shavitt and Barnes, 2020). Existing studies have mainly focused on the different factors in the fashion sharing experience, consisting of fashion sharers, shared fashion items, the way to share and their internal response, such as feelings when sharing (Schwager and Meyer, 2007).

Individuals' personal characteristics significantly influence the fashion sharing experience. According to Caprariello and Reis (2013) and Gilovich et al. (2015), individuals were dissatisfied with shared purchases if they were materialistic. This may be due to their inherent values and expectations surrounding ownership, control, quality and personalisation of possessions (Price and Belk, 2016). These individuals prioritise the exclusive control and pristine condition of their belongings, which can be compromised when sharing items. Besides, materialistic individuals tend to associate the value of possessions with their self-worth, and shared items may not fulfil this perceived value (Zhang et al., 2020).

Further, Tinson and Nuttall (2007) found social relationships influence individuals' fashion sharing experience, but scant research exists on this topic. For example, Tinson and Nuttall (2007) recognised clear differences in fashion sharing in different social relationships, such as among siblings or among friends. Compared to sharing among peers, sharing that occurs among siblings, particularly sisters, has less respect in it. According to Tinson and Nuttall (2007), the reason for this is that sisters assumed the issue, happening during sharing, caused by the lack of respect would be resolved. Among siblings, the closer the relationship is, the more likely for one to share another's high-quality items, such as new make-up. Other studies, such as

Tomasello and Warneken (2008), Van Berkel et al. (2015), Ryu et al. (2019) and Harvey et al. (2020), have touched on the topic of prosocial sharing, but they have not approached it from the perspective of consumer experience, especially not in the context of fashion. Instead, these studies have typically focused on family or human behavioural research in sociology or anthropology. Therefore, this research seeks to have an understanding of fashion sharing within social relationships and explores how social relationships influence individuals' fashion sharing practices.

Shared fashion items stand at the fulcrum of the fashion sharing experience with various influencing dimensions, such as size and fit (McKinney and Shin, 2016), type of fashion items such as everyday wear vs. high-end or luxury items (Bodenheimer et al., 2022), trendiness and condition of the item (Helinski and Schewe, 2022). The performance risk concerning the quality issues of shared fashion items, particularly in platform-mediated fashion sharing (Mukendi and Henninger, 2020), may cause users to be unable to enjoy their fashion sharing experience (Lang, 2018). Contaminations have been a significant part of quality issues, including hygiene, utility contamination and territorial contamination (Clube and Tennant, 2020). The first two types of contamination are tangible, whereas the third is caused by an object being identified as belonging to someone else, either literally or psychologically (Baxter et al., 2017). When consumers know that an object has been physically handled by someone else, especially a stranger, they are concerned about contagion (Gao, 2017; Kim and Jin, 2021). Hazée et al. (2017) pointed out that contamination of shared fashion items can be either genuine or perceived. Compared to physical contact, consumers can mentally construct images of their shared fashion items as being contaminated, which is termed imagined contamination effects (Rachman, 2004).

However, as consumers become more environmentally conscious, a few signs of wear may be interpreted as a positive feature, indicating sustainability and reduced waste rather than a decrease in quality. In other situations, shared fashion items associated with great sentimental or historical value allow fashion sharers to partake in the item's narrative or history, adding depth to the sharing process and enhancing the fashion sharing experience (Baxter et al., 2017). Therefore, despite the fact that the shared fashion items show signs of use or being touched by others, these traces actually improve the consumer's fashion sharing experience. At this time, despite the fact that these shared items have been used by others, they transfer the meanings valued or desired by fashion sharers, a process known as 'positive contamination' (Argo et al., 2006; Baxter et al., 2017; Clube and Tennant, 2020). An example of positive contamination is that items that have been used or signed by celebrities can increase in value and increase individuals' willingness to purchase (Newman et al., 2011).

Also, according to Caprariello and Reis (2013), consumers' shared purchases are connected with higher levels of enjoyment. Gilovich et al. (2015) explained that, when compared to sole ownership purchases, shared purchases are more likely to be experiential in nature, strengthening social bonds and eliciting fewer social comparisons. In addition to co-purchasing, existing literature has insufficient discussions about the influence of other forms of fashion sharing, such as borrowing/lending or B2C fashion rental, on individuals' fashion sharing experiences.

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, consumers' fashion sharing experiences also encompass factors such as motivations (why they share), the timing and occasions (when and

where they share) and the usage feelings consumers accrue when sharing fashion items (consumers' internal responses). However, existing research has not devoted sufficient attention to these aspects of sharing and how they influence consumers' fashion sharing experiences.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed existing research concerning fashion sharing and consumer experience. This chapter has begun with a review of the historical evolution of fashion sharing, providing an understanding of how fashion sharing has evolved from the past to the present. This lays the foundation for comprehending the diversity of modern fashion sharing forms.

This chapter has also introduced eight existing forms of fashion sharing. These fashion sharing forms have been divided into two categories due to the emergence of the Internet era: traditional and novel fashion sharing. The chapter has discussed the development as well as the pros and cons of each fashion sharing form. While the rise of online fashion sharing has been rapid, traditional fashion sharing may still dominate the current landscape of fashion sharing practices. However, research has predominantly leaned towards novel fashion sharing, lacking the necessary understanding and attention towards traditional fashion sharing. Therefore, this research takes a more comprehensive perspective to understand both traditional and novel fashion sharing practices and their participants.

Finally, this chapter has reviewed another under-researched area of existing literature: factors influencing individuals' fashion sharing experiences. Based on this, this chapter has reviewed how fashion sharers, shared fashion items and the methods of sharing fashion influence consumers' fashion sharing experiences. Given the knowledge gaps identified in the literature

review, this research therefore aims to explore consumers' fashion sharing experiences through the lens of identity theory and from the perspective of consumers. In the next chapter, the literature on identity will be reviewed.

Chapter 4-Literature Review III: Identity Theory

4.1 Introduction

Questions about identity matter because they relate to how we perceive ourselves, how we understand this world and how we deal with our relationships with others. A significant number of answers to these questions have emerged from a variety of perspectives in contemporary social science, including psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology, and history (Stryker and Burke, 2000). When explaining *identity* or *the self*, theoretical perspectives diverge.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine existing theories on identity from different perspectives and to provide a lens to frame this research. Specifically, in 4.1, different definitions of identity are introduced and discussed, which inspire this research to construct its understanding of the identity concept. Following the timeline of their historical development, identity theories from the perspective of psychology and sociology are reviewed, laying a cross-disciplinary foundation for the discussion in the following section. In 4.2, the meaning of identity in consumer research is first reviewed. Secondly, the section critically reviews how sharing, involving temporary material possessions, shapes individuals' self- and social identities. Due to the limited literature examining the relationship between sharing and consumer identity, the author reviews the literature concerning purchasing and consumer identity as an entry point.

4.2 The Concept of Identity, Identity Theories and Their Development

In our daily lives, we use 'I', 'my' and 'me' to refer to ourselves. Words such as the 'self', 'self-concept' and 'self-identity' are usually used to refer to 'identity'. The definition and concept of

identity can be discussed from diverse disciplinary perspectives that inform various theories concerning the self.

This section mainly focuses on the meanings of identity and the historical development of identity theory from the perspectives of psychology and sociology. The review of these two perspectives on identity provides a strong framework for the consideration of identity theory in consumer research, which follows in the next section.

4.2.1 I and Me

This section mainly concentrates on two types of identity theories, including Dialogical Self Theory and Narrative Identity Theory. These two types of theory provide valuable perspectives for me to think about what identity is and what it means to individuals, which helps me to adopt a theoretical standpoint concerning the self.

The book by James (1890), *The Principles of Psychology*, is considered the first account of self-identity (Huang, 2009). According to James (1890), ‘Me’ and ‘I’ are two aspects of the self. The former can be regarded as an object while the latter is a subject. The ‘Me’ self has three constituents of identity according to James (1890), including the material me, the social me and the spiritual me. Specifically, the material me consists of an individual’s body, family relations and possessions. The social me refers to the recognition that the individual receives from and gives to others. The spiritual me means the entire collection of one’s state of consciousness (James, 1999), including the individual’s thoughts and feelings. In these three layers of the self, whether these different components or aspects of their identity can provide an individual with similar emotions is the key to differentiating the self and the not-self (Barresi, 2002; James,

1999). In simpler terms, how a person feels about their body, social recognition, and inner thoughts can help them understand who they are and distinguish who they are not. Compared with the Me self, the I self reflects what individuals observe or perceive themselves to be doing in the physical world.

In addition to putting forward the material self, the social self and the spiritual self, James (1890) contributed to identifying the central part of an individual's identity. One paragraph of *the Principles of Psychology* can appropriately provide the description of how we choose our identities among various selves:

“I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not. If I could, be... a great athlete and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon vivant and a lady killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist ... and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the bon-vivant and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably, at the outset of life, be alike possible for a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully and pick out on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs carrying shame and gladness with them” (James 1890, p. 153-154).

This account reveals that we may want to be in many roles or characters, but we may need to choose the primary roles or characters guiding our behaviours. In other words, we may just have one ideal character which is compliant with our attitudes and emotions, while the other

selves might need to be suppressed. Similar to James (1890), McAdams (1996) builds identity theory on a clear distinction between the I self and the Me self and supports a multi-layered self. However, different from James (1890), McAdams (1996) believed those different selves, which seem to oppose each other, can co-exist at the same time, which might be temporal. This means an individual has a possible chance to be both a millionaire and a saint at the same time. This is because the self changes over time and involves the development of self-narratives. These narratives integrate the “*individual's reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future, rendering a life-in-time sensible in terms of beginnings, middles, and endings*” (McAdams, 1996, p. 298). Thus, individuals will seek the chance to harmonise different roles when changes happen to these roles. For example, if a millionaire wants to be a saint, he needs to be capable of managing his self-narratives as a saint; then, his multi-layered self can be settled. Thus, concerning individuals’ active construction of the self, we can introduce the embryonic form of an important concept, the *identity project*.

The concept of *identity project* was also gradually developed. Rainwater (1979) considered the self as a reflexive project in that the individual is answerable to its development from the past to the future, which resonates with Giddens’s (1991) and McAdams’s (1996) perspectives. In other words, Rainwater (1979) believed that “*we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves*” (Giddens, 1991, p. 75). Thus, the reflexivity of the self is continuous and pervasive at each moment, which extends to the body of individuals (Giddens, 1991). And the body is a part of the action system to construct the identity project instead of a passive item (Rainwater, 1979; Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, the appearance of the body becomes the canvas to manage an individual’s identity presentation in modern society, which is highly relevant to this research about exploring how individuals manage their self-identity via sharing fashion items with others.

In addition to Rainwater (1979), Giddens (1991) and McAdams (1996) focused more on the construction of self-narratives. McAdams's (1985, 1996) identity theory suggests that identity comes in the form of a narrative, complete with "*setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme*" (p. 101), which is known as McAdams's life story model of identity. Different from James's (1890) theory of the self, which is governed by spiritual activities, McAdams (1996) argued that an individual's identity is dominated by his or her capacity to maintain a particular life story (Giddens, 1991). Identity, according to McAdams' life story model of identity, is not a synonym for the self, but rather a specific quality of individuals' self-understandings and how the self can be organised. An individual's identity emerges in his or her adulthood when the individual continuously extracts the understanding of the self from his or her life stories. Thus, the formation of identity is a long and dynamic process.

Mikhail Bakhtin delivered his thoughts about a relational view of the self in the book, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). He thought the self is determined by who and what we meet. There is a sentence in his book, which reveals his core thoughts on identity:

"I cannot manage without another; I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 287).

This account stressed that individuals might understand and define themselves through the integration of first- and third-person information about the self. This account also emphasised the fact that the self is relational and can only 'be' in relation to others. According to Barresi (2002), first-person information refers to an individual's perspective and experience of their own action as they are participating in it. Third-person information refers to the observations

made by another while seeing an actor engage in an activity. Moreover, first- and third-person information is exchanged in utterances. However, based on Bakhtin's works, the integration of first- and third-person information can hardly be fully achieved because of the shifts and changes in different persons' identities (Barresi, 2002). This is because individuals will never be able to comprehend one another's actions as they comprehend their own behaviour due to the various epistemological viewpoints of individuals. Thus, identity in Bakhtin's theory is fluid and ambiguous (Jabri, 2004, 2005).

Based on Bakhtin's (1973) theory of the polyphonic self, Hermans and Kempen (1993) discuss another account of the self, the *dialogical self*. This concept regards the self as a variety of viewpoints (internal voices) from which dialogical relationships can be created (Suszek, 2017; Hermans, 2001). Dialogical Self Theory accepts a pluralistic approach to individuals' personalities and the self. Hermans (2001) thought the dialogical self was at the intersection of the works of James (1890) and Bakhtin (1973). In accordance with James (1890), Hermans (2001) believed a continuity between the experiences of a person's spouse, children, ancestors, and friends since, as members of the 'Mine', they are all extensions of the same self (Hermans, 2001). However, in accordance with Bakhtin (1981), Hermans (2001) argued that the same characters signify distinct and sometimes opposing voices in the spatial realm of the self. However, Dialogical Self Theory is criticised for its lack of empirical support, devaluation of personality integration, and blurring of the self's boundaries (Suszek, 2017).

In sum, two types of self theory have been reviewed and discussed, namely *Dialogical Self Theory*, proposed by Hermans (2001) and inspired by James (1890) and Bakhtin (1981), and

Narrative Identity Theory, proposed by McAdams (1985, 1996) and inspired by Rainwater (1979) and Giddens (1991).

4.2.2 The Social Self

Sociologists and social psychologists emphasise the society-shaped self, and are interested in how individuals interact with society, how society shapes individuals and how individuals maintain, change and advance society, consciously or unconsciously, through their behaviours. Symbolic interactionism is one of the four major pillars of sociology, which informs social identity theory. Symbolic interactionism suggests that our social world is constructed via the commonplace activities of everyday social interaction (del Casino and Thien, 2020). Individuals, as agents in social groups, create symbolic and shared meanings through repeated daily interactions, which influence how individuals perceive themselves through their thoughts of others' views and actual others' views (Shrauger and Schoeneman, 1979). Under the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, there are many works exploring the concept of the self, such as Cooley (1983) and Goffman (1990).

Cooley (1983) proposed the concept of the looking-glass self (first introduced in 1902 by Cooley). This concept indicates that *“our self-concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment”* (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983, p. 77). According to Cooley, the looking-glass self consists of three steps: (1) we assume how we must look to others; (2) we assume and react to what we believe others' evaluation of that appearance must be; and (3) we develop the feelings over the perceived evaluation of others (Shaffer, 2005; Siljanovska, 2018). In Cooley's looking-glass self, emotion is the anchor among these three steps that individuals adjust their perceived 'appearance' depending on their feelings about the

perceived judgement from others (Huang, 2009; Scheff, 2005). Particularly, Cooley emphasised the importance of specific feelings, pride and shame, which both arose from self-monitoring (Scheff, 2000).

The essential function of others' evaluation does not mean individuals play a passive role in social interaction. Instead, individuals actively shape their self-image, and how others think about them (Nickerson, 2021). Cooley (1983) pointed out that individuals actively interpret the perceived judgments and perceptions of others. Specifically, individuals selectively adopt perceived judgments of others rather than passively accepting all of those. After making the selective adjustments, individuals are then able to control and manipulate the responses and estimates of others.

The concept of the looking-glass self is widely applied to the field of social media research, though it was created more than a hundred years ago and faces the challenges of modern individualism (Jones, 2015; Scheff, 2005). Jones' (2015) empirical research demonstrates that after reading audience comments, some YouTubers (the videos/posts creators) became more socially conscious or attentive to their self-presentation and communication methods (Jones, 2015), which is consistent with Cooley's looking-glass self. In the virtual world, the non-verbal reactions from others function like verbal ones in online social interaction as well. Tanujaya, (2022) suggests that Instagram 'Likes' (a hollow heart-shaped icon) have a subconscious influence over receivers via self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and subsequent actions. This is because 'Likes' build a moulded perception of Instagram users, which represents how people view, judge or respond to the posts created by Instagram users, in other words, a 'glass'. Furthermore, other research findings suggest that social media are not only plain glass but more

likely to be a magnifying mirror which magnifies or even distorts individuals' self-perception and tears the consistency of the self perceived by oneself, particularly in adolescents (Skogen et al., 2021; Krawczyk et al., 2019; Hamilton et al., 2022). Moreover, negative social media interaction, such as gross and mean comments, has proven harmful to individuals' long-term well-being (Beyens et al., 2020), which is also why the looking-glass self is questioned by some scholars. For example, Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979), argued that, in some cases, how people perceive themselves and how others actually evaluate them are inconsistent, but Cooley's theory assumes others can accurately respond to an individual.

In line with Cooley (1983), Goffman (1990), as a symbolic interactionist, extended the concept of the looking-glass self in his most famous account of the self, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman (1990) employs theatrical imagery to illustrate the complexities of social interaction. Goffman (1990) believed people engage in social interactions as actors on a stage and take part in various performative social roles. When on the 'front stage', the actors can see the audience, and the audience's expectations for how they should play their parts impact the actors' behaviours. But 'backstage', hidden from others' view, they act as their true selves (Siljanovska, 2018).

Goffman (1990) considered shame as a social emotion which drives individuals to tailor their behaviours, which resonates with Cooley (1983). Goffman, however, emphasised embarrassment over shame and suggested the fourth step beyond Cooley's three: the management of embarrassment or shame (Scheff, 2005), which can be considered part of impression management. Impression management, often known as self-presentation, is the process through which individuals exert control over the impressions formed of them by others

(Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Goffman attached great importance to embarrassment/shame because he thought embarrassment/shame serves to maintain an individual's commitment to social organisation, values and convention (Heath, 1988).

Leary and Kowalski (1990) introduced a two-component model of impression management. The first component is impression motivation. Leary and Kowalski (1990) argue that individuals consciously monitor their influence on others and have the motivation to control others' views of them. The second component is impression construction, which refers to the process of particular impressions that individuals desire to create. This two-component model of impression management coincides with the work of Goffman (1990) in that the identity work is not only 'what's-going-on-in-our-heads', but also how we (want to) present ourselves to others (McCarthy, 2013, p. 51).

There is another line of thought in symbolic interactionism explaining how individuals' self-identities develop. Before the looking-glass self of Cooley (1983), George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed the role-taking theory. Instead of focusing on emotions or feelings like Cooley (1983) and Goffman (1991), Mead (1934) emphasises the function of social interaction since individuals' childhood and states that thought, self and society are the results of role-taking. In addition, Mead believed that role-taking is a cognitive process. During this process, individuals demonstrate their ability to continuously observe themselves from the perspective of others (Scheff, 2005). In contrast to Cooley's definition of the self through the lens of specific individuals, Mead (1934) highlighted the importance of adopting different social roles, like those in various groups, and even roles based on imagined individuals or communities (Tice

and Wallace, 2003). Thus, individuals may have various identities depending on the different persons or social groups they interact with.

4.2.3 Self Identity and Social Identity

When examining relationships among individuals and social groups, scholars use another term, social identity, to differentiate that of the self. A social identity is an individual's knowledge of which social category or group they belong to (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). A social group is a collection of people who share a social identity or consider themselves members of the same social category (Stets and Burke, 2000). Social identity theory, first proposed in the 1970s, is an interactionist social psychological theory of the role of self-conception and associated cognitive processes and social beliefs in group dynamics and intergroup connections (Hogg, 2016).

Both social identity theory and identity theory believe the self is reflexive and can categorise or be categorised in particular ways which distinguish itself from other groups (Giddens, 1991; Stets and Burke, 2000). This categorising process is called self-categorisation in social identity theory but identification in identity theory. In social identity theory, individuals compare themselves to certain groups and try to find possible common features, such as languages, beliefs and attitudes, with these groups, which aims to determine their in-group or out-group identities (Major et al., 1993; Castano et al., 2002). According to Burke and Tully (1977), in identity theory, the essence of identity is the categorisation of the self as a role occupant and the assimilation of the meanings and expectations connected with that role and its execution into the self.

Social identity theory contributes to explaining group-based stereotypes and prejudice (Bigler and Liben 2007; Edelman et al. 2018). An individual's self-concept comprises both personal identity and social identity. In different contexts, one of these two parts of self-concept may be more salient than another (Gonzalez, 2019). For instance, when in the situation of 'Goffman's backstage', an Individual's personal identity is more likely to dominate this person's behaviours. However, if someone meets a group of people from a saddle club, social identity may play a more important role in their interaction during the initial phase of group interaction or when individuals first come together in a group setting. Research demonstrates that group stereotyping and prejudice are more salient when social identities are prominent (Edelman et al., 2018). Thus, bias might be reduced if the salience of intergroup differences is reduced. Identity salience is defined as the significance of an identity for self-definition in comparison to other identities held by an individual (Shamir, 1992). Social identity theory provides a valuable theoretical lens for several research areas, such as consumer psychology (Pettifor et al., 2020), education (Kim et al., 2018) and company governance (Schückes and Gutmann, 2021). Despite their contributions, social identity theories face criticism as well. For example, Hogg and Williams (2000) argued that these theories have become so comprehensive and robust that they are no longer falsifiable, as nearly any experimental result can be understood within their overall framework.

Thus far, in this research, self-identity can be understood as how individuals perceive themselves. An individual's self-identity is multi-layered and is influenced by social interaction, and their ability to comprehend and construct it. Moreover, emotions, feelings and attitudes are anchors that determine if someone is willing to embrace new features and get rid of old ones in their self-identity during social interaction. Based on individuals' understandings of themselves

and other factors, such as social consensus and culture, they actively categorise or are passively categorised into various social groups with distinctive features, which form individuals' social identities. Reviewing and discussing this group of concepts (self-identity and social identity) help this research interpret individuals' fashion sharing behaviours and practices from psychological and sociological perspectives. For example, concerning the issue of social identities, the study can explore how individuals' identities influence their fashion sharing practices and how individuals use their shared fashion items to reflect their social identities.

4.3 Identity, Material Possessions and Sharing

As defined in the previous chapters, sharing in this research is an umbrella concept and refers to the circulation of consumption resources and fundamental social interactions, which build the social relationships connecting both individuals and groups, and can be reciprocal, altruistic or selfish. There are many forms of sharing as discussed previously, including lending/borrowing, renting and co-owning. The purpose of this section is to explain how human sharing behaviours, involving temporary material possessions, are connected to an individual's self- and social identities. Moreover, this section also explores the role of fashion sharing in an individual's identity project.

4.3.1 Material Possessions and Identity

Sharing behaviour within the fashion context allows individuals to have temporary material possessions of fashion items. It has been proven by empirical studies that individuals use material possessions to construct, develop and express their identities (Kleine and Baker, 2004; Dittmar, 2011). Nevertheless, research and theories concerning the role of temporary material possessions in consumers' self- and social identities are scarce (Eckmann and Landwehr, 2020;

Fritze et al., 2020), particularly within the context of fashion (Battle et al., 2018; Lang, 2018; Zhang and Lang, 2018; Loussaïef et al., 2019; Sörum and Gianneschi, 2023). Therefore, this section discusses the role of general material possessions in identity construction first. New and different perspectives regarding temporary material possessions brought about by sharing are discussed later.

With regard to the relationship between possessions and the self, James (1890) argued that we are the sum of our possessions. Consistent with James's (1890) account of the material self, Belk (1988) believed that our possessions are parts of ourselves and explained the concept of extended self. In Belk's (1988) work, the extended self is considered as including not only external objects and personal possessions but also persons, locations, group possessions and body components. These material objects are seen as symbolic when individuals pay more attention to meanings beyond their tangible and physical features (Levy, 1959). Through the symbolic meanings of material possessions, an individual receives a sense of self as well as the opportunity for identity construction and even for identity transformation (Loussaïef et al., 2019; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Fashion items, as tangible and material objects connected to the human body, can reflect individuals' aesthetics and values to others (Kaiser, 1997). Therefore, often fashion objects are selected as the means by which individuals can convey symbolic meanings. These symbolic meanings are used by individuals to reflect how they perceive themselves and their affiliation or connection to a specific social group (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 2015). Through fashion, consumers acquire the symbolic meanings related to their desired identities and avoid undesired ones, which helps them manage their identity projects (Banister and Hogg, 2001; Banister and Hogg, 2004; Gabriel and Lang, 2015).

However, with the development of online markets during the last decade, the means by which consumers acquire symbolic meanings are changing. Past research paid attention to how consumption involving ownership of possessions helps shape individuals' identity projects and social differentiation (Belk, 1988; Bardhi et al., 2012). More recent research has gradually shifted the focus to consumers' fluid relationships with possessions. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017, p. 582) introduced and explained a new dimension of consumption, namely liquid consumption, which is defined as "*ephemeral, access based and dematerialised.*" On the contrary, solid consumption is identified as "*enduring, ownership-based, and material*" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017, p. 582). The concept of liquid consumption is in line with the features of fashion sharing in this research, as it liberates individuals from the burden of ownership, such as limited storage (Belk, 2007; Albinsson and Perera, 2018). In an increasingly liquid world, sticking to a solid attachment to possessions might be problematic since identity projects are constantly changing (Bauman, 2001; Bardhi et al., 2012). Indeed, in fashion sharing activities, individuals no longer regard owning the product itself as the ultimate goal but focus instead on enjoying the values and meanings brought by the product itself in all aspects of sharing, and how these values and meanings reflect or shape their identity.

4.3.2 Identity Projects and Consumption

As discussed in 4.2.1, Giddens (1991) presented self-identity as a reflexive and interminable project that individuals are actively constructing and developing. What matters in Giddens's identity project is the ability of individuals to construct and maintain their self-stories. In line with Giddens's (1991) idea that self-identity can be considered a project, the identity project concept in consumer research

focuses on how consumers construct a cohesive narrative of the self by using marketplace resources that connect the past, present, and future (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Larsen and Patterson, 2018). In the marketplace, fashion items tied to the human body are of particular symbolic appeal (Johnson et al., 2014). Individuals use fashion discourse to develop their identity as they transition from childhood to adulthood (Marion and Nairn, 2011), which can be considered fashion's contribution to individuals' identity projects.

Research concerning the connection between consumption and identity construction is fruitful. Early research suggests that consumers purchase items which are consistent with their self and social identities (Birdwell, 1968; Sirgy, 1982), which is also evident in consumers' fashion sharing practices (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Kerkelä, 2018; Sörum and Gianneschi, 2023). The more significant the identity is to individuals, the more appealing its connected products are (Kleine et al., 1993). In Goffman's (1990) account, individuals try to manage the impression of others when performing on the front stage; thus, they would also manage the appearance required for the front-stage identity performance. For example, Rosenberg et al. (2022) explained how the handbag displays its symbolic and functional value in the everyday performance of modern females. During the daytime, a multifunctional tote bag might be the best friend of professional women because a tote bag can satisfy its owners' functional demands, like carrying their laptop, umbrella and other items used in the workplace. But the item will be changed when shifting into a night party; a big and heavy tote is less likely to attract its owners who aim to be the party queens. A small and delicate handbag fits more into the night party context. These bag examples illustrate how individuals select fashion items consistent with their social identities to satisfy their practical or hedonic needs on different occasions. However, purchasing or owning is not the only way that consumers can acquire fashion items consistent

with their identities. Sharing, as an alternative to solid material possessions, increasingly gains popularity and positively involves consumers' identity construction (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; Fritze et al., 2020).

Furthermore, what influences individuals to purchase, or share is not only how they see themselves but also how they expect themselves to be or construct 'an ideal me' (Malär et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). Individuals are more inclined to use a material symbol, such as a fashion item, to compensate for their lack of self-completion (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 2013; Simpson, 2019). According to the self-completion concept in consumer research, individuals can use symbolic indicators, such as brands and titles, to repair a threatened self-view (Saenger et al., 2020). Consider a person who normally dresses modestly but chooses to wear luxury brands to a high-profile event. In this case, the individual may be using the luxury brand as a symbol to bridge the gap between their normal self and an 'ideal me' who fits the prestigious setting. This behaviour is consistent with the self-completion theory, implying that they are compensating for a perceived deficit in their identity, particularly when they feel out of place or believe they need to elevate their self-presentation in specific contexts.

Recent research has revealed, however, that individuals may purchase, share or use a product that is inconsistent with or that contradicts their identities, which challenges the previous perceptions of a monolithic and continuous self. Ward and Broniarczyk (2011) found that consumers may choose an identity-contrary gift for a close friend. For example, some people may dislike wearing souvenir T-shirts. However, if their friends like these T-shirts as souvenirs, they will still purchase the T-shirts and send them as gifts to make their friends happy. There are various reasons behind identity-contrary consumption, like trying different items, such as

fashions (Du, 2020), cultural differences or social pressures (Suzuki et al., 2012), negative selves (Bahl and Milne, 2010) and states of uncertainty (Ng et al., 2021). Moreover, Du (2020) discussed that consumers would use techniques of neutralisation, such as denial of responsibility and denial of the significance of any conduct, to shield themselves from the guilt arising from identity-inconsistent fashion consumption. Further, Ward and Broniarczyk (2011) found that purchasing an identity-contrary gift for others may result in an identity threat, which makes the giver experience discomfort. In addition to this, when one's self-perceptions are temporarily unsettled, their metacognitions indicate that something is incorrect (Gao et al., 2009). Thus, individuals facing an identity crisis will desire to make product decisions which can help to recover their essential self-concepts and prevent their self-images from being shaky.

The identity project is a continuous process, which means that the identity of individuals is not immutable. Due to different life stages and changing living environments, individuals' identities change over time, which influences how they utilise consumption to reflect or extend their identity. In consumer research literature, two perspectives of identity can be found which are rooted in different ontological positions: ascribed identity and acquired identity (Gabriel and Lang, 2015; Larsen and Patterson, 2018). These two perspectives of identity share similarities with their psychological perspectives but are grounded in cultural perspectives (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). On the one hand, ascribed identity focuses on a fairly essentialist position in that one is born and is believed to be unified, stable and fixed (Wooten and Rank-Christman, 2018; Jenkins, 2014). By identifying similarity and distinction, ascribed identity helps individuals to categorise themselves into different social identities, such as male and son. On the other hand, acquired identity is defined as changing, fluid and developing and can be attained with the help of others during one's life (Jenkins, 2014). Through acquired identity,

individuals can modify the qualities of ascribed identity and embrace new features of their identity (Gabriel and Lang, 2015). In the case of fashion sharing, ascribed identity can be used to explain how individuals perform identity through fashion sharing activities and what stable fashion sharing habits they inherit from their nuclear family. Furthermore, individuals establish their acquired identities through their self-developed fashion sharing practices where they have the freedom to choose their preferred fashion sharers and sharing modes.

Materialism and materialistic values are the foundation of contemporary consumer culture (Richins, 2017). Richins and Dawson (1992, p. 307) defined materialism as “*the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states.*” Richins (2017) explained how material acquisition carves the sense of the self throughout an individual’s life. She identified the insecure and unstable self brought about by the heavy reliance on things. However, avoiding ownership and material possessions does not mean turning away from materialism. Atanasova and Eckhardt (2021, p. 482) defined materialism as “*a logic of consumption, which manifests as a preoccupation with the consumption of objects, access or experiences as a way to signal status, build image, pursue happiness, and attain a sense of self-worth.*” In the case of fashion sharing, this means that fashion sharers can still be materialists without owning material things. Fashion sharers can construct and transit their ascribed and acquired identity via material sharing rather than ownership. However, compared to exploring the ownership of things through the lens of identity, consumer research on the self–object relationship in sharing is more limited (Loussaïef et al., 2019). In existing relevant but limited research, individuals are confirmed to have a shared sense of ownership through family sharing practices (Loussaïef et al., 2019) and have a shared family identity (Belk, 2010). In the case of car sharing, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) showed

that access enables consumers to pursue their postmodern identity projects as they exchange car models according to their lifestyle needs. Within the fashion context, Kerkelä (2018) stated that fashion sharing might provide consumers with unique chances for identity expression, identity experimentation, and achieving ideal identities that are out of reach for consumers under traditional ownership. Furthermore, Loussaïef et al. (2019) argued that luxury fashion sharing serves as a fluid transformation of self-presentation, and fosters a temporary extended self as possessions do, but the shared rather than fully owned items should be in line with consumer identity. Nevertheless, such a liquid relationship to goods is not always believed to be positive for constructing the identity project. Sörum and Gianneschi (2022) argued that fashion sharing might not influence the identity narratives of fashion sharers and even brings a series of obstacles, such as difficulties in developing attachments to things.

The concept of identity project may not work in every case. The construction and maintenance of identity projects in consumer research heavily rely on marketplace resources (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). However, the idea that everyone wants to or is capable of engaging in identity projects through fashion consumption ignores class inequalities and relative access to fashion resources (Skeggs, 2014). Further, signalling valuable identities to others necessitates that individuals have the ability to effectively participate in aesthetic fashion self-presentation, and that others interpret these performances as intended (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2016). Despite these valid critiques, this research focuses on interpreting individuals' fashion sharing practices through the lens of identity theories because such theories are still apt at illuminating the role and significance of fashion sharing in consumers' identity projects, social practices and associated experiences.

4.4 Chapter Summary

The exploration of the self is the eternal pursuit of human beings. This chapter contributes to this topic by reviewing existing theory and empirical research on self and social identity. Specifically, this chapter pays attention to the relationship between individuals' identities and their fashion sharing practices, including the perspective of psychology, sociology and consumer research. Based on this discussion, I hold the view that the nature of fashion sharing is still about material possession, but of a temporary kind, which is different from the views of existing research, such as Fritze et al.'s (2020), which suggests that non-ownership consumption has eliminated the need for material possessions. Compared to traditional consumption, however, the sharing of material fashion possessions is more likely to be temporary, fluid and burdenless and has similar influences and functions on one's identity construction. Moreover, the concept of identity project is at the heart of the discussion. This chapter explores how fashion sharing contributes to one's identity project while highlighting that managing an identity project is not the only answer to every individual's fashion sharing practice. The following chapter will introduce the philosophical standpoint of this research and how this philosophical standpoint helps the author choose the research approach.

Chapter 5-Philosophical Standpoint and Approach

5.1 Introduction

Research philosophy is a basic set of beliefs and assumptions of researchers concerning how to obtain knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). It is a fundamental aspect of social research, as it provides a framework for understanding the nature of knowledge, the relationship between the researcher and the researched subjects, and the process of inquiry. A ‘paradigm’ or ‘worldview’ is a way of conceptualising and making sense of the complexities of the world (Patton, 2002; Creswell and Clark, 2018). Specifically, research philosophy guides the establishment of research questions, research design and data analysis (Crotty, 1998), which is essential for social research. Thus, this chapter focuses on my philosophical standpoint and research approach for the study, which guides the research design presented in Chapter 6.

The first section of the chapter discusses the meaning of research philosophy and the significance of adopting an appropriate philosophical standpoint. I explain the reasons why I adopt an interpretivist standpoint in this research rather than positivism. In section 5.3, I provide an overview of the reasons for adopting a qualitative research approach in this research.

5.2 Interpretivism as a Research Paradigm

In social research, research philosophy consists of axiology, ontology, and epistemology. Further, a research paradigm is formed by the combination of research philosophy and research methodology (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006), which operates as heuristics which are adopted to solve certain research issues (Abbott, 2004). According to Bryman (2008), Maxwell (2013) and Creswell (2014), selecting a certain paradigm is influenced by research questions and objectives,

researchers' personal values and beliefs, their past experiences, the research context and setting, and the theoretical frameworks and traditions in their discipline. By recognising these factors, researchers can choose a research philosophy that is appropriate for their study aims and objectives and that is consistent with the field's known knowledge and best practices and my worldview. Primarily based on the research questions and my personal values, I regard myself as an interpretivist in this research.

Interpretivism is widely adopted in social research and is rooted in several philosophical and theoretical traditions. The origin of interpretivism can be traced back to the early 20th century, particularly to the works of philosophers and sociologists who challenged the positivist approach, which was dominant at the time (Willis, 2007). Believing in a single reality and taking an objective stance (Saunders et al., 2019), positivists typically adopt the deductive approach and quantitative research methods to test proposed hypothesis based on existing theories. The positivist research approach might be effective in natural sciences but shows limitations in terms of its ability to capture the complexities of human behaviour and social phenomena. Positivism emphasises objective observation and empirical evidence. However, human behaviour and social phenomena are inherently subjective and cannot be fully understood through purely objective methods (Schwandt, 2000). Furthermore, positivist approaches were criticised for their inability to account for the context and environment in which social behaviours occur (Bryman, 2016) and for neglecting the role of individuals in shaping their social world (Blaikie, 2000). Therefore, to overcome these limitations, interpretivists consider the reality of the world subjectively and embrace multiple realities, which can be understood through languages, stories, experiences and practices within certain contexts (Saunders et al., 2019).

Normally, interpretivists are more likely to be insiders of the research with an empathetic stance (Saunders et al., 2019). To comprehend social reality, interpretivists posit that one should delve into the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals attribute to their interactions and experiences (Schwandt, 2000). Typically, interpretivists use a bottom-up approach and adopt qualitative methods to generate theories from smaller samples (Creswell, 2014). Further, while interpretivism is frequently employed to build theories, positivism is mostly used to test theories (Saunders et al., 2019). Facing an under-researched area, I needed to stand on a theory-building paradigm, and interpretivism fits that criterion.

Interpretivism has several advantages in consumer research. Firstly, interpretivism enables researchers to delve deeply into the complexity of consumer behaviour, which can reveal the underlying motives, beliefs and attitudes that influence consumer behaviours (Thompson, 1997). This is beneficial for achieving a more sophisticated view of consumers and consumption, as interpretivism enables insights into the meanings that consumers assign to their decisions and experiences. Secondly, the interpretivism paradigm encourages the flexible use of qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnography, which can be tailored to the natural settings of consumers. This flexibility allows researchers to examine consumer behaviour in real-world circumstances, resulting in richer and more reliable conclusions (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Thirdly, interpretivism stresses the consumer's own understanding and interpretation of their experiences, ensuring that research findings are grounded in the actual experiences and perceptions of consumers. This is critical to understanding consumers' behaviours (Goulding, 1999). For example, Oliveira de Mendonça et al. (2021) stood on interpretivism and explored individuals' experiences of being minimalists

and how they create their identities through de-growth behaviours. Oliveira de Mendonça et al. (2021) used various qualitative methods, including netnography, cultural texts analysis, in-depth interviews and attended a minimalist event. They generated the findings based on participants' views and experiences. Similarly, my research aims to explore consumers' fashion sharing experiences. Given that fashion sharing is an under-researched topic, this paucity of research highlights the importance of adopting an interpretivist standpoint to understand how consumers engage with fashion sharing from their own perceptions and interpretations.

5.2.1 Ontological, Epistemological and Axiological Standpoint

Ontology is a philosophical concept that pertains to the study of being, existence, and reality (Saunders et al., 2019). It deals with questions such as what exists, how things exist, and what their fundamental properties and relationships are. Ontologically, interpretivism holds that reality is socially constructed and subjective, formed by individual perceptions, experiences, and social interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 2023; Blumer, 1986). This means interpretivism embraces a changing and multiple reality (Saunders et al., 2019), compared to a single reality in positivism.

Internalist-idealist and relativist are two ontological views in the interpretivism paradigm (Potrac et al., 2014). In this research, I adopt a relativist ontology, which contends that reality is relative and varies depending on different views and settings, rather than being permanent or universal (Field, 1982). This viewpoint holds that what is true or real is determined by specific cultural, social or linguistic frames. Individuals' sharing practices are subjective and can be understood as dynamic and ongoing processes of inquiry and interpretation, shaped by the various needs and goals of individuals, and the broader social and cultural contexts in which

they live. For example, early on in human history, food and clothing sharing practices were essential for survival and usually took place within tribes (Isaac, 1978). But with the development of social structure and technology, current sharing behaviours can be implemented without the limitations of time and space and with someone unfamiliar, like sharing clothes via online platforms. Moreover, within different social and cultural contexts, sharing practices within the fashion context also can be different. For instance, Gentina et al. (2013) found that Japanese women have a strong attachment to their personal belongings and avoid sharing clothing with their daughters in order to preserve control. In contrast, French mothers share clothing to cope with existentially distant relationships. All these examples tell us that fashion sharing practices can be diverse and there is no single reality that reflects what consumers' fashion sharing practices look like.

Although fashion items exist objectively, their ontological status can be understood as being contingent on their use and context, rather than on fixed or essential properties. In other words, the meaning or value of a fashion item in this research context is determined by how the item's owner and/or sharers interpret and understand the item, rather than by any inherent or essential qualities of such item. For example, if a lady is happy to lend a dinner dress to her friend for a wedding, the value of the dress extends beyond its basic function of providing warmth, a fundamental characteristic of clothing. Instead, the dress fulfils another's social and symbolic needs and, likely, brings joy to the owner. This example illustrates that the essence of objects can be relative and defined by the meanings ascribed to them by individuals within a particular social milieu.

However, relativist ontology is challenged for its limited critical assessment and meaningful comparison of different viewpoints, especially within the context of social research and theory evaluation (Hammersley, 1992; Hollis, 1994). This is because relativist ontology posits that reality is subjective and constructed by individuals based on their experiences and interpretations. While this perspective enriches understanding by highlighting the diversity of human experiences, it also introduces complexities in establishing a common ground for evaluating and comparing different viewpoints. Therefore, to counteract this potential disadvantage of relativist ontology, I have concentrated on reviewing and exploring previous theories and empirical studies concerning the concept of sharing behaviour (Chapter 2), fashion sharing and consumer experience (Chapter 3), and adopted identity theories (Chapter 4) as a strong theoretical lens for this research. Based on these theories and literature, I deliver my perspectives on human sharing behaviours and experiences within a fashion context.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge, justification, and belief (Saunders et al., 2019). It seeks to answer questions such as how we acquire knowledge, what constitutes knowledge, and how we can distinguish between true and false beliefs. Epistemology is concerned with the nature and limits of human knowledge and understanding, and it is essential to many fields of study, including science, philosophy, and education (Kelly, 2006). The study of epistemology involves examining the nature of knowledge and the methods used to acquire it, as well as the factors that influence our beliefs and understanding (Pritchard, 2013). Interpretivists embrace a subjectivist epistemology and believe that all knowledge is grounded in our particular experiences (Hiller, 2016). Our social experiences shape our perceptions of the world; thus, everyone holds unique knowledge because of their different experiences and their multiple interpretations of those experiences

(Schwandt, 1994; Hiller, 2016). For fashion sharers, their different fashion sharing experiences develop their unique understandings of fashion sharing and what they value in those experiences and their feelings about them. Further, human beings' social characteristics allow them to share their fashion knowledge through their sharing experiences with others, such as passing down garments from generation to generation, and generating knowledge about fashion sharing within different social contexts (Berger and Luckmann, 2023). This also explains why fashion sharing differs across various cultural and historical contexts in the ontology discussion above. Therefore, to generate knowledge of fashion sharing and contribute to furthering social knowledge of such practices, there is a need to access, understand and interpret personal fashion sharing experiences.

Axiology is the “*researcher's view of the role of values*” as well as morals in research (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119). Interpretivists argue that researchers are integral to the subject of their study; therefore, it is impossible to detach the researcher from the research subject (Darby et al., 2019). This means that interpretivists recognise the influence of the researcher's values, biases and ethical considerations on the research process, which is contrary to positivist approaches that strive for objectivity and detachment. This is because, for interpretivists, understanding human behaviour and social phenomena requires an empathetic engagement that inevitably brings the researcher's values into the process (Schwandt, 1994). Furthermore, reflexivity is an important aspect of axiology in interpretivism (Hamati-Ataya, 2013). It entails the researcher's continuous reflection on their role, potential biases and the impact of their values on the research process and results. Reflexivity aids in recognising and, to some extent, minimising the researcher's subjective effect on the study (Finlay, 2002).

This research is inextricably linked to my own values and personal experiences, whether it be the selection of research topics or the choice of research methods. For instance, aside from the fact that the topic of fashion sharing is under-researched and has significant implications for the current state of the fashion industry, I ‘shared’ clothes with my cousins when I was a child. However, my sharing experience was unpleasant as a sharer. Since then, I have become curious about others’ sharing experiences, which drove me to conduct this research and hear others’ stories about sharing. This research has become part of my personal experience and enriched my values. In addition, particularly during the data collection phase, I have engaged in a continuous practice of reflexivity to ensure that my personal experiences and values do not overshadow the diverse narratives and perspectives of the participants. This reflexivity prevents the research from becoming a platform for my own healing journey, but a respectful and open exploration of others’ fashion sharing stories. By consciously reflecting on my biases and preconceptions, I have strived to make participants feel valued and heard, allowing their experiences to shape the findings and contribute to a broader understanding of fashion sharing.

5.3 A Qualitative Research Approach

Methodology focuses on the choice of methods and techniques that can be used to answer research questions (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). The exploratory nature of this research requires a qualitative research design, which is often bound up with interpretivism (Ivey, 2023). The definitions of qualitative research are various. Aspers and Corte (2019, p. 139) defined it as *‘an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied.’* This definition is abstract; however, Aspers and Corte’s (2019) definition underscores the dynamic, exploratory and insightful nature of qualitative research. More

specifically, Creswell (2013, p. 44) identified qualitative research as *‘an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data collection in the participant’s setting, analysis of the data inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure.’* Although definitions differ, the goal of qualitative research is to comprehend the depth and complexity of human experience, as viewed through the lens of the individuals who experience it within their sociocultural contexts (Jackson et al., 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Research designs are central to answering research questions and achieving the research aim. They are determined by research questions and objectives, as well as their relationship to research philosophy, approach and other pragmatic factors (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, I adopt a qualitative approach in this research for two reasons. Firstly, adopting a qualitative research design is in line with my philosophical standpoint. Standing on the interpretivism paradigm, I focus on answering my research questions from the perspective of fashion sharers. This is because, the fashion sharing experience of consumers is subjective, changing and unique for individuals, as discussed in 5.2.1. Finding ways to access fashion sharers and understand their fashion sharing experiences is the motivation of this research. A qualitative approach provides me with flexible choices and in-depth analytical tools to reach my purpose. This approach fosters a deeper insight into the complexities and dynamics of fashion sharing experiences.

Second, accepting the qualitative approach is a requirement to reach my research aims. In this research, I seek to explore consumers' fashion sharing experiences. Although sharing behaviour has existed in our society for thousands of years, it remains insufficiently understood, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Based on this, my research purpose is to explore consumers' fashion sharing experiences through the lens of identity theory and to address four research questions:

- *RQ1*: What are the nature and characteristics of fashion sharing?
- *RQ2*: What are the experiential differences between owning and sharing fashion items?
- *RQ3*: What benefits do consumers derive from their fashion sharing practices?
- *RQ4*: What is the connection between fashion sharing and sustainability meanings and motives for consumers?

Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, a qualitative research design is suitable. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, are useful for gaining a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of social phenomena, while quantitative methods, such as surveys and experiments, are useful for testing hypotheses and generalising findings to larger populations (Saunders et al., 2019). In comparison to quantitative research designs, qualitative methods are more beneficial for acquiring deeper knowledge of individuals' fashion sharing practices and experiences than quantitative research (Creswell, 2013).

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the interpretivist philosophical standpoint underpinning my methodological choices for exploring consumers' fashion sharing experiences. I embraced a

relativist ontology, holding that individuals' fashion sharing experiences are relative and rely on how individuals view and interpret them. This ontological standpoint is in contrast with the positivist idea of a singular and objective reality. Epistemologically, I adhered to a subjectivist stance, believing that the knowledge concerning fashion sharing arises from individual experiences and social interactions. Axiologically, I adopted an insider role in the research. Reflexivity has played a critical role in navigating my personal biases and values throughout the research process. My reflective practice ensured an empathetic engagement with participants' stories, fostering a respectful and open exploration of fashion sharing narratives.

Further, I explained the reasons for adopting qualitative research. The choice of a qualitative research approach is a natural extension of my philosophical standpoint as well as the requirements for answering my four research questions. It offers the necessary flexibility and depth to examine the dynamics of fashion sharing, enabling a theory-building process rooted in the rich, detailed experiences of participants.

Chapter 6-Online In-depth Interviews

6.1 Introduction

This research examines individuals' fashion sharing experiences. The chapter introduces the methodological considerations and research design involving 40 semi-structured online interviews with photo-elicitation and thematic data analysis. The chapter then focuses on four core themes, namely *sharing and owning*, *fashion sharing benefits*, *fashion sharing and sustainability* and *fashion sharing within relationships*.

6.2 Methodological Considerations and Research Design

The research design is divided into five stages: determination of the research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. It is worth noting that these five stages were not conducted linearly but are presented in this order. For example, the ethical issues were considered throughout the whole process of the research. This research adopts a flexible research design for addressing the research purpose of gaining deeper insights into consumers' fashion sharing experiences.

6.2.1 Research Design

The research employed *semi-structured interviews* as the data collection method. Interviews can offer a rich understanding of individuals' experiences, valuable when exploring under-researched behaviours like fashion sharing, where reasons to engage in fashion sharing and experiences can be highly personal and varied (Seidman, 2013). With semi-structured interviews, the researcher can adjust questions in real-time, based on the responses of the interviewees, allowing exploration of intriguing or unexpected pathways that arise (Brinkmann, 2013). In other words, semi-structured interviews provide more flexibility with a relatively

clear conversation direction. By using interviews, the researcher can gain contextual insights from the participants into the environments in which their fashion sharing activities occurred. The method provides the opportunity to establish rapport and trust between the researcher and participants, which can lead to more open and honest responses (Roulston, 2010, King et al. 2018). Therefore, based on the literature, the research questions and informal, exploratory observations of fashion sharing practices on Instagram, the discussion guide of the semi-structured interview was finalised and is presented in Appendix 6.1. The interview questions focused on participants' personal information and their perspectives on fashion and forms of engaging in fashion sharing. The questions explored the benefits of fashion sharing derived by them and the relationship between owning and sharing, along with any sustainability concerns and their influence on participants' fashion sharing practices.

6.2.2 Sampling

To have deeper insights into the individuals' fashion sharing experiences, the research participants were expected to meet the following criteria: be 18 years-old or older; have any form of fashion sharing experience; and be willing to share pictures of their shared fashion items. To find research participants who met these criteria, non-probability sampling was adopted by this research. In contrast with probability sampling, in which each member of a population has a known, non-zero probability of being included in the sample, non-probability sample does not give all individuals an equal chance of selection (Saunders et al., 2019). This disparity arises because non-probability sampling techniques frequently rely on potential participants' convenience and accessibility instead of random selection (Daniel, 2011). As convenience and accessibility were important during the time this fieldwork was being

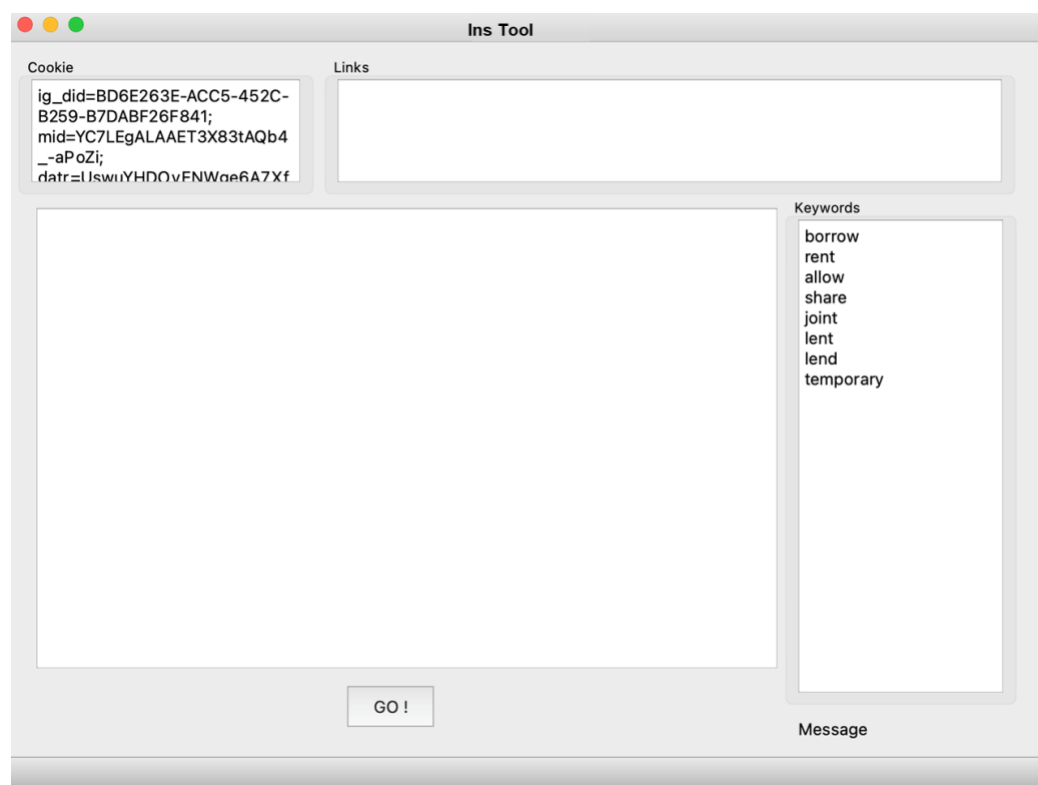
conducted (i.e., during the Covid-19 pandemic), a non-probability sampling was used in this research.

This stage of the research combines three subtypes of non-probability sampling, namely purposive sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling for recruiting research participants. Firstly, I searched keywords such as ‘fashion rental’, ‘fashion/clothes/apparel/garments sharing’, and ‘renting clothes/fashion/apparel/ garments’ on Google and Microsoft Bing, and Instagram emerged as having rich content on individuals’ fashion sharing experiences. Instagram posts contained characteristics of individuals’ fashion sharing practices, such as whom the users shared fashion with, what they shared and when. Additionally, these posts included various types of information such as text posts, pictures, and videos, so it was an apt platform through which to recruit participants for this research.

Thus, for purposive sampling, a Python-based semi-automation tool was developed for systematically sampling posts as a means to recruit potential participants for the interviews. The tool has the ability to use optical character recognition (OCR) technology to recognise the English words displayed on the screen and control mouse movement and click function. Unlike web crawlers, this semi-automation tool does not automatically send the request for website content, instead, I did it manually, and the programme provided assistance for content extraction. Five steps were used to extract the content of Instagram posts which are shown with examples in Figure 6.1. First, I manually identified a few potential Instagram users and hashtag topics that could contain posts describing consumers’ fashion sharing experiences. Second, keywords, such as ‘rent’, ‘borrow’, ‘clothes’, ‘lend’ and ‘share’, which are related to fashion sharing practices were recognised and categorised in a list. Third, each identified Instagram user and

hashtag topic was manually searched for in a built-in browser in the tool. This helped to display all the posts under a particular user or topic, and then the programme could automatically extract the content of these posts using OCR technology, followed by a keyword-matching process. Fourthly, the outputs from the programme showed (a) the total number of posts from relevant users, (b) the number of matched posts containing useful information, and (c) the post contents and their links to (a) and (b) respectively. Fifthly, I had to manually view all posts from (b) to evaluate the richness of information and decide whether to try and recruit the creators of such content for the research.

Figure 6.1 Web Programme Developed for The Research



After running the programme, 191 posts were extracted from Instagram. From such posts, over 160 Instagram users were identified as potential participants for this research. These users were contacted by the message on Instagram and seven participants were successfully recruited.

Secondly, this research also used a convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are chosen depending on their availability and willingness to participate in a study (Etikan et al., 2016). It is especially helpful in research situations where time and resources are limited (Saunders et al., 2019). To quickly recruit research volunteers, I posted recruitment information with specific criteria on the website *callforparticipants.com*. For recruitment purposes, my Instagram account was updated with the same information. The information included my name, university email address, research purpose, recruitment requirements, the estimated length of the interview and the interview tools, such as Zoom and MS Teams. 23 participants were successfully recruited by adopting a convenience sampling technique.

Thirdly, snowball sampling is a chain-referral sampling approach in which initial participants help recruit further participants among their acquaintances (Goodman, 1961). This method is especially beneficial when investigating hidden or difficult-to-reach populations (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). For this research, as fashion sharing experience is a personal topic, some individuals might have been more willing to share their fashion sharing experiences with me when being referred to me by their acquaintances, hence the adoption of this third sampling approach. Ten participants were successfully recruited by employing snowball sampling method.

This three-pronged sampling approach resulted in the recruitment of 41 research participants in total. One of them decided to withdraw from the research project for personal reasons, so 40 interviews were successfully conducted. The demographic information is presented in Table 6.1

below. The information includes the participants' pseudonyms, gender, age, country or region, occupation and education level.

Table 6.1 Interview Participants' Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country/Region	Occupation	Education level
George	Male	27	Mainland China	Student	Master's degree
Olivia	Female	28	Greece	Beauty journalist	Master's degree
Charlotte	Female	45	UK	Fashion designer	Bachelor's degree
Emma	Female	N/A	Canada	Actress	Bachelor's degree
Ava	Female	30	Philippines	Nurse	Bachelor's degree
Sophia	Female	30	US	Influencer	Bachelor's degree
Amelia	Female	26	UK	Engineer	Master's degree
Isabella	Female	29	Lebanon	Data scientist	PhD
Liam	Male	22	Algeria	Market researcher	Bachelor's degree
William	Male	28	UK	Unemployed	Withdrawal from university
Louis	Male	24	UK	Supervisor	Bachelor's degree
Evelyn	Female	38	UK	Artist	Bachelor's degree
Harper	Female	37	UK	Engineer	Master's degree
Camila	Female	19	Kenya	Student	High school
Luna	Female	23	Hong Kong SAR	Student	Bachelor's degree
Elizabeth	Female	27	Austria & UK	Student	Master's degree
Rosie	Female	22	Mainland China	Student	Bachelor's degree
Robert	Male	40	Saudi Arabia	Student	Master's degree
Grace	Female	23	Poland	Student	Bachelor's degree
Clara	Female	23	UK	Student	Bachelor's degree
Zoe	Female	22	UK	Student	Master's degree
Layla	Female	39	Nigeria	Student	Master's degree
Lucas	Male	24	Spain	Student	Master's degree
Hazel	Female	23	UK	Student	Bachelor's degree
Freya	Female	30	Mexico	Lawyer	Master's degree
Molly	Female	27	Kenya	Student	High school
Ruby	Female	24	UK	Student	Master's degree

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country/Region	Occupation	Education level
Mary	Female	23	Austria	Student	Master's degree
Chloe	Female	23	Mainland China	Student	Bachelor's degree
Sara	Female	29	UK	Charity staff	Bachelor's degree
Lilly	Female	23	Poland	Student	Bachelor's degree
Max	Male	22	Saudi Arabia	Student	High school
Mia	Female	25	Mainland China	Blogger	Master's degree
Dylan	Male	38	Republic of Korea	Student	Master's degree
Vera	Female	35	UK	Model	Bachelor's degree
Georgia	Female	45	Belgium	Blogger	Master's degree
Alice	Female	21	Greece	Student	Bachelor's degree
Aurora	Female	37	Japan	Student	Master's degree
Pete	Male	34	UK	Postdoctoral researcher	PhD
Hailey	Female	25	UK	Personal trainer	Bachelor's degree

Table 6.2 presents the fashion sharing forms in which research participants engaged. It can be seen that borrowing is the most common form of fashion sharing. 38 research participants had relevant fashion borrowing experiences, accounting for 95% of the total. Second, 75% of the research participants took part in fashion lending practices before the interviews. Third, no more than half participants (17, 42.5%) had co-owned fashion items with their sharers before the interviews. At last, 57.5% of the research participants had fashion rental experiences.

Table 6.2 The Fashion Sharing Forms in which Research Participants Engage

Pseudonym	Forms of Fashion Sharing			
	Borrowing	Lending	Co-ownership	Fashion rental
George	✓	✓	✓	✓
Olivia	✓	✓		✓
Charlotte	✓	✓	✓	
Emma	✓			✓
Ava	✓			✓

Pseudonym	Forms of Fashion Sharing			
	Borrowing	Lending	Co-ownership	Fashion rental
Sophia	✓	✓		✓
Amelia	✓	✓		
Isabella	✓	✓		
Liam	✓	✓	✓	
William	✓	✓	✓	
Louis	✓	✓		
Evelyn	✓	✓		✓
Harper	✓	✓		
Camila	✓	✓	✓	✓
Luna	✓			
Elizabeth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rosie	✓			✓
Robert	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grace	✓		✓	
Clara	✓	✓	✓	
Zoe	✓	✓		✓
Layla	✓	✓	✓	
Lucas	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hazel	✓	✓		
Freya	✓	✓	✓	✓
Molly	✓	✓	✓	
Ruby	✓		✓	✓
Mary	✓	✓		✓
Chloe	✓	✓		✓
Sara	✓	✓		✓
Lilly	✓			
Max	✓			
Mia	✓	✓		✓
Dylan		✓		✓
Vera	✓			✓

Pseudonym	Forms of Fashion Sharing			
	Borrowing	Lending	Co-ownership	Fashion rental
Georgia	✓	✓		
Alice	✓	✓		✓
Aurora			✓	✓
Pete	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hailey	✓	✓	✓	

6.2.3 Data Collection

Participant recruitment and interviews were conducted in parallel. Before the formal interviews with the participants, one pilot interview was introduced with one of the participants. This procedure helped me to test and refine the interview question guide and practice my interview skills (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). For example, through the pilot interview, I realised the importance of being flexible towards the questions on the interview guide rather than fixedly going through all the questions on the lists and making full use of time to get the desired information.

The interviews were conducted from September to December 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 39 interviews were conducted and recorded online via Zoom, MS Teams and TencentMeeting, with one online interview facilitated by WhatsApp. There are several benefits brought by online interviews. Firstly, time and geographic flexibility (Hanna, 2012), conducting interviews online allowed me to overcome geographic barriers and access individuals' fashion sharing experiences in countries and cultural contexts from Asia, Africa, North America and Europe. Second, it can provide participants with a sense of anonymity (Seitz, 2016), along with the comfort of being in their homes, and encourage the openness of narrating their fashion sharing experiences (Nunkoosing, 2005).

These online in-depth interviews were between 50 minutes and an hour. Long virtual interviews can increase the cognitive load for research participants (Kock, 2004), along with ‘Zoom fatigue’ (Fosslien and Duffy, 2020). Nevertheless, some interviews lasted around 75 minutes with participants having extensive content to share.

Before the interview, the participants were asked to provide pictures of their shared fashion items. During the interview, these pictures played a role as a catalyst for triggering memory and helping the participants to share more detailed information about their past sharing experiences (Collier and Collier, 1986). Adopting photo-elicitation interviews allows me to unlock rich and nuanced discussions (Harper, 2002). For example, if without the elicitation of photos, the description of shared fashion items and the fashion sharing experience attached to them might be articulated in words alone (Bignante, 2010). Using photos helped the participants to focus on what happened to these shared fashion items without complex descriptions of them, which enhanced the quality of interview communication.

6.2.4 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis method that involves analysing data in order to identify patterns, themes, and categories within that data (Clarke and Braun, 2014). First introduced in the 1970s by physicists, philosophers, and historians (Merton, 1975), many versions of thematic analysis have been developed with the shared aim of analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis does not impose a specific data collection method or theoretical framework, which makes it a flexible and useful tool for researchers (Nowell et al., 2017). It

tends to be interpretive, focusing on my understanding and interpretation of the data (Patton, 2014).

There are several reasons why this research adopts thematic analysis. First, as a popular analytical method, thematic analysis can be used to answer most research questions, “*from questions about people’s practices and views and opinions to questions about the representation and construction of particular social and psychological objects and subjects in particular contexts*” (Clarke and Braun, 2014, p. 1948). This is why thematic analysis is widely adopted in social research. In consumer research, thematic analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of consumer attitudes and behaviours with a powerful and useful research technique, revealing underlying meanings and motivations (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Secondly, thematic analysis is a flexible and adaptable method, which provides me with an open space to explore the data and a way of reaching the research purpose. Thematic analysis can be used with a wide range of data types and can be adapted to suit the specific needs of the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This flexibility makes it a useful tool in consumer research, where the data can come from many different sources, such as interviews, surveys and social media (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, Mogaji et al. (2021) employed thematic analysis to operationalise social links and shared goals with the Twitter social network by extracting and analysing the content of 5,200 users’ tweets. This example reveals how thematic analysis copes with a large amount of qualitative data from the Internet.

The research purpose of the research is to have deeper insights into consumers’ fashion sharing experiences. Using thematic analysis flexibly facilitated the identification of patterns of

consumers' fashion sharing practices and helped the author to identify commonalities and differences across different consumers, which is explained in the following sections.

There are two core components, including 'defining themes' and 'organising themes,' in thematic analysis with the purpose of structuring these two components to show the conceptual relationships between them (King and Brooks, 2018). However, there are several different ways to carry these two core processes, called the different 'styles' of thematic analysis. King and Brooks (2018) summarised the four main styles of thematic analysis, including Template Analysis (King and Brooks, 2017), Braun and Clark's (2006) style of thematic analysis, Matrix Analysis (Nadin and Cassell, 2004) and Framework Analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). Sharing the same two core components, defining themes and organising themes, these four styles of thematic analysis have different strengths as well as drawbacks which fit into different research topics and contexts.

The research began the data analysis with a "Braun and Clark" style of thematic analysis, using NVivo 12 as the analysis software. Generally, this style is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning or 'themes' within qualitative data, with six steps: *"familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report"* (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 87). The Braun and Clark style of thematic analysis offers high flexibility because it is not confined to any specific theory or framework. Its approach is particularly effective when handling large datasets, ensuring comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, it proves invaluable in delving into participants' perceptions and experiences, enabling a richer understanding of the data. Further, the richness of the data and fashion sharing is an under-researched topic that I tended to freely

dance with data and discover patterns in it. However, after a month or two of investigation, the shortcomings of this approach became apparent. The coding work was lost in thousands of PDF transcript pages without a clear direction due to the lack of an initial coding template. This unsuccessful data analysis experience taught me valuable lessons: the “Braun and Clark” style of thematic analysis might not work in a study with a large amount of data but with limited time and manpower.

After reflection, I decided to generate an initial coding template summarised from the discussion guide and the first ten interview transcripts focusing on answering the research questions. After applying an initial coding template to the remaining interview data and clustering and modifying the template, a coding framework was finalised, which is presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Coding Template

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Fashion sharing benefits	Social benefits	<i>Network building</i>
		<i>Sentimental bond</i>
		<i>Social identity</i>
		<i>Sharing is caring</i>
	Utilitarian benefits	<i>Thrift</i>
		<i>Monetising fashion sharing</i>
		<i>Practical usage</i>
	Hedonic benefits	<i>Fun and happiness</i>
		<i>Aesthetic appreciation</i>
		<i>Playing with more items or styles</i>
		<i>Commitment free</i>

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Fashion Sharing and Sustainability	Sustainability as a drive	
	Fashion sharing experience facilitator	
	The role of fashion sharing in sustainable lifestyles	
	Contributions and concerns	
Fashion Sharing within Relationships	Types of interpersonal relationships in fashion sharing	<i>Families</i>
		<i>Friends</i>
		<i>Lovers, couples and inter-gender fashion sharing</i>
		<i>Neighbourhoods, communities and group fashion sharing</i>
	Fashion sharing relationships statuses	<i>Healthy</i>
		<i>Toxic</i>

6.2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations ran through the whole study. Before the sampling phase, all the documents related to this phase of the study, including the interview discussion guide, participation information sheet (attached in Appendix 6.2) and consent form (attached in Appendix 6.3), received ethics approval from the University of Birmingham regarding the University's Ethical Review process.

During the sampling phase, the Python-based semi-automation tool was developed for interview participants sampling on Instagram. But among all methods, the most conventional technology is a web crawler, which is a computer program that can travel, locate and index websites or information. In order to understand its principle, it is worth presenting a brief introduction about accessing website content. For visiting a webpage, a uniform resource

locator (URL), also known as a web address, is typed into the browser. This would allow the browser to send a request to a specific server, which might belong to Google, Instagram, or users' computers. The server will then process these requests, analysing where they come from and what the user wants to do. After that, a response will be generated in the form of source code and sent back to the browser, in which these resources are decoded and displayed on our screen. The web crawler program can simulate the browser behaviour and send the request, followed by analysing the replied resource to collect useful information. There are many useful web crawler programs, such as Google and Microsoft Bing. Commercial web crawlers, such as Octoparse, serving consumers, have been developed. However, because of the nature of such commercial crawlers, in which the programme automatically sends the request at an extremely high rate, most websites are designed to actively detect and forbid crawling as this behaviour can cause significantly high pressure to the server. Thus, I developed a Python-based semi-automation tool which replaced me to finish a massive volume of manual work, avoiding ethical pressure of the web crawler program while promoting the sampling efficiency.

As this study involves human subjects, informed consent was a priority. Before interviewing the potential research participants, I emailed them the participation information sheet and consent form. In these two documents, I not only clarified the purpose of the study but also clearly explained the elementary criteria for participant recruitment, the requirements for them, and how their data would be stored, used and eventually discarded. Specifically, the interview transcripts and recordings have been stored in the Birmingham Environment for Academic Research (BEAR) Data Storage System and are used for research analysis, reports and publications. All data from the research will be destroyed after 10 years from the date of

research publication. At the beginning of the interviews, all the information above was verbally introduced and explained again to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity.

Along with informed consent, privacy and confidentiality are critical. Participant's personal information should be kept private (King et al., 2018). This means that any data obtained, retained, or shared must be handled with extreme caution and prudence, with no unnecessary personal information gathered. When reporting the findings, any identifiable data was anonymised or pseudonymised in this research (Kaiser, 2009). When employing photo-elicitation, I processed the images to ensure that no identifiable information was inadvertently revealed in the images used.

There are other ethical consideration points, raised during the data collection phases Firstly, due to the pandemic, the 'Zoom fatigue' phenomenon was prevalent. Therefore, this study respected the participants' time and personal space, which meant scheduling interviews carefully (Hughes, 2012). Secondly, the diverse sample brought me opportunities to derive interesting findings while facing ethical challenges. Specifically, I needed to ensure I considered the cultural and social context of the participants. For example, according to Tolich (2004), researchers should be aware of power dynamics, language barriers, or other factors that could influence the validity of the data or the comfort of the participants. Therefore, before and during the interview, some further information was asked, like participants' preferred pronouns, the place and way they preferred to be interviewed and any cultural or religious taboos with regard to this research topic.

The second ethical consideration is about Instagram post choices. Although Instagram is generally a public site, there are two types of accounts: public accounts and private accounts. Depending on the description from Instagram, if users are under 18, their Instagram accounts default to private, which means their posts can only be visible if other users are approved to be their followers (Instagram, 2023b). Although users who are over 18 can set their accounts as private, other users also need to request to be their followers to visit their posts. In order to avoid ethical issues, such as conducting research on under-18-year-old users, I only collected data from the posts of Instagram users with public accounts.

The third ethical consideration is the Python-based semi-automation tool used for sampling and collecting data. As mentioned in 6.2.4, conventional web crawlers are forbidden to be used for most websites due to the great pressure brought to their servers. Thus, I developed a Python-based semi-automation tool which replaced me to finish a massive volume of manual work.

6.3 Research Findings

In this section, the main findings are presented in the following order. Subsection 6.3.1 explains how the participants perceived the experience of sharing and owning fashion items. Subsection 6.3.2 explains the benefits derived by the participants during their fashion sharing experiences. These values consist of social benefits, utilitarian benefits and hedonic benefits. Further, in 6.3.3, the connection between fashion sharing practices and sustainability concerns is discussed. Lastly, the fashion sharing practices within social relationships are explained in 6.3.4; and this subsection discusses the types of social relationships that may be involved in fashion sharing practices, fashion sharing relationship statutes and the influence of different fashion sharing relationship statutes on the participants' fashion sharing behaviours.

6.3.1 Sharing and Owning

The participants reveal a distinction between sharing and owning fashion items from the perspective of usage experience, resulting from their personal values, their fashion sharers, different usage feelings, the shared fashion items and expected reactions from others. The comparison between fashion sharing and owning can be divided into three dimensions. Firstly, a few participants stated that there was no difference between using shared fashion items and owning them. This may occur when the participants do not attach great importance to ownership. For example, Elizabeth (female, 27, Austria & UK) has a long history of sharing fashion items with others and does fashion sharing on a regular basis. She believes no difference exists in her fashion sharing experience and explains why she thinks:

“...There are sometimes, items that I have, like, lend to people that haven't come back. So, I don't see ownership in that kind of strict sense. I'm quite happy for clothes to come into your life for a bit and then go somewhere else. And then maybe they come back...”

[Elizabeth, female, 27, Austria & UK]

Another situation in which participants are unable to identify the difference between sharing and owning is when they share fashion items with people who are close to them or whom they trust. For example, George (male, 27, Mainland China) stressed that if sharing with his partner, using the shared fashion items with his partner feels the same as owning items. However, this feeling does not apply when sharing with others. He explained the reason as the boundary between him and his partner is blurrier, compared with others. Hence, he thought his things were hers, and her things were his. A similar no-difference feeling happened to Luna (female, 23, Hong Kong SAR), who only shared with her parents, brother, and boyfriend because she trusted their hygiene.

Secondly, the informants expressed that they would become more cautious, careful, and even stressed when using shared fashion items particularly the expensive ones, which was the most common situation among the 40 interviews. When asked why, the most common response is *“It (the shared fashion item) is not mine.”* Specifically, they believed that they should provide extra care to those shared fashion items, preventing them from being damaged or stained. Interestingly, this is regarded as the negative aspect of fashion sharing, with participants concerned about their lent items being lost, damaged, or stained. For example, Evelyn (female, 38, UK) expressed a clearly fearful feeling when wearing the shared fashion items:

“I feel worried when I've got a shared item or swapped item. I feel a bit more nervous wearing the dress because I know it's someone else's item. So, there's always a fear that you're going to do something to, like, ruin the dress. So, there's a little bit of fear there. And you feel more pressure to take care of the item.” [Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

And this tension can even extend to the care stage of these objects. For example, Isabella (female, 29, Lebanon) demonstrated a clear difference in treatment between her own fashion items and those being shared, paying more attention to care for those shared items:

“...Definitely, I treat the ones that I borrow with more care because, you know, I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to those (shared fashion items) when I'm washing them. I'm really careful, I don't put anything that changes the colour and the wash. So, well, with my own stuff, I don't really pay that much attention.” [Isabella, female, 29, Lebanon]

This difference is especially evident when it comes to sharing expensive items both in and out. For example, Amelia (female, 26, UK) is happy to share her fashion items with others but is reluctant to share her expensive designer bags with others unless she deeply trusts them. Mia

(female, 25, Mainland China) could not enjoy the social event when she borrowed a white luxury bag from a company because she was afraid of staining it.

In other cases, some participants' worries about wearing shared fashion items result from a fear that others will judge them if they discover the item was shared. Liam (male, 22, Algeria) explained that he felt more confident when wearing his own fashion items even fashion sharing helped him out on some occasions.

"When I'm wearing the ones, I share, or I have rented that I usually don't feel that confident. But when I wear the one bought by myself, I usually have more confidence.... They (the shared fashion items) did help me out in meetings ...I can say, they may be just the feeling in me that I should at least buy something ..." [Liam, male, 22, Algeria]

Therefore, Liam (male, 22, Algeria) would not tell some people that some items were shared rather than bought. This is because he thought: *"People will have a different thinking that this guy cannot afford to buy."* Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) gave a further explanation towards why not telling others about fashion sharing with an analogy of car sharing:

"Let's say, for example, you have a BMW. Okay.... You enjoy it. And everybody who knows you now will say, 'She has a very nice car'. Okay. As soon as they know that you have rented that car. Right? Then that just doesn't make you. They will look at you differently. So, it has been kept a secret just for you. If you rent it for the entire year, people still think it's for you. You're a great person. Well, this is reality. It's not good. But it's reality." [Robert, male, 40, Saudi Arabia]

This may be because materialistic individuals place a high value on ownership over usership as it contributes to their self-identity and social image (Richins, 2004). This suggests a social

stigma or societal pressure associated with ownership, which could be related to status, prestige, and wealth display.

Thirdly, some participants felt more confident when using a shared fashion item. For example, Camila (female, 19, Kenya) felt more confident when wearing her elder sister's fashion items because of her sister's fashion taste and trust in her sister, and she thought: "...it (*the shared item*) fits a little better than your own. Or um, if you put it on, it might even go better than your own virtual tour.... And I trust her hygiene." Furthermore, William (male, 28, UK) explained the enhanced feelings brought by the shared fashion items: "*I think it gives me confidence, much more confidence because I know that my own brother has a good sense of style, so, and I don't feel self-conscious, and I don't need affirmation from others. If my outfit is good enough because I know that he picked the right items, you know. So, I think that's the main difference (between wearing shared and owned items).*" Therefore, their fashion sharing experiences enhanced their feelings towards themselves. Even though they both expressed that the enhanced feelings may disappear when they took off the shared items, the enhanced feelings come back when they watched the photos or videos in which they wore those shared items.

Sharing items can lead to a desire for ownership. For example, Amelia (female, 26, UK) borrowed a dress to attend a ball and had a memorable experience. She expressed her reluctance to return the dress: "...it just makes me think that '*Oh, I wish it was mine and I didn't have to borrow it*'. Like this thing, it (*her usage experience*) is so immersive and graceful. It made me feel nice that I felt that '*Oh, I wish I didn't have to give it back*'. I wish this was mine so. It's like, even if it's sitting in the wardrobe not doing anything, I can just say that '*Oh, I own this!*'".

Others, such as Louis (male, 24, UK), converted the enhanced experience brought by the shared fashion items into actual purchasing behaviour.

“...So yeah, every time I borrow something usually, I don't wear it myself, which is a wild borrow. It's, in the first place, because I don't own my version. And I'll go 'Right, okay, I'm going to get my own version'.” [Louis, male, 24, UK]

In conclusion, comparing the usage experiences of shared and owned fashion goods reveals three states: indifference, unfavourable feelings toward using shared products, and enhanced feelings. These various experiences elicit varied behaviours, including concealing sharing and a desire to own.

6.3.2 Fashion Sharing Benefits

This theme explains the perceived benefits that individuals derive from their fashion sharing experiences. The three subthemes, including social benefits, hedonic benefits and utilitarian benefits, under ‘Benefits of Fashion Sharing’ illustrate what these benefits are and how they empower individuals when engaging in fashion sharing. Different benefits can exist in a single fashion sharing experience rather than existing alone.

6.3.2.1 Social Benefits

Social benefits refer to how fashion sharing behaviours and experiences allow consumers to connect, respond and interact with others. The social benefits of fashion sharing behaviour permeate almost every social aspect of consumers’ sharing practices, like network building or bonding with others. This section presents four findings concerning the social benefits of temporarily accessing fashion items.

6.3.2.1.1 Network building

The informants' statements reveal that fashion sharing activities help them build and expand their social networks. The type of fashion sharing activities influences consumers' network-building process. For example, Olivia (female, 28, Greece), who had online fashion rental experiences, thought building social connections through online fashion sharing platforms might be difficult, but it can provide a channel to link to others:

"..., it (fashion sharing) is a nice way to speak to new people. I didn't make any friends, but I know people that have become friends through the APP, which is lovely. And it's nice knowing a bit more about the person before they borrow something from you." [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

For sharers who can meet offline, they may build a long-lasting connection. Isabella (female, 29, Lebanon) made a close friend after attempting to borrow a hijab when she arrived in the UK. She and her sharer still have a very close friendship and are long-term fashion sharers. However, the purpose of their fashion sharing activities shifted from functional usage to friendship bonding. About their current fashion sharing experience, she said:

"...I'm no longer in that need (borrowing a hijab), but it just continued as like a hobby and part of the friendship. So, every time, I buy something I'm like, 'Look! I got this. And I think it's good for both of our sizes.' For example, if it's proper pants (trousers). And she will be like, 'Yeah, okay, I'll give them to you when I see you' and yeah that's pretty much how it (current fashion sharing activity) goes." [Isabella, female, 29, Lebanon]

Therefore, both online and offline fashion sharing activities contribute to individuals' network building, particularly the latter. This could be due to the trust level established through various fashion sharing activities.

6.3.2.1.2 *Sentimental bond*

Fashion sharing helps to create a sentimental bond between fashion sharers. However, the role of a sentimental bond in fashion sharing activities can vary depending on the different types of social relationships. If sharers are friends or in a romantic relationship with the informant, the informant usually felt stronger and more visible bonds with their sharers as a result of their fashion sharing experiences. For instance, George (male, 27, Mainland China), who normally shared his fashion items with his girlfriend, considered fashion sharing as a way of showing love:

“...Okay, like I said, it (sharing fashion items) is like a message to enhance our relationships. Every time I saw my girlfriend can wear my stuff and feel happy to wear my T-shirt. I'm also quite happy because I think I'm accepted and loved by her.” [George, male, 27, Mainland China]

In other examples, Chloe (female, 23, Mainland China) and Evelyn (female, 38, UK) explained how and why friends get closer if they share. Like shopping together (Dalziel and Bevan-Dye, 2018), fashion sharing activities allow consumers to socialise and bond strongly via similar fashion or other interests.

“...If you are familiar with each other, you will be more willing to borrow things. And then if you borrow more things, you will communicate more, and then you will be closer.”
[Chloe, female, 23, Mainland China]

Evelyn thought the reason that fashion sharing can strengthen people's connection is about trust building within the sharing.

“...And I think it (fashion sharing) has helped me to connect with my friends more. I think it's built-up trust. Like what we were saying before, you give someone your clothes, and you know, you have an expectation of how it will be looked after. And I think it's a way, like getting closer to people...Like, that's a way of connecting more with your friends.”

[Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

Some informants believed that fashion sharing works in their families or other close relationships, but in a more subtle way that was inconspicuous until I brought it up. About the reason why fashion sharing can bond families, Sophia's (female, US, 30) statement might be the answer: *“...you're, hopefully, making an effort to trust the person you're lending from and sharing with from your family because it's your family...”* However, trust is critical to every healthy fashion sharing relationship, which will be further explained in 6.3.5.

6.3.2.1.3 Social identity

Social identity is a dimension of social benefits that fashion sharing activities help consumers to find through a cohort of individuals sharing the same interests or beliefs, which in turn helps to shape their social consciousness. In other words, individuals find their *groups* via fashion sharing. For example, Olivia (female, 28, Greece) thought she met a group of people who share similar interests in sustainability topic by using a UK fashion sharing platform.

“And well, everyone is interested in sustainability, one way or another. So, you already have something in common. And then it's nice being able to access so many different wardrobes that you wouldn't be able to otherwise..., through XXX (an App name), I met a few like-minded people and that was really nice.” [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

In other cases, not only do the social activities that occur in fashion sharing help consumers shape their social identities but so do the shared items. Like a canvas, the garment carries information, such as patterns, marks or even slogans. Thus, if consumers value the information provided by shared fashion items, their social identities can be enhanced or even shaped. For example, Camila (female, 19, Kenya) was addicted to her sister's hoodie because of one sentence on that hoodie. She used this sentence to encourage herself not to be people judging a book by its cover.

“It really enhances my view on judging people based on how they look like and how they appear at first. But I found the message on it (the hoodie) to be very cool... ‘Not judging people based only on their appearance.’ That's the whole aspect of you that you couldn't judge colour and couldn't tell by people's faces, whether they're good or bad.” [Camila, female, 19, Kenya]

6.3.2.1.4 Sharing is caring

Consumers can also provide or receive affection and care through fashion sharing activities, which satisfies sharers' sentimental and practical needs. The exact words of participants, 'sharing is caring' appeared more than once during the different interviews, which shows what fashion sharing means to them and their fashion sharers. For example, Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) said: “*share is care*” when explaining why he chose to share fashion items with others. He thought showing care for others through sharing is part of their culture.

“Well, because I think this is a lovely thing to do. It's...' share is care'... Well, well, that's a personal point of view. And I think, you know, a lot of people would share that idea with me that if you make someone happy. So, that's good. It's good to make someone happy. You know. So, if someone asked you to do something, this is actually part of our culture,

you know, part of where I come from, you have to help people who need help.” [Robert, male, 40, Saudi Arabia]

William (male, 28, UK) has mobility issues. Most of his clothes or other pieces were co-owned by his older brother. Because of his immune system issue and the pandemic, he could not go outside and pick up those items together with his brother as before. Therefore, William’s brother shouldered the job of buying new pieces back home. In this case, William’s brother looked after William in the way of sharing fashion items together.

“...he went out and purchased the items or got them in a charity shop with reference to the pandemic. It was like really convenient, you know, in terms of that, I could shield but still have an update to my wardrobe.” [William, male, 28, UK]

Moreover, William (male, 28, UK) also gave concern and care to his brother by looking after these pieces well. Because he needed to use a wheelchair, many clothes, especially trousers, were easy to wear and tear. So, he only wears the shared items on certain occasions.

“...I'm only going to wear these trousers (shared with his brother) for shopping or socialising, or a night out. You know, I wouldn't wear them at home because they're his as well.” [William, male, 28, UK]

There are many ways for individuals to show their love and concern for others by engaging in fashion sharing, with different reasons to do so. Dunbar (1998) explained sharing behaviours from the perspective of evolutionary roots, where sharing resources was a means to ensure survival within the group. But the participants’ experiences are much more complex than that. For example, William’s (male, 28, UK) brother shares fashion items with him because of his health issues, while the community where Alice (female, 21, Greece) was located engages in

fashion sharing to help people in need overcome economic difficulties (see in 6.3.4.1.4). Even though it is all about care and love, the underlying reasons for fashion sharing may vary.

6.3.2.2 Utilitarian Benefits

Utilitarian benefits can be loosely described as the usefulness of the sharing fashion activities perceived by the consumers. There are three specific dimensions of utilitarian benefits: *Practical usage*, *Thrift* and “*Monetising*” *fashion sharing*.

6.3.2.2.1 *Practical usage*

Practical usage is a fundamental dimension of utilitarian benefits in that individuals share fashion items for some functional purpose. Some participants shared the fashion items because of some special occasions, such as job interviews and graduation ceremonies. Further, practical usage of fashion sharing not only works on special occasions, but also in everyday life. Under the dimension of practical usage, garments return to their original functions, such as keeping warmth and covering. For instance, Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) lent his scarf to his wife on an extremely cold winter day to keep her warm.

6.3.2.2.2 *Thrift*

Participants derived various benefits from their fashion sharing activities. Being thrifty was the one that got mentioned the most by participants. The benefit of thrifting in this research means how engaging in sharing fashion items helps consumers save money and storage space, as well as fully make use of idle fashion items.

However, being thrifty may have two meanings in this context: *‘I want to be thrifty’* and *‘I have to be thrifty.’* The different meanings of thriftiness in this research may be brought by the different economic situations of consumers. For consumers, who have to be frugal, sharing garments with others is more likely to be a need due to financial circumstances. For example, some participants stated that due to the scarcity of goods when they were kids, they had no choice but to share clothes with siblings and relatives. This *‘have to be thrifty’* experience may negatively impact their feelings and experiences towards fashion sharing, which can be seen in the case of Evelyn (female, 38, UK) who did not enjoy her early fashion sharing experience because sharing was a necessity for her as a kid. The current Evelyn (female, 38, UK) continues to choose fashion sharing with others and clearly expressed her interest in saving money during the interview, even though *‘having to be thrifty’* may no longer apply.

“...And I mean, I've been really poor, and I knew that when you're in that situation, you have to share. It's not a nice thing. It's just a reminder that "you haven't got money". ...Whenever I've shared as a necessity, it's not been a nice thing, because you don't really have a choice. But when you've got more money, you've got more choice.”

[Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

Thrifty fashion sharing can be a lifestyle or even a *‘virtue’* for consumers who *want to be thrifty*. The type of consumers who regard thriftiness as a lifestyle, want to be thrifty not only in terms of money but also the storage space, which is in line with the various forms of consumer minimalism (Wilson and Bellezza, 2022). By sharing fashion items with others, they can promote the efficient use of fashion resources and reduce the need for individual ownership.

6.3.2.2.3 “Monetising” fashion sharing

Engaging in fashion sharing is a way for very few participants, such as Olivia (female, 28, Greece), to earn monetary benefits, particularly for those who are interested in online fashion sharing platforms. Many participants, such as Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia), did not have knowledge about the online fashion sharing business, even though they were interested in it. A description from Olivia (female, 28, Greece) was used below to show how the business on a P2P online fashion sharing platform works if she is the lender. the processes are 1) uploading the fashion items; 2) determining the sharing-out dates; 3) waiting for messages from other users interested in the items; 4) chatting for lending details; 5) shipping the item(s) and finally 6) waiting for them to be returned. The latter two phases are not presented in this chunk of conversation but in a later conversation.

“...so you can upload your items, and for each item, you can have a calendar, and you can block out dates. For example, if someone has already borrowed it, or if you’re away for a trip, you can block out the dates so that people can’t see them as available. And then they can select the dates that they want the item for, and then you get a message request, and they can write a note. In a message, if they want or they can just send a request and you can chat with them. Maybe they’ll say: ‘Oh, I want this for a wedding, I’m going on a girls’ trip, and I want to wear this dress....’ And you can accept the request or decline, for whatever reasons.” [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

Among the conversations with some participants, money earning is likely to be an added value brought by consumers’ sustainability consciousness. For example, when I asked Olivia (female, 28, Greece) for further information about her reasons to share, she said:

“Well, it (sustainability concern) is just the fact that I decided to share things. It is part of wanting to be more sustainable...” [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

Moreover, the participants sometimes charged their sharers when lending fashion items to them. Charging their sharers brought some little monetary benefits to the participants, but it was more of a guarantee or a reminder that the sharers would carefully look after the shared fashion items.

Thus, although money saving is the most mentioned dimension in utilitarian value, participants hardly thought about earning money in the first place. What some participants really care about is the meanings behind their fashion sharing behaviour regardless of the engaged fashion sharing forms, like their sustainability concern and protections for the items shared out.

But for another group of people, they did make a living with the help of fashion sharing. For example, Mia (female, 25, Mainland China) told me about an interesting phenomenon in her industry: some fashion bloggers borrowed or rented luxury fashion goods, such as bags, to build an exquisite presentation of the self and posted their photos on social media.

“...I know a blogger girl. She's known for having a luxurious, high-end lifestyle. So, in her daily life, she goes to expensive restaurants, five-star hotels, and also some luxury goods... But she told me that, in a lot of her videos, when she was introducing luxury bags, they weren't hers. They actually belong to a luxury vintage shop.” [Mia, female, 25, Mainland China]

Therefore, fashion sharing offers individuals access to benefits to satisfy their different purposes.

However, the finding also suggests, that some research participants deriving utilitarian benefits cannot perceive their shared fashion items or fashion sharing experiences as contributing to their identity project. For example, fashion sharing has been a normal activity for Aurora

(female, 37, Japan) and her family, and they shared luxury bags together for cost and storage savings. She clearly expressed that she could not perceive the influence of fashion sharing on her identity. It seems that Aurora (female, 37, Japan) could not tailor her identity project because she overly focused on the practical usage or thrift of sharing fashion items, instead of attaching meanings to fashion sharing.

6.3.2.3 Hedonic Benefits

Hedonic benefits refer to the joy and pleasure consumers derive from their fashion sharing experiences. Based on the participants' statements, four dimensions contribute to hedonic benefits, including *Fun and happiness*, *Aesthetic appreciation*, *Playing with more items or styles* and *Commitment free*.

6.3.2.3.1 Fun and happiness

The pleasure of pursuing fun and happiness forms the underlying logic of hedonic benefits in fashion sharing. The enjoyment and happiness generated by the process of sharing fashion can be classified according to the various purposes of sharing fashion items. The first situation is sharing fashion items for fun events. For example, Amelia (female, 26, UK) wore a costume borrowed from her aunt to attend an immersive play, *the Great Gatsby*. She said this shared costume was admired by many people in that show and brought her an immersive consumer experience when attending the play:

"... It made me like, it made me feel that I was actually one of the (characters of) Great Gatsby because it was an immersive play. So, if I would not have worn the costume, I would not feel too involved in the play, but because of wearing it, I felt involved in it."

[Amelia, female, 26, UK]

In Amelia's case, obviously, the occasion (where) provided the basic tone of her happiness and her shared fashion item (what), the borrowed costume, enhanced her fashion sharing experiences.

For some participants, sharing fashion items with others is a joy. For example, Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) believed lending his fashion items to others was a way to help, which made him satisfied that his behaviours were in line with his culture, requiring people to help others.

Additionally, some participants expressed joyful feelings towards their fashion sharing experience because they believed sharing fashion items is a way of experiencing fluid identities, such as the identity of their friends or families. Evelyn (female, 38, UK) thought some clothes were parts of her friends as their extended selves. By sharing these items, she said:

“And I think swapping (clothes) with my friends is fun because you get to share part of your friend's identity. As you know, when you see your friends and something a lot and then you try it on, or you swap something. So, you can have a laugh about how it looks different on you... You see that person in that stuff a lot of the time. And then it's like, it becomes part of what you see when you see them... So, when you swap, it's like you're taking on something of that person.” [Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

Therefore, how the participants perceived the fun and happiness of their fashion sharing can be various. But in general, the fun and happiness of fashion sharing can be brought by the shared fashion items, the fashion sharing experience and even fashion sharers with the perception of altruism, reciprocity and self-appreciation.

6.3.2.3.2 *Aesthetic appreciation*

When sharing items with other individuals, particularly the item providers, may receive aesthetic appreciation from others. Specifically, some participants believed that many people around them fancy borrowing their fashion items as the validation of their fashion sense. For example, Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) and Amelia (female, 26, UK) were very proud that their families and friends preferred to borrow fashion items from them because of their good fashion tastes and items. This research uses Amelia's explanation as an example:

“Well, I think if anybody wants something or doesn't have something, it's always me that, ‘Okay oh, you can wear mine’... It's like I've got a better piece, a better dress or a better thing than what they have. mm hmm, ...that's one of the reasons why I lend.” [Amelia, female, 26, UK]

The nature of *aesthetic appreciation* is that individuals tend to derive approval from others by sharing fashion items to match their self-identity that ‘I'm a person having good fashion taste.’ Therefore, other people's borrowing behaviours play the role of Cooley's (1983) glass. Specifying Cooley's (1983) looking-glass self here, other sharers' recognition and continuing borrowing behaviours build a moulded perception of these participants, revealing how those sharers think and respond to the research participants' fashion tastes. In other words, other sharers' recognition and continuing borrowing behaviours are the ‘glass’, reflecting individuals' self-perception.

6.3.2.3.3 *Playing with more items or styles*

Individuals engage in fashion sharing activities to access and try different items or styles, which is also the most frequently mentioned aspect of fashion sharing valued by the participants. Most informants said, that through their fashion sharing experiences, they received an understanding

of what clothes or styles are suitable for them. For example, Emma (female, N/A, Canada) thought sharing fashion items helped her to find appropriate styles.

“...when you borrow, you can experiment with colour; with shapes of clothing. And I think that once you decide what colour really goes with you and which styles really go with you. Then you can also help improve your own fashion sense and style sense, so you only buy would be kind of need.” [Emma, female, N/A, Canada]

In other cases, for example, fashion sharing might be the most convenient way for individuals to try on some specific fashion items. For example, Evelyn (female, 38, UK) needed to attend a dance ball in certain dresses. She chose to borrow these dresses because:

“...So, sharing the closet I can get is an easier way to get different sorts of dresses because you can't always go down the high street and get like 1940s dresses or 50s dresses.” [Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

In addition to this, sharing fashion items helps some participants to play with different styles. fashion sharing can encourage bold fashion decisions. For example, Charlotte (female, 45, UK) and Louis (male, 24, UK) both like extravagant fashion styles. However, Louis (male, 24, UK) usually had less confidence to wear those extravagant fashion pieces. But Charlotte (female, 45, UK) encouraged him a lot and shared some fashion items with him. Consequently, she said:

“...but he's (Louis) becoming more confident as a result of borrowing things and going out and wearing them and just taking more risks, I think.” [Charlotte, female, 45, UK]

However, there were still some garments, such as a sparkling jacket, Louis (male, 24, UK) was not confident enough to wear outside due to a negative childhood experience, even though he desired it. His solution was to lend this garment to others, gaining an enhanced feeling via

others' display of this sparkling jacket. He said: *"I've not seen anyone wear this and feel unconfident. And I think part of it, is because if you're going to wear this jacket, you're going to be seen. So, you have to feel confident. Because if you don't feel confident, you're just not going to wear it because you cannot hide in this whatsoever."* Through others' display of this item, he finally encouraged himself and wore this sparkling jacket by himself. Therefore, Louis's (male, 24, UK) case confirms that individuals can play with more items or styles by sharing fashion items out rather than only sharing something in.

6.3.2.3.4 Commitment free

Individuals enjoy the commitment-free benefits of fashion sharing because they do not have to pay the costs of ownership and do not have to worry about storage, maintenance and disposal of the shared fashion items. For example, Harper (female, 37, UK) believed sharing fashion items provided her with the chance to try more styles with less responsibility and pressure on the items.

"It means you have access to a wider variety of different items, sometimes different styles. And you get the opportunity to try something on and decide whether you like it or not without having to either try it on in the shop, so in an awkward spot or try it on at home, and then send it back, or take it back. You've got less responsibility and pressure to like it." [Harper, female, 37, UK]

Hailey (female, 25, UK) thought fashion sharing can make people share the responsibilities of maintaining and managing fashion items.

"...It (if owning a massive wardrobe) becomes yours, like you have to look after it. And there's nothing wrong that you know, if it gets damaged, it's on you to fix whereas like

stuff shared or you have access to a wide variety of stuff. There are a lot more choices and it's like a shared responsibility.” [Hailey, female, 25 UK]

Fashion sharing allows escape from the mental and physical burden of ownership (Schaefer et al., 2016). The mental burdens of owning fashion items include the guilt of purchasing new items, disposing of well-conditioned fashion items and other negative experiences (Zhang et al., 2019). Physical burdens include but are not limited to the financial constraints paid to own fashion items as well as the storage space (Hira and Reilly, 2017).

6.3.3 Fashion Sharing and Sustainability

The *Fashion Sharing and Sustainability* theme is introduced to explore the connections between some participants' fashion sharing experiences and their sustainability concerns. Some participants' sustainability concerns interact with the whole process of their fashion sharing experiences, from the start of their fashion sharing journey and are maintained throughout. However, it is worth noting that this subsection focuses on the participants with sustainability concerns, not all research participants. In this research, more than half of the research participants mentioned their sustainability concerns to the current fashion industry, driving them to engage in fashion sharing.

6.3.3.1 Sustainability as A Drive

Fashion consumers have begun to reflect on fashion consumption, particularly in light of social and environmental issues, such as pollution and labour exploitation. In this research, some participants considered their sustainability concerns as a primary reason to share fashion pieces. For example, this is the primary reason for Charlotte (female, 45, UK).

“...Yeah, I think it is a fundamental (reason), ..., I think, I think it's probably the reason that I share is because of sustainability...” [Charlotte, female, 45, UK]

Some participants regarded overconsumption as the antithesis of sustainability while engaging in fashion sharing activities provides them with a way to avoid consumption, particularly in trendy or occasion wears (Bly et al., 2015), such as wedding dresses. Olivia (female, 28, Greece) believed there have been too many fashion items produced in our world. It is time to share them with others.

“... I think, first of all, because there's already enough items in the world, you know. So many are being produced every day. It's truly unsustainable...so why not share with each other, especially if it's something like an occasion or a wedding or something that you have to go to? Why would you buy something just for one day? And then, also the items that we already own, why not share with each other?” [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

Concerns about the environment motivate some participants to share rather than purchase fashion items. This might be because, when talking about sustainability concerns, what participants had considered more was their children's well-being rather than just themselves, as Emma's (female, N/A, Canada) quote illustrates:

“...I think it's important (to be sustainable) because it's important to be mindful of, you know, clothes, in the end, a lot of them are made of polyester and they're not degradable. And it's going to be on the planet for a long time. And I don't want to grow old, knowing that the shirt that I threw away is still in the garbage and dirty the planet for my kids.”
[Emma, female, N/A, Canada]

The legacy hypothesis, which proposes that having children raises concerns about the environment and climate change, may explain participants' consideration of offspring's well-

being (Thomas et al., 2018). These participants, such as Charlotte (female, 45, UK) tried to build a role model for their children.

“...I've just got to set a good example, I guess, for me and help my children to learn. So, it's been sort of something that we've shared together, learning together.” [Charlotte, female, 45, UK]

Some participants had experienced a transition in their attitudes toward fashion. They described a more fashion-conscious youth when they wanted new things without considering the impact of their behaviour. But this can change with age and experience. After living in another country and witnessing the impact of waste, Sophia (female, 30, US) devoted herself to promoting her sustainable ideas and outlooks on social media:

“I was living in Australia; I was starting to see the impact of waste on our planet... And it's weird because it feels funny that I never noticed it until then, but I think I didn't notice it in a way that meant that I was guilty in any way. I thought it was a bigger issue and it wasn't my problem. And so, when I did change my mindset around it, I started to believe that I could have an impact positively. On, you know, sharing my own fashion changes and why and how they were...” [Sophia, female, 30, US]

Some participants suggested that they preferred sharing to buying when they wanted to access ‘new’ items. But this does not mean fashion sharing is the only choice among a portfolio of fashion practices. Usually, fashion sharing and buying behaviours coexist. The participants, however, became more cautious and conscientious about their fashion buying behaviours. Charlotte (female, 45, UK) explained her changes in purchasing since she became concerned about sustainability issues.

“...So, I don't just have a pair of jeans and say 'Oh look! It's a pair of jeans.'... (Now) I understand how much time it takes to make, who's making it, how bad the modern cropping is for the Eco, you know, for the ecology of whole areas and whole communities, and whole oceans. So, I never knew these things before 10 years ago... So, now that I do know, I can't unknow it. And so, it's much more important than it ever was.” [Charlotte, female, 45, UK]

Charlotte (female, 45, UK) reveals that sustainability was not necessarily an initial concern for participants to engage in fashion sharing, but with the accumulation of knowledge and long-term exposure to sustainability issues, things will be changed. And these concerns are not only about themselves but also about the people they care about. Engaging in fashion sharing is considered a solution.

6.3.3.2 Sustainability as A Fashion Sharing Experience Facilitator

Empowered by their sustainability awareness and actions, the participants felt the increasing importance of sharing fashion items instead of buying them. The participants thought what they had done concerning fashion sharing could actually build a way to sustainability and they felt proud and satisfied with what they were doing. These positive feelings, such as being proud and satisfied, amplified by their fashion sharing behaviours, can be detected, especially when participants have a clear understanding of the outcomes of their fashion sharing behaviours. For example, George (male, 27, Mainland China) thought he was doing the ‘right’ things for the planet.

“...because every time when we think we can through this method (fashion sharing) to reduce the purchase and reduce waste, we are quite happy with our behaviours.” [George, male, 27, Mainland China]

Some participants, such as Louis (male, 24, UK), felt positive because they interpreted their sharing behaviours as an individual social responsibility. Engaging in fashion sharing is the way to shoulder this social responsibility.

“I think when you've got the sense of responsibility, and that you're doing your bit to help the planet, which is what everything in modern life is going to have to become about because we can't keep consuming the way we do, especially in fashion. I think it absolutely benefits everyone and they feel this sort of social responsibility that is taking it in and yeah, is positive all around.” [Louis, male, 24, UK]

Unlike the sustainability problems that directly drive individuals' behaviour to engage in fashion sharing, the participants' positive experiences and feelings toward fashion sharing may have a subtle but long-term influence on individuals' subsequent sharing or buying behaviour. This is because feeling good about consumer experience influences how individuals perceive themselves, which is likely to help them maintain the behaviour (Poortinga et al., 2004; Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010; Davari and Strutton, 2014). Therefore, the enhanced fashion sharing experience can transform sustainability concerns into a motivator to continue to participate in fashion sharing. And then, being sustainable will not only be a one-off choice but a component of people's lifestyles.

6.3.3.3 The Role of Fashion Sharing in Sustainable Lifestyles

For some participants, sustainability is a way of life, and fashion sharing is an important part of that. They decided to take part in fashion sharing because they believe it is necessary. Even though their definitions of sustainability may differ, many participants combined their knowledge, experiences, personal perceptions and identities to develop their own understandings of sustainability. For example, Charlotte (female, 45, UK) considered pursuing

sustainability as an ideology in her life. Another example is Emma (female, N/A, Canada), who considered sustainability an important element in her daily life. She said:

“Sustainability is, for me, it's a lifestyle; it's not one thing that I do, it's how I live my life from day to day, I think. Sustainability, having it on my mind is very important; it just makes me feel like, 'I'm doing something good for the planet.' So, that's what I find sustainability.” [Emma, female, prefers not to say her age, Canada]

For the participants holding sustainability concerns or leading a sustainable lifestyle, they believed fashion sharing will become a trend in the future, which helps reduce necessary fashion consumption. George (male, 27, Mainland China) thought, as a concept, fashion sharing would be more popular in the future due to sustainability, which is why he wanted to participate in this research. Many other participants, such as Olivia (female, 28, Greece) and Freya (female, 30, Mexico), expressed the same reason for taking part in this research.

“(When being asked why to attend the interview) Because I think sharing fashion, is a quite interesting topic, and I believe this is a trend, like, we will see more in the future, because you know the sustainability. Also, I have relative experiences, so I want to share my experience.” [George, male, 27, Mainland China]

To boost the trend of sharing instead of purchasing, some participants actively engaged in promoting it to others. This was done in three ways: 1) posting relevant information on social media; 2) hosting offline events and 3) word of mouth (WOM). Most participants chose to encourage fashion sharing behaviours by sharing their own sharing experiences with people close to them, participants believed in the power of WOM because they thought they could set a good example by demonstrating that *“we can contribute to our planet through our actions”* (George, male, 27, Mainland China). Due to the social value (explained in the last section) of

fashion sharing, this approach usually functions during conversations or other social events between the participants and their acquaintances. For example, Charlotte (female, 45, UK), a fashion designer, successfully convinced her cousin to use her dress to attend a wedding. Furthermore, compared with the posts on social media, the participants could receive more direct responses from the persons they tried to influence, which may boost their confidence in supporting sustainable consumption and encourage their further actions.

6.3.3.4 Perceived Contributions to Sustainability and Concerns of Fashion Sharing

In terms of the perceptions of fashion sharing activities regarding their contributions to sustainability, the first one is reducing the participants' fashion purchasing desires and behaviours, particularly unnecessary buying. According to Niinimäki et al. (2020), decreasing fashion purchases is a significant shift in consumer behaviour to reduce the environmental impact of the fashion industry. Ava (female, 30, Philippines) stated her idea in a brief sentence, which can be regarded as a consensus among the participants thinking fashion sharing reduced their desire to buy new items.

“...because if I know that I can access something else by borrowing or renting when I don't think I should or I must buy it at all.” [Ava, female, 30, Philippines]

The participants' fashion sharing experiences helped to reduce their purchasing desires or behaviours because they derived several benefits and positive feelings from their sharing experiences. The participants normally might not derive these values and positive feelings from their purchasing experiences. Visiting others' wardrobes, for example, provides Charlotte (female, 45, UK) with a fun and guilt-free way for sustainability seekers to gain access to different fashion pieces.

“So, yeah, I think just because it's kind of even more fun than shopping... You know... when I buy something, there's always a little bit of a guilty feeling, even when it's sustainable because it's new. And I really love the fact that if I'm sharing something or borrowing something. There's no guilt, it's just a lot of fun, and I can look after it and give it back, and everyone's happy.” [Charlotte, female, 45, UK]

Sophia (female, 30, US) even created her own definition of “brand new” fashion items by sharing rather than buying. And this new definition might be the key to opening the door to ‘being sustainable.’ She said:

“...Society always taught us that new is better. And it doesn't necessarily mean you have to go out and buy something new. You can just borrow something. We need to work on our mindset shift around new, and that's where the change is happening.” [Sophia, female, 30, US]

The second direct sustainability benefit of fashion sharing is extending the lifespan of fashion pieces, which is proven to be effective in realising sustainable fashion (Goworek et al., 2020). Many participants suggested that sharing with others can give a lot of unused fashion items a new lease on life. Hailey (female, 25, UK) thought the more those items are worn, the longer lifespan they have.

“Like you get more use out stuff, it becomes longer term (of its life) ...rather than it just being something you own for a year; and then got rid of and never see something; then get like second life, or something like that, which is a lot nicer.” [Hailey, female, 25, UK]

But there are also some participants holding an opposite view that they thought sharing would shorten the lifespan of fashion items. For instance, the main concern of Robert (male, 40, Saudi Arabia) is about wear and tear after cleaning or washing.

“...because every time somebody wears that, you need to wash it. So, if you wash it, the colour changes, and the quality of the piece changes...If you wash it, like, for 50 times, yeah, you can, you know, very hard to recognise that this is the same piece to look very different.” [Robert, male, 40, Saudi Arabia]

Sharing is not the only way for participants to lengthen the active life of fashion pieces. maintenance of the existing items, such as repairing and proper storage, is also important. Sophia (female, 30, US) explained that she gave extra care to ensure the condition of her items.

“...I think all the clothes in my closet right now, without just a few new pieces, are all from years past. And they are still like new because I take care of them. So, I made sure to, you know, treat them like new.” [Sophia, female, 30, US]

Hailey (female, 25, UK) did the same. The detailed way of care given to her fashion pieces is to fix them. She always prepared a sewing kit in her bag. She not only fixed her own fashion items but also helped others.

“And again, give it a long life, and share it with them. Like if I can fix someone else's clothes or things, I will fix things I'm a fixer for and through until I can't physically fix them. I will always try and repair and mend stuff. I've sewn buttons back onto tops and things from my dad. One of my friends asked me to sew a hole in her leggings that needed fixing. Yeah, I always try and fix it before just getting rid.” [Hailey, female, 25, UK]

Some participants fully utilised the social benefit of fashion sharing to find others who share similar sustainability interests with them. As a result, these sustainability seekers are capable of harnessing the collective power of their groups to influence the mindsets of others. For example, Freya (female, 30, Mexico), a lawyer, always organises swapping parties in her country even in different cities. She has made several friends who share the same interest as her in

sustainability through the various swapping parties. Then, her group of friends always gathered together to plan the parties, which is more likely to be effective if just her alone. As Louis (male, 24, UK) mentioned that it is an individual social responsibility to pay attention to sustainability issues, but Freya (female, 30, Mexico) and her friends turned this individual responsibility into a collective responsibility. Thus, a scale effect is formed in solving sustainable problems. Further, the individual perspective of 'I am a sustainability seeker' can turn into a social identity as 'we are sustainability seekers.'

Even though fashion sharing provides benefits for achieving sustainable consumption, it also raises some concerns for some participants. These concerns mainly focus on the fashion rental businesses, such as those happening on online fashion sharing platforms. The participants, such as Olivia (female, 28, Greece), questioned the carbon footprint produced during the transportation of items. She said:

"... It all depends on the logistics, I guess because I don't think it's possible to share with someone across the world; because that would mean a high carbon footprint to ship that item to then ship it back to you. So, that wouldn't make sense. But then if it was like within the country, maybe it's easier..." [Olivia, female, 28, Greece]

Others, such as William (male, 28, UK) and Luna (Female, 23, Hong Kong SAR), were concerned about the packaging for shipping the shared fashion items. They worried about the over-packaging of one tiny item or the usage of some environmentally unfriendly packaging materials. From this aspect, William (male, 28, UK) even believed commercial fashion sharing businesses are more harmful.

“I think that can cause more harm than good, because, in that case, you know there's a whole string of things involved, like delivering the clothes, you know, and sending them off in a plastic, or paper covering, you know. Kind of a package, you know, and that causes more harm than good so obviously.” [William, male, 28, UK]

Additionally, Freya (female, 30 Mexico) pointed out her concern about fashion sharing through her observation of the fashion swapping parties she held. She found some individuals frequently appeared at fashion swapping parties. She thought fashion sharing may also provide a way of overconsumption:

“I think it could be negative in the way how often they are swapping (and) how often they are buying. Because in the end, it could end in an overconsumption of clothes. Like it's, it's still the problem.” [Freya, female, 30 Mexico]

Therefore, fashion sharing brings actual changes in individuals' mindsets and behaviour while raising some concerns. Generally, research participants expressed that their fashion sharing activities and experiences reduce their desire to buy new fashion items and improve the utilisation of their fashion items. Nevertheless, some participants expressed concerns about fashion sharing, including shortening the lifespan of fashion pieces, the carbon footprint produced during the shipment of shared fashion items, unsustainable packaging issues and potentially guilty-free overconsumption.

6.3.4 Fashion Sharing within Relationships

This subsection presents the theme, *fashion sharing within relationships*, identified among the data. Research to date has shed little light on exploring the social relationships in sharing behaviours, particularly in the fashion context, which is bridged by this research. The content

of this theme focuses on the types of relationships involved in fashion sharing, how the participants dealt with the different relationships when sharing fashion items and the interinfluence between social relationships and the participants' fashion sharing practices.

6.3.4.1 Types of Interpersonal Relationships in Fashion Sharing

There are five primary types of interpersonal relationships in fashion sharing, including families, friends, lovers and couples, neighbourhoods and communities, and strangers. Each type of interpersonal relationship plays an important part in the social relationship map of fashion sharing but owns its particular characteristics which are explained in this sub-subsection. It is worth noting that very few participants had fashion sharing experiences with strangers, like online users from through P2P fashion sharing platforms or unfamiliar sharers in real life. As a result, with the exception of some cases discussed in 6.3.2.1.1 regarding networking building, this type of social relationship needs further understanding, and this sub-section focuses on the remaining types of social relationships.

6.3.4.1.1 Families

Family fashion sharing behaviours appear to be the most common form concerning social relationships among the participants. Almost all participants expressed that they shared fashion items with family members at some point and their fashion sharing behaviours started from their families in their childhood. Usually, families who share fashion items are more likely to result from functional purposes, like accessing certain items and financial considerations. However, trust (hygiene and fashion aesthetics) and accessibility are two factors that help family fashion sharing have inherent advantages over other forms of fashion sharing within relationships.

Based on various family relationships, the participants' fashion sharing feelings and experiences differed, particularly between generations. Therefore, this subsection takes '*Generation*' as a starting point to discuss family fashion sharing behaviours from the perspective of intragenerational and intergenerational family fashion sharing.

Intragenerational fashion sharing is most common among siblings and cousins. In addition to utilitarian fashion sharing, pursuing new items or fashion styles is another reason for participants to share with their same-generational families. Young siblings or cousins actively borrowed their older siblings' or cousins' fashion pieces because they admired their older siblings' or cousins' aesthetics. There are two kinds of cases in this situation.

First, young siblings or cousins are in their adolescence, on a path of exploring and experimentation. Older siblings or cousins act as models (Gray, 2011). When asked why she shared with her older sister, Camila (female, 19, Kenya) mentioned "*I like her (my sister's) fashion sense.*"

Young participants may also psychologically or physically rely on their older siblings or cousins. For example, William (male, 28, UK) lives with his older brother because of severe health issues which became particularly difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic. William (male, 28, UK) shared clothes with his older brother for a variety of reasons, including his respect for his older brother's fashion taste, their shared concerns about environmental issues and the care provided by his older brother. But the daily care from his older brother plays an essential role

in their fashion sharing relationship. Thus, when talking about the future, William (male, 28, UK) expressed a tinge of sadness during the interview if their co-owning relationship is to end:

“...when he gets married and moves away to the other side of the country or the other kind of cities, then, obviously it wouldn't be possible to continue this kind of relationship (co-owning fashion items) we have.” [William, male, 28, UK]

However, not all intragenerational family sharing behaviours are spontaneous, particularly when the participants were at a young age and their fashion sharing activities met some challenges, such as family financial dilemmas and tough sharers. The fashion sharing activities in their families are usually led by older generations, such as parents or grandparents. Evelyn (female, 38, UK) expressed her negative feelings about sharing with her older sisters when she was a child. And those unhappy fashion sharing experiences made her stop sharing fashion items with her family and now she only shares with her friends.

“When I was younger, then (fashion sharing) wasn't as fun because it was imposed on me by my mom. Like my mom would say, now it's time to have this dress because we didn't have a lot of money. I'd have to take whatever clothes from my sisters, and I never used to like that.” [Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

Intergenerational family fashion sharing means fashion sharing activities happen between different generations in the family. The majority of participants regarded utilitarian usage as the primary reason for sharing with family members from other generations. For instance, Rosie (female, 22, Mainland China) mentioned: *“I lent my grandma my pyjamas when she visited my home.”*

However, if the participants viewed the shared items as symbolic of their sentimental connections with their sharers, especially when they were separated from the sharers, complicated feelings such as nostalgia or homesickness about their inter-generational family fashion sharing experiences emerged. Clara (female, 23, UK) borrowed a belt from her mother. This belt had been 30 years with her mother before being lent to Clara. She travelled to many countries and this belt was the only stuff she had to carry with her wherever she went. About this, she explained:

“...If I was to get robbed by someone and they wanted to take all my clothes, except one item, this (the belt) would be the item that I wanted to keep... Well, I take it with me everywhere. On any trip that I go on, I always bring it with me... It represents my mom.”

[Clara, female, 23, UK]

As a consequence, these items are often given such special meaning by the participants that the participants are unwilling to share them with others, particularly when these items have a long history or have witnessed stories of the sharers.

6.3.4.1.2 Friends

Compared with families naturally bonded by blood, individuals have greater freedom in making friends. The differences between families and friends lead to different ways of getting along, which can be reflected in the participants' fashion sharing activities. For example, Georgia (female, 45, Belgium) shared her fashion pieces with her family members (mainly with her sister and mother) and friends but had different attitudes towards them.

“...I was sharing before because it's just what you do with family, anyway, with a sister close to your age and body type. I mean, it's kind of a normal thing to borrow each other's

stuff or steal, in the case of my sister sometimes. But, with friends, I wasn't really doing it with friends before. This is something that started only since I care about sustainability."

[Georgia, female, 45, Belgium]

The difference in attitude and behaviour towards these two groups of sharers may be due to ways of bonding. Compared to family ties, connections with friends involve chosen shared interests and values. Common interests can enhance the engagement in reflective mutual interpretation between individuals (Leibowitz, 2018). In Georgia's (female, 45, Belgium) case, shared sustainability concerns bonded her with her friends; thus, they chose to share fashion items together. In other examples, Charlotte (female, 45, UK) and Louis (male, 24, UK) studied at the same university before, and they both are fashion-conscious. They are used to designing and sharing fashion items together, which helps them enhance their friendship while enjoying more items from each other's wardrobes. Therefore, individuals can put their mutual interests or ideas into practice by sharing fashion items together.

6.3.4.1.3 Lovers, couples and intergender fashion sharing

Research participants were mostly in heterosexual romantic relationships and some of them engaged in inter-gender fashion sharing. Females tend to take the initiative in fashion sharing activities and play a dominant role. Female participants were more willing to borrow male fashion items while males did not usually engage in the behaviour. The rare voluntary intergender fashion sharing behaviour of males was also found in other types of relationships, such as families and friends. When asked why they do not borrow female fashion goods, the male participants' responses can be summarised as follows: women's clothing is not appropriate for them in terms of size, style, modelling and cutting. Even though there were some male participants accepting fashion items from females, they chose to share items which have gender-

neutral styles, colours and types. In contrast, the reason why female participants actively borrowed clothes from males is that these female participants enjoyed some dimensions, such as cut and over-size style, of menswear, which provided them with a more comfortable wearing experience and even a gender-fluid experience. Sophia (female, 30, US) used to share fashion items with the sharers from different genders. She had special feelings about these shared items.

“...I really appreciate some of the men's wear looks that I can pull off, a little bit more like androgynous style, so you know whether that's a button down or an oversized men's blazer. I think gender fluidity is becoming so much more normal that it is exciting that we can borrow from different genders. And I don't think there's anything wrong with it whatsoever.” [Sophia, female, 30, US]

However, most participants expressed that they had no interest in experiencing gender fluidity. For example, many participants, like Elizabeth (female, 27, Austria & UK), were concerned with how they displayed these shared fashion items in intergender fashion sharing.

“I'm not interested in wearing men's clothes or dressing like a man. I like individual men's items is probably how I'd put it.” [Elizabeth, female, 27, Austria & UK]

Concerning romantic relationships in fashion sharing, some psychological and behavioural patterns are different from those in general intergender fashion sharing. Love has exclusivity, particularly in some cultural contexts, such as East Asia (Karandashev, 2019). As a consequence, sharing fashion goods becomes a way to show love possession. For example, Mia (female, 25, Mainland China) wearing her boyfriend's fashion items, such as a hat or a jacket, wants to show others that ‘*You're in harmony and in a great relationship with each other. So, it's actually a way for me to express the state of our relationship... It feels more like taking ownership of a guy.*’

In addition to love possession, the participants also received comfort through wearing their lover's clothes when feeling upset or anxious. Harper (female, 37, UK) explained the occasion when feeling unhappy and wearing her boyfriend's clothes:

"...If I'm feeling a bit low, and I want to feel warm and snuggly. (I will) borrow a big jumper that you can cuddle up in. It feels good, warm and cosy. It feels like a hug."

[Harper, female, 37, UK]

Harper (female, 37, UK) borrowed a T-shirt from her boyfriend and kept it for the whole summer because she said, *"It smells rather good and like him."* According to Wedekind et al. (1995) and Shoup et al. (2008), scent and bonding are linked. Even if individuals are not always fully conscious of it, the scent of romantic partners becomes a method to identify with that person. Furthermore, the aroma of the loved partner becomes pleasant and a source of positive sentiments, and people come to like it. Sharing partners' clothes helps realise this biochemical process.

6.3.4.1.4 Neighbourhoods, communities and group fashion sharing

Fashion sharing activities not only happen within one-to-one social relationships, such as between couples, or between mother and daughter, but also can involve a group of fashion sharers. This group fashion sharing normally occurs in some particular events. For example, Alice (female, 21, Greece) shared a community fashion sharing activity which started five or six years ago. At first, there were only two or three families doing it; then, this fashion sharing activity spread and became a tradition in her town. The description below includes the reason, the fashion sharing details and Alice's personal experience in this community fashion sharing activity.

“...So, in my town in Greece, (it) has been like every Friday, and at any time, like where you can borrow and lend clothes. And the first time I participated was when I was 15, 16 years old. I really liked it. So, I went there almost every week until I came here... So, every person can take some clothes from his or her farm, and then they can put them on some benches outdoors. And then every other person can go to them and borrow them or buy them for a very small amount of money. But usually, it's free... It started when, I think was a crisis. Yeah, it was a time when we had like, a financial crisis. So, some people couldn't like, have clothes, like new clothes.” [Alice, female, 21, Greece]

Although no one organised this community fashion sharing activity, it became a default way for members in this community to show their care for others who may not have new clothes to wear. Another example of group fashion sharing is the swapping party held by Freya (female, 30, Mexico). Different from the community fashion sharing activity in Alice's (female, 21, Greece) hometown due to the financial crisis, Freya (female, 30, Mexico) held several fashion-swapping parties to resist fast fashion and encourage individuals to engage in a more sustainable way of accessing fashion items. However, Freya (female, 30, Mexico) found not everyone in the swapping parties was “swapping”:

“I have (found) some people that are into the fashion swap parties, like each party, you know. The last there was a party two months ago, and these people coming again to this, to the next stop party. And I discovered that some of them are selling their clothes. And that it's important because they are not helping. No, they are not helping with this!”
[Freya, female, 30, Mexico]

Therefore, group fashion sharing normally starts with certain shared purposes. However, not everyone in a group fashion sharing activity is doing the same thing as others, which may result in others' efforts going to waste.

6.3.4.2 Fashion Sharing Statuses within Social Relationships

There are two main types of fashion sharing statuses within social relationships: healthy and toxic. Different factors, such as sharers' personalities, trust and communications, result in different fashion sharing statuses within social relationships. Individuals' fashion sharing experiences are like mirrors reflecting fashion sharers' relationship patterns. For example, Mia (female, 25, Mainland China) has a deep bond with her mother; thus, she likes borrowing her mother's fashion items and trusts her fashion taste:

“So, my mom and I, we are really closed with each other. Also, my mom has a really classic style. So, I like and borrowed a lot of her items.” [Mia, female, 25, Mainland China]

And the feelings of the fashion sharing experiences will encourage or discourage individuals to continue sharing fashion items with these sharers. As mentioned before, George (male, 27, Mainland China) normally shared fashion items with his partner (in 6.3.2.1.2). When being asked whether he would keep sharing fashion items, he answered:

“Yes. Because I already have such an experience and I am quite happy with this experience, so I think the future will continue to keep this hobby (fashion sharing).”
[George, male, 27, Mainland China]

It is noteworthy that there may not be one fashion sharing relationship status which can be described as 'ordinary or neutral.' This is because people, whether self-interested or inclined toward reciprocity, always attach some value to or want to derive some benefits from their fashion sharing experience. As a result, individuals evaluate various fashion sharing

experiences and decide whether their fashion sharing relationships are healthy (positive) or toxic (negative), and whether or not to continue in them.

A healthy fashion sharing relationship provides consumers with positive fashion sharing feelings and influences, which nourishes this relationship in return. For example, William (male, 28, UK) and his brother showed love and care to each other via fashion sharing, which strengthens their bond further. Moreover, a healthy fashion sharing relationship shapes consumers' values and fashion sharing behaviours in the long term. There are several factors which are included in a healthy fashion sharing relationship, including respect, trust, equality, support and effective communication. Particularly, trust can be seen as the currency of fashion sharing behaviour.

A toxic fashion sharing relationship is the opposite of a healthy one, which normally begins with the breakdown of respect (See Harper's example below). As a result, the participants experience negative feelings, such as being disrespectful and awkward, about their fashion sharing experiences, which may discourage their continuous fashion sharing behaviours with the sharers in those toxic fashion sharing relationships. Unlike in a healthy fashion sharing relationship, participants in toxic fashion sharing relationships can easily feel the existence of power relations or even manipulation. Specifically, this research finds, that in family fashion sharing, younger children often have limited decision-making power, and the sharing rules are typically established by the adults or older siblings in the household, which is in line with the findings of Tinson and Nuttall (2007). For example, Evelyn's (female, 38, UK) older sister forced Evelyn to "lend" her favourite fashion items to her.

Compared with other types of fashion sharing relationships, this research found a toxic fashion sharing relationship usually occurs in family fashion sharing, in both intragenerational and intergenerational family fashion sharing. Family relationships often involve different dynamics than relationships with friends or romantic partners, which can affect the establishment and respect of personal boundaries (Allan, 2008). Personal boundaries, especially in fashion sharing, can be easily crossed, resulting in hurtful feelings and memories for individuals. For example, Harper (female, 37, UK) felt angry and hurt when her father lent her riding jodhpurs to his current wife's daughter whom she had never met before without asking her permission. Harper (female, 37, UK) complained: *"It felt like a lack of respect and a preference for the girlfriend's daughter's feelings/needs over and above mine."*

Some participants may be disappointed, even traumatised, by their toxic fashion sharing relationship and cease sharing fashion items with those 'toxic fashion sharers.' But this does not mean they will not share with others in the future. Some participants thought fashion sharing was the thing they learnt and started from their families when they were children. They stopped sharing fashion items with their families because of the toxic fashion sharing relationships. But they continued to share garments with others around them. Evelyn (female, 38, UK), for example, stated unequivocally that she disliked sharing clothes with her older sisters because her childhood fashion sharing was an unwilling choice, and her sisters displayed some unacceptable fashion sharing behaviours. She currently only shared fashion items with her friends, as she explained:

"... I just remember lots of fights growing up with my sisters about clothes... Their clothes were new. And I got all their clothes when they were second-hand... In my case, one of my sisters was, quite greedy about (my clothes when I grew up), if she saw something

that she liked of yours, she will just take it...I think now, it's more fun (to share with friends) because there's more choice involved, more variety involved as well." [Evelyn, female, 38, UK]

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has elaborated on the methodologies and findings of this research. The chapter begins by outlining the research design, data collection techniques, sampling strategies, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Semi-structured online interviews, enriched with photo-elicitation, were the preferred modes of data collection. To ensure a diverse group of participants, a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling was employed, resulting in 40 online interviews.

Secondly, the findings have highlighted three types of benefits of fashion sharing as identified by participants, including social, utilitarian and hedonic benefits. Social benefits consist of four dimensions: building networks, strengthening sentimental bonds, shaping social identity and showing love and care to others. Utilitarian benefits of fashion sharing include practical usage, saving money and storage space and making monetary benefits from fashion sharing. Hedonic benefits reveal how participants experienced joy, received appreciation for their fashion choices and experimented with diverse styles without commitment.

Thirdly, this chapter has explored the connection between participants' fashion sharing experiences and their sustainability concerns. For many, these concerns not only drove their engagements in fashion sharing but also brought satisfaction from their eco-conscious decisions. Besides, the participants, like minimalists, viewed fashion sharing as an extension of their

sustainable lifestyle. While some participants view fashion sharing as a way to reduce consumption and extend the life of fashion items, concerns arose about its potential downsides, such as the environmental impact of shipping and unsustainable packaging.

Fourthly, this research has delved into the social dynamics of fashion sharing, highlighting relationships among families, friends, lovers and communities. This research has examined various facets, including intergenerational, intragenerational and intergender fashion sharing. Within these dynamics, two primary relationship statuses emerged: healthy and toxic. While healthy relationships promote and strengthen fashion sharing, toxic ones deter and strain it.

Chapter 7-Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore consumers' fashion sharing experiences, for which a qualitative research design was adopted. In this chapter, the findings of the study are brought and discussed together to report the research findings and relevant contributions.

The content of the chapter is presented as follows. Section 7.2 explains eight characteristics of fashion sharing. Section 7.3 discusses the connection between fashion sharing and consumers' self- and social identity. Section 7.4 provides a summary of this chapter.

7.2 Characteristics of Fashion Sharing

This study identifies eight characteristics of fashion sharing, as revealed by the research findings, including *benefits exchange*, *identity engagement*, *temporary material possession*, *sociality*, *trust*, *digitalisation*, *sustainability* and *de-ownership*. While the first five might be considered fundamental characteristics of sharing, the final three are relatively new having emerged as part of the development of modern society and the internet. These eight characteristics are appropriate in the context of fashion, although they may vary in other sharing contexts. The discussion of the eight characteristics extends the existing understanding of sharing by examining the meanings, consumers' derived benefits and current development of sharing within the fashion context.

7.2.1 Benefit Exchange

Benefit Exchange is a central characteristic in the context of fashion sharing because it fundamentally captures the nature of mutual benefits derived from such an interaction. Fashion sharing entails the reciprocal (Belk, 2014b), altruistic or self-interested giving and receiving of something valuable, which goes beyond mere transactional exchange. The exchange of benefits in a traditional ownership-based transaction is straightforward: monetary benefits are exchanged for goods or services. Conversely, this research finds that fashion sharing provides other types of benefits to individuals, both tangible and intangible. This includes the transfer of material goods as well as non-material benefits. Three types of benefits that individuals can directly acquire from fashion sharing include social benefits, utilitarian benefits and hedonic benefits, which are explained in Chapter 6 and summarised as follows:

- *Social benefits*: By engaging in fashion sharing, individuals can build social networks, strengthen sentimental bonds with others, show their care and love to others and establish their group identity.
- *Utilitarian benefits*: Fashion sharing allows a thrifty way for individuals to satisfy their practical fashion usage needs. Besides, fashion sharing can be a way to make monetary benefits.
- *Hedonic benefits*: By engaging in fashion sharing, individuals can receive fun and happiness, and recognition from others about their fashion tastes. Moreover, individuals play with more fashion items and styles through fashion sharing in a commitment-free way.

The different types of benefits that people derive from sharing behaviour were discussed in previous research within different contexts, such as car sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012;

Jani and Philemon Mwakyusa, 2022), food sharing (Harvey et al., 2020b) and space sharing (Brinkø et al., 2015; Ikkala and Lampinen, 2015; Moon et al., 2019). However, in contrast to previous studies that emphasise singular sharing benefits, such as the emphasis on use value in Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), this research highlights the diverse benefits that consumers derive from fashion sharing. This difference may be due to different contexts. For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) stressed the use value of car sharing but this research finds all three types of benefits can be central benefits for different individuals. This could be attributed to the car's significant utility value, which surpasses its other benefits due to its great financial worth. In contrast, fashion sharing encompasses a broader range of benefits because fashion serves not just a functional role but also cultural, expressive, and social purposes. The inherent differences in the primary functions and perceptions of cars versus fashion items result in the distinct emphasis on their sharing benefits.

This research finds that the social benefits of fashion sharing enhance the interaction of sharers and create a new tie between consumers, which is in line with the findings of Frenken and Schor (2017). Particularly, the research findings reveal that people can build a long-lasting connection if they meet and share fashion items.

The research also uncovers how shared fashion items help to build and show social and self-identity for individuals, which is consistent in other contexts of sharing, such as knowledge sharing (Bingley et al., 2022). But differently, the research recognises the fashion sharing activity itself helps consumers shape their social identities. Individuals may establish their communities, particularly online ones, to show their group identities. Besides, fashion sharers

can also resonate with the messages conveyed by the shared items to enhance their group identity.

Furthermore, this research identifies other dimensions of social benefits in fashion sharing. Specifically, the research finds out how individuals show their care and affection to people around them by sharing fashion goods. A typical example in this research is William (male, 28, UK) and his older brother's fashion sharing experience. The research finding explains how the shared fashion items serve a role as sentimental bonds depending on the different types of social relationships.

Concerning the utilitarian benefits, Barquet et al. (2016) mentioned the economic benefits that all stakeholders may receive from sharing. The research also uncovers how fashion sharing reduces financial costs to access different fashion items for individuals, which is aligned with Hamari et al. (2016). Also, in line with the previous research, this study finds that people are monetising fashion sharing as they share out their fashion items to earn monetary benefits. This further reveals that, in the modern context, sharing can be less than entirely altruistic (Bucher et al., 2016). This is in line with Widlok (2013) who describes sharing as a complex phenomenon instead of just labelling it as altruism or reciprocity. The results highlight two distinct scenarios related to thriftiness in terms of money, storage space, and the utilisation of idle fashion items: here we see individuals who 'have to be thrifty' and/or those who 'choose to be thrifty.' Fashion sharing experiences in these two different situations may not be the same.

In terms of hedonic benefits, the findings of the research agree with Alzamora-Ruiz et al. (2020) that the joy of sharing motivates individuals to share with others. The research also finds fashion

sharing provides commitment-free happiness to individuals, which helps them escape the burden of ownership (Zhang et al., 2019). The research finds both shared fashion items and fashion sharing experiences can bring happiness to individuals. The findings contribute to identifying how fashion sharing can be considered as a recognition of individuals' fashion tastes and how individuals play with different fashion items or styles.

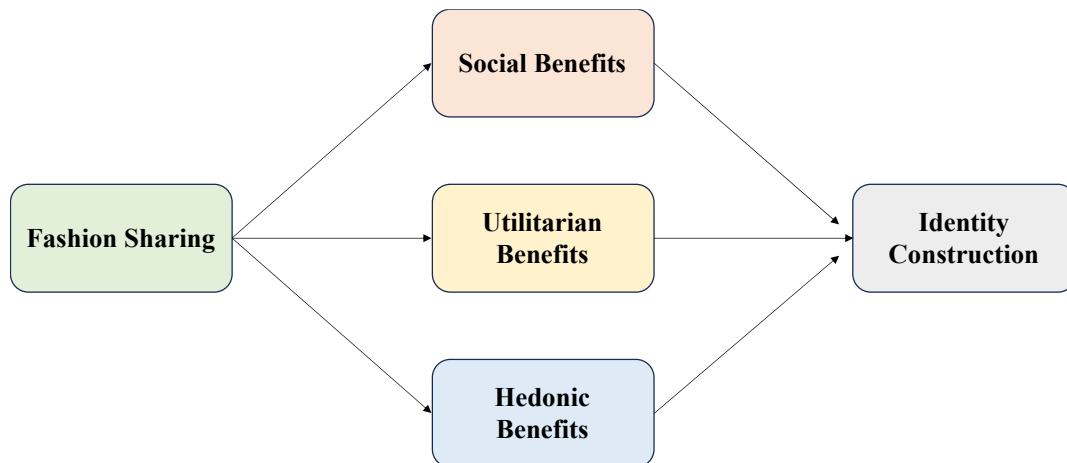
7.2.2 Identity Engagement

The findings suggest that fashion sharing, as an identity-oriented activity, derives from fashion's fundamental role in self-expression and identity construction. Individuals engage with the objects and symbolic meanings emanating from fashion sharing activities. The desired and perceived symbolic meanings of shared fashion items or the fashion sharing experience itself embody what participants value in their fashion sharing endeavours. However, compared to owning fashion, sharing fashion items allows people to explore and express their identity at a lower burden or even without burden. This burden is not only financial, but also includes storage costs in terms of space, as well as the guilt associated with overconsumption.

Furthermore, fashion sharing not only provides social, utilitarian, and hedonic benefits but also significantly contributes to identity construction. When these benefits are perceived by individuals, they facilitate individuals' self-identity maintenance or development. Understanding how individuals construct or maintain their identity through fashion sharing enriches existing knowledge about self-identity in non-ownership consumption by highlighting the role of derived benefits.

Therefore, based on this, the current research establishes the components (or dimensions) of identity that consumers derive from their fashion sharing practices, which is shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1 Identity Shaped by Fashion Sharing Practices



Compared to Belk’s (2014, p. 1595) “*you are what you can access*” and Wilhelms et al.’s (2017, p. 105) “*you are what you share*”, this study reveals that the underlying nature of ‘what you share or access’ is the emphasis on the benefits of the accessed or shared products. This study extends Belk’s (2014) and Wilhelms et al.’s (2017) statement into ‘you are what you derive from sharing.’ Individuals engage in fashion sharing because it brings about certain benefits that align with their desired self-identity.

7.2.3 Temporary Material Possession and De-ownership

The findings contribute to identifying two seemingly similar but fundamentally distinct characteristics of fashion sharing: temporary material possession and de-ownership. Both of these concepts discuss the self-object relationship but from different perspectives.

Temporary material possession, as identified in this study, describes the objective temporary relationship between the self and fashion objects. This temporary material possession is determined by the act of fashion sharing. This is because fashion sharing does not involve the transfer of ownership of the items and the items can only be retained and used for a limited period of time. Meanwhile, individuals rely on physical fashion objects to fulfil their desired values, which is different from other types of sharing, like knowledge sharing (Ahmed et al., 2019) or music sharing (Veselovsky et al., 2021). Therefore, ‘temporary material possession’ is a core characteristic of fashion sharing.

This research, on the other hand, defines de-ownership as the active relinquishment of permanent material possessions by individuals, which is a new feature of current fashion sharing. Individuals choose to maintain a fluid relationship with physical fashion items for different reasons, such as pursuing certain lifestyles or sustainability concerns. De-ownership does not mean individuals detach from their possessions but adopt a more flexible portfolio of fashion consumption that moves away from ownership and towards sharing.

Materialism is a changing concept as can be seen in this research. Zaman et al. (2019) argued that thrift fashion consumers are dematerialised, which neglects to consider that fashion consumption highly relies on physical objects to fulfil individuals’ fashion demands. Instead, this research aligns with Kramarczyk and Alemany Oliver’s (2022, p. 701) perspective on appreciative materialism, a kind of materialism which still ascribes a “*great deal of importance to objects in the lives of consumers but does so through the voluntary non-possession and/or non-accumulation of these objects, as well as a caring ethics that extends to non-humans*”. In today's society, fashion sharing can be a form of temporary material possession that is not

focused on ownership but rather on appreciation. This study establishes that fashion sharing can be a type of temporary material possession that is focused on appreciation rather than ownership, broadening the definition of materialism and self-object relationships.

7.2.4 Sociality

The process of sharing fashion relies on the interaction between individuals. The finding supports Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) in that consumer engagement is a crucial characteristic of traditional fashion sharing which happens within the common social framework, such as kin, friends and colleagues. However, the findings also reveal that limited involvement can be a case in some forms of fashion sharing, such as B2C rental services, due to the structured and standardised rental process (Joyner Armstrong and Park, 2017). But for both online P2P fashion sharing and offline traditional fashion sharing, sufficient individual interaction and involvement are important.

The findings reveal that offline traditional fashion sharing necessitates direct individual communication, such as contacting the appropriate sharers, discussing the sharing terms, coordinating pickups and drop-offs and sharing user experiences. These communications contribute to building networks and strengthening social relationships. As Chloe (female, 23, Mainland China) said, *“If you are familiar with each other, you will be more willing to borrow things. And then if you borrow more things, you will communicate more, and then you will be closer.”* Therefore, communication within fashion sharing is like a bridge to link individuals and their fashion sharing demands.

Compared to offline traditional fashion sharing, the research finds that online P2P fashion sharing may involve more elements for the interaction of users, including live chats, forums, and review systems, providing a space for users to engage, communicate and share experiences (Davidson and Infranca, 2015). The UGC concerning fashion sharing builds an online fashion sharing reputation system. This interactive information exchange enables users to make informed fashion sharing decisions and feel more connected to their online communities (Oliveira and Casais, 2019).

Trujillo-Torres et al. (2023) support the tightly coupled online fashion sharers' interdependencies as does this research. But they found individuals have little motive to cooperate or care about the influence of their behaviour on sharers' journeys because they perceive insufficient social accountability (Trujillo-Torres et al., 2023). This is different from the case of offline traditional fashion sharing, which the findings of this research illuminate. The reason behind the different findings might be instrumental sociality in online fashion sharing (Rainie and Wellman, 2012), in which relationships are more opportunistic due to self-interest purposes. Sharing behaviour, which tends to be self-interested, can be called 'demand sharing' (Widlok, 2013). Lewis et al. (2014) explained that high mobility contributed to demand sharing. While open online environments create opportunities for high mobility, they also lead online fashion sharers to consider others less. In contrast, traditional fashion sharing is more likely to occur within social circles where fashion sharers are already familiar with each other. Therefore, this research finds that the underlying logic of traditional fashion sharing is more likely to be about altruism, reciprocity or reciprocal altruism.

7.2.5 The Significance of Trust

Trust is fundamental in fashion sharing. The crucial role of trust remained consistent throughout the current study. Some other research, such as Poppelaars et al., (2018) and Arekrans et al. (2022), mention the importance of trust. But less light was shed on how the trust mechanism works in sharing behaviours within the context of fashion as the current research has done. Further, much recent research focused on trust in the sharing economy but ignored other forms of sharing, such as sharing among acquaintances in human life. This research contributes to exploring these under-researched areas.

The findings reveal that trust determines with whom to share. This research finds that most individuals are comfortable sharing fashion items with familiar sharers. This is why Belk (2010) argued that family sharing is the most ubiquitous kind of sharing. Individuals believe that sharing with familiar people reduces the risk of damage, loss and contamination (Lang, 2018). This finding indicates why consumers are interested but do not get involved in C2C or B2C fashion sharing businesses where trust is difficult to build between strangers (Arekrans et al., 2022). Reputation systems, ratings, and reviews have been regarded by existing research as the most commonly used technological solutions to this problem (Räsänen et al., 2021).

Secondly, the findings uncover that trust influences what to share. According to Guinnane (2005), the more trust there is in a person, the more likely individuals are to share things valuable to borrowers, which is confirmed by the current research. The current research finding indicates that the meaning of ‘valuable’ varies from person to person and includes different aspects, including monetary benefits, sentimental attachment, condition of the item (brand new or wear-and-tear) and exclusivity or rarity. For example, Amelia (female, 26, UK) may not share her expensive designer bags with others she knows but is not close to, while Mia (female, 25,

Mainland China) was reluctant to share her brand-new fashion items with persons whom she did not trust. The current research finds that the greater the trust between lender and borrower, the greater the chance for lenders to be willing to share items expressing their identity. This is because sharing items that are highly relevant to an individual's identity can indeed involve a certain level of risk of revealing lenders' personal tastes, values or social status (Ert et al., 2016).

However, trust mechanisms occasionally break down in fashion sharing due to the different meanings of 'valuable' perceived by consumers. Therefore, there are fashion goods that individuals are unwilling to share with others. Except for underwear, these goods are normally extremely meaningful, serving as sentimental bonds with certain persons or are very expensive. For example, the never-to-share out belt of Clara (female, 23, UK) that she got from her mother (p. 184). These items all represent aspects of the extended self that participants would not share with others due to what those items mean to them. Sharing such items increases the risk of them becoming lost, damaged or not being treated with the same reverence and care that the owner would.

Thirdly, the research finds that trust influences sharing experience, compared to the experience of owning. The finding reveals that the more people trust a relationship, the more fashion sharing experiences are similar to owning experiences. This is because trust reduces the perceived barriers and risks (Lang, 2018), such as the boundaries between sharers, others' blame and unhappiness due to damage or loss and fear of judgment, allowing individuals to enjoy shared items in a manner similar to how they would if they owned them.

In cases when there is insufficient trust established among individuals, the experience becomes fraught with feelings of anxiety, apprehension and the burden of potential damage, loss, or soiling of the shared items (discussed in 6.3.2). This finding challenges the uncritical reverence for non-ownership consumption and supports the burden of access (Schaefer et al., 2016; Hazée et al., 2017), to some extent. Moreover, the findings uncover a lack of trust as a barrier to encouraging sharing instead of purchasing in this context.

Finally, the findings suggest that trust and interpersonal relationships mutually influence each other. The current research finds two primary statuses of fashion sharing relationships (healthy and toxic, in 6.3.5.2), based on different levels of trust. The trust between fashion sharers lays the foundation for one party's comfort or discomfort in the fashion sharing experience. However, other components of fashion sharing, such as the interaction between sharers and the experience of using shared items, have a further effect on relationships.

7.2.6 Digitalisation

As Belk (2014b, p. 1595) said, *“Sharing is a phenomenon as old as humankind, while collaborative consumption and the “sharing economy” are phenomena born of the Internet age.”* Although the sharing concept is not limited to the sharing economy in this research, it is evident that the Internet empowers modern sharing practices. The current research captures one important new feature of fashion sharing, that is, digitalisation. The rise of technology and e-commerce platforms have played a vital role in enabling the spread and ease of fashion sharing practices (Lee and Chow, 2020). Such platforms have emerged as the primary medium for current and future fashion sharing, allowing users to easily browse, select, and organise the delivery and return of items (Todeschini et al., 2017).

Social media's rise has also had an impact on the digitisation of fashion sharing. Social media platforms are used not only for individual and business users to promote sharing platforms but also to allow individual users to share their fashion sharing experiences and inspire others (Scaraboto, 2015). For example, I invited Olivia (female, 28, Greece) to participate in this research due to her post on Instagram concerning the promotion content for a fashion sharing online platform. Olivia (female, 28, Greece) explained to me the specific sharing process of the P2P online fashion sharing platform (in 6.3.2.2.3). This is one of the few explorations that investigates fashion sharing from the perspective of fashion renters.

The vast majority of fashion sharing practices discussed in this research are offline and acquaintance related. But the finding shows that participants had an interest in the online fashion sharing business, and few had no knowledge about it. However, compared to offline B2C fashion rental businesses, only a small number of participants actually took part in any form of online fashion sharing business. This phenomenon may be due to an attitude-behaviour gap in online fashion sharing practices, which is in line with the findings of Lee and Chow (2020).

Regarding the reason for the attitude-behaviour gap, the findings suggest trust issues. First, fashion sharing is a trust-based activity. A lack of trust in business service providers or other online sharers is a key barrier for those who have not yet tried fashion renting (Bodenheimer et al., 2022) or other types of sharing, which requires effective solutions in online fashion sharing businesses. For example, Liam (male, 22, Algeria) clearly expressed he did not trust the hygiene of fashion items from other online users. Therefore, the current research points to the

importance of boosting trust among online sharers so that fashion companies can boost the digitalised fashion sharing businesses. Second, the findings indicate that some individuals distrust the marketing of fashion rental businesses which build their business as a solution to address certain societal or environmental issues. Some even suggest that online fashion rental may create new issues. For example, Emma (Female, N/A, Canada) believed that fashion rental was unsustainable since it would create new demand from customers, such as following new fashion trends, resulting in over-sharing problems. As a result, consumer distrust of the fashion rental mode can be divided into two categories: distrust among consumers and distrust of consumers towards the fashion sharing business model.

7.2.7 Sustainability

While, historically, sustainability might not have been a primary driver of fashion sharing, the increasing awareness of the detrimental environmental impacts of fashion overconsumption and of the conventional linear fashion business model, as well as a series of social issues have brought sustainability to the forefront of fashion sharing discourses (Henninger et al., 2016; Amasawa et al., 2023). Currently, one of the drivers of fashion sharing is sustainability.

The current research identifies sustainability concerns as the motivation for consumers to engage in fashion sharing. Furthermore, the sustainability meanings of fashion sharing improve consumers' fashion sharing experiences. This is because people believe they are contributing to addressing sustainability issues by engaging in fashion sharing practices.

This research shows that fashion sharing contributes to sustainability mainly in three ways: (1) extending the active lifespan of fashion items (particularly idle ones), (2) reducing the desire

for and purchase of new fashion items, and (3) forming a community effect for sustainability. With regards to the first point (1), instead of each individual owning separate items, the same item can be used by many sharers over its lifecycle, reducing the environmental impact associated with production and disposal (Iran et al., 2019). The finding is in line with existing research encouraging longer lifespans for fashion items, such as Laitala and Boks (2012), Klepp et al. (2020) and Aakko and Niinimäki (2022). In addition, the finding indicates that individuals also value the extension of lifespan extracting maximum benefits from the resources used in the garment's production. For example, the energy, water, and materials invested in producing a piece of clothing are utilised more effectively when the garment is used multiple times by different sharers (Luo et al., 2021).

Concerning (2), fashion sharing achieves sustainability with different benefits provided to individuals. For example, individuals can access various fashion items or styles with very low or no financial costs (in 6.3.2.3.3) receive fun and happiness from their fashion sharing practices (in 6.3.2.3.1), accept families' love and care via fashion sharing, or only want to save money and storage space (in 6.3.2.2.2). These dimensions of different benefits all can be motivations for consumers who choose to share but not purchase fashion items. And these potential benefits spark individuals' desires to liquefy their consumption (Rosenberg et al., 2023). However, it should be noted that reducing the desire and purchase of fashion consumption does not mean sharing is the only choice for consumers, rather, they can embrace a smarter fashion consumption portfolio: a hybrid of sharing and purchasing.

Regarding (3), the communities can be both online and offline. The fashion sharing communities often share values of sustainability, mutual benefit and responsible consumption,

which can encourage more sustainable behaviour among participants (Hamari et al., 2016). Interestingly, the only offline community built for sustainability, found by the current research, is the cross-country swapping parties held by Freya (female, 30, Mexico) and her friends (in 6.3.3.4). On the contrary, this study finds more online communities, such as the online fashion sharing platforms themed sustainability used by the participants. According to Alhashem et al. (2021), online communities possess some specific capacities, which offline environments do not have, to enable collaboration through a collective mind and break the limit of space and time. Other characteristics of having sharing activities in online communities contribute to its popularity, too: convenience and accessibility (Hamari et al., 2016), a wide selection of groups or communities, anonymity (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), efficiency (Möhlmann, 2015), community and social interaction (Lieberman and Schroeder, 2020), as well as information and awareness (Greijdanus et al., 2020).

7.3 Fashion Sharing and Identity

Fashion goods are a significant aspect of individuals' self-presentation, which is a vital representation of self-identity and is important to managing an identity project. This research finds fashion sharing and identity share a profound and intricate relationship. Firstly, this research finds fashion sharing encourages identity exploration. Providing access to a wide array of clothes and styles, fashion sharing allows individuals to try different fashion identities with low associated financial and environmental costs (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). In other words, before committing to a particular style, one can try on different 'fashion selves', adding to the fluidity and diversity of their identity projects (Belk, 1988).

Secondly, fashion sharing reflects and strengthens individuals' self-identity, which is in line with Loussaïef et al. (2019) exploring self-object relationships in fashion. Specifically, this research establishes that individuals express and strengthen their identity by (1) sharing identity-consistent fashion items and/or (2) engaging in fashion sharing activities, like minimalists use sharing to reduce and manage the fashion items they own.

Concerning point (1), the finding indicates that individuals normally share fashion items which are in line with their group- or self-identity. For instance, an individual who identifies with the punk subculture and values unique, edgy fashion may prefer to borrow a vintage leather jacket instead of a brightly coloured sequined evening gown.

Further, the finding suggests that fashion sharing nourishes the hidden features of one's self-identity, which extends the existing understanding of the consistency between fashion items and self-identity. For example, Louis (male, 24, UK) secretly loved extravagant outfits but had less confidence to buy and wear them. Sharing fashion items gives him a way to try and display these items, which nurtures a more multifaceted self. This is consistent with how individuals perform at the "front stage" and "backstage" in Goffman's (1990) identity theory. For some, what they wear on a daily basis is how they want people to perceive them on the "front stage"; nevertheless, they express their true selves on "backstage" by sharing fashion items (Carter and Gilovich, 2012). This is because, fashion sharing is a part of experiential consumption, with the involvement of material objects. According to Gilovich and Gallo (2020), a person's sense of identity is intertwined with the opinions of others; as a result, they tend to share or buy what it signifies to others. But for experiential consumption, which may be more invisible to others, they make decisions only for their own advantage.

In terms of (2), individuals demonstrate their self-identity through engaging in fashion sharing practices, which is aligned with the finding of Sörum and Gianneschi (2023). The act of fashion sharing itself is imbued with numerous symbolic meanings for individuals. By participating in fashion sharing, individuals acquire and express their identities as they currently are or as they aspire to be. For example, engaging in fashion sharing to express sustainability concerns or to show a type of lifestyle, such as minimalism or thrift. Through gaining the symbolic meanings of fashion sharing experience, individuals can manage their identity project as a minimalist, a thrifty fashion sharer or a fashionista. This finding demands that attention be shifted from focusing on *self-object* relationships as discussed in Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012), Loussaïef et al.'s (2019) and Merisalo's (2021) research, to *self-fashion sharing experience* relationship as sharing is a part of experiential consumption.

Thirdly, identity blending is found in this research when individuals share others' fashion items. Identity blending, as conceptualised in this study, pertains to the phenomenon wherein the act of sharing fashion items fosters a collective sense of identity, whereby individuals assimilate certain aspects of another person's identity into their own (Davis, 1994). Loussaïef et al. (2019, p. 269) used the term, "*positive identity contamination*" to refer to the phenomenon where individuals feel a positive association or sentimental connection with a fashion item because of its original owner the person they borrowed it from. This contamination does not refer to a physical or tangible impurity but rather an emotional or symbolic connection. However, sharing clothing goes beyond accessing fashion items and advancing the positive association or sentimental connection among fashion sharers. It incorporates an exchange of styles, aesthetics, and values associated with these pieces. As Belk (1988) suggests, our possessions are not

detached from our selves but are indeed a part of our self. Hence, when individuals share fashion pieces, they are sharing extensions of others' identities. The process of sharing blurs identity boundaries (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), resulting in what I term 'identity blending'.

This finding suggests that identity blending in fashion sharing becomes more prominent when individuals focus more on social and hedonic benefits than utilitarian benefits. Furthermore, different from Loussaïef et al. (2019), only focusing on how fashion sharers receive the identity influence from shared items' owners, this research found identity blending works for both item owners and sharers. This is because fashion sharing is a mutual process; and 'sociality' is one of the characteristics (see in 7.2.4). For example, Evelyn (female, 38, UK) preferred sharing fashions with her friends because of enjoyment. She explained how they shared part of their identities with each other via fashion sharing.

"...because You get to share part of your friend's identity. When you see your friend's something a lot, and then you try it on, or you swap something. So, you can have a laugh about how it looks different on you. And it's fun because it's part of the friendship as well."

A possible explanation for this might be that when individuals emphasise the hedonic benefits of fashion sharing, they appreciate the experience, the emotional engagement, and the pleasure of sharing and wearing the fashion items of others. This, in turn, facilitates the adoption of the style, aesthetic preferences, and values associated with these pieces (Armstrong et al., 2015). The joy of experimentation, novelty, and experimenting with different styles can lead to the incorporation of elements from other people's fashion identities (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012), which contributes to identity blending. Concerning social benefits, like the sentimental bond attached to these shared fashion items, the emotionally charged items can serve as

‘memory markers,’ carrying with them narratives, experiences, and pieces of the identities of the previous owners. Therefore, when people focus on the social benefits of these items, they are more likely to form attachments that contribute to their identity blending.

However, identity blending does not happen to every fashion sharer. Some participants felt they were who they were, even when wearing others’ garments. For example, Emma (female, N/A, Canada) insisted that she is herself but in different shared fashion items: *“I don't think so. I think I'm still me, and I'm not more like my husband or more like my son if I wear it (their clothes). I think it's just me inside their clothes.”* Identity blending ‘malfunction’ may be due to different reasons. But in this research, the most common finding is that sharers with a strong sense of personal identity and self-concept may be less susceptible to identity blending. This finding extends the previous understanding that sharing can result in changes of identity, particularly for people sharing items in (Loussaïef et al., 2019), by showing that identity blending can malfunction.

Fourthly, based on the findings from both phases of the research, fashion sharing transforms individuals’ self-identity into social identity via interactive engagement with others. When individuals engage in fashion sharing, they willingly interact with the fashion identities of others. This process exposes them to new styles, values, and aesthetic preferences, which they can incorporate into their own self-identity, such as how Camila (female, 19, Kenya) reminded herself not to judge others based on their appearance by borrowing a hoodie from her sister with a slogan containing a similar meaning on it.

However, the transition from self-identity to social identity is more than just borrowing elements from others' identities. It is more complicated, involving the individual's identification with a community or group of people who share and embody similar fashion tastes, preferences, and/or practices (Belk, 2014b). This community could be a real-world social network or an online platform for fashion sharing (Kim and Johnson, 2016). For instance, the swapping parties held by Freya (female, 30, Mexico) and her friends aimed to decrease fashion purchases. Or the hashtag challenges required users to display certain outfits by using shared fashion items on Instagram. By actively participating in these common practices, individuals construct a shared sense of belonging and collective identity, therefore transforming their self-identity into a social one. This collective experience can foster a stronger connection to the group, making their group membership a significant part of their identity (Moghaddam, 2006).

The process of identity transformation through fashion sharing is a dynamic, ongoing project. Individuals constantly negotiate and redefine their identities through social interactions, as Giddens (1991) observes. The sharing of fashion pieces is one example of an interaction in which individuals constantly shape and reshape their identities in relation to their social group.

Finally, the research finds that not every shared fashion item or every fashion sharing experience contributes to identity project construction. The process of constructing one's identity project through fashion sharing is multi-faceted and complex while many factors influence this process. This research finds the important influence of fashion sharing feelings on identity project construction (Adams et al., 2020). Negative feelings towards fashion sharing, such as being stressed about the price of the item, which is far higher than their daily use costs, or being afraid of damaging the shared items, negatively impact how individuals perceive their

fashion sharing experiences or the shared fashion items. If individuals have negative feelings about the shared fashion items, they may not be able to derive deeper meanings from the shared fashion items or experiences because the potential meanings, which can enrich their identities, are suppressed by negative feelings. Mia (female, 25, Mainland China) received a designer bag from a company and attended a promotion event, for example. However, she stated that she was unable to enjoy using the bag because it was too expensive, and she had to be careful not to stain it. On this occasion, Mia's (female, 25, Mainland China) identity was unable to resonate with the designer bag.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the key findings of the research. It has presented and explained eight characteristics that define fashion sharing. Then, this chapter has delved into the connection between fashion sharing and identity. It demonstrates that fashion sharing encourages individuals' identity exploration, reflects and strengthens their existing self-identity and merges the identities of those who share.

In the final chapter, the main findings and their relevance to the research questions will be summarised and explained. Furthermore, the implications, limitations, and future directions of the research will be clarified.

Chapter 8-Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

Fashion sharing is a sociocultural and economic activity that allows individuals to temporary access to fashion items, promoting connection-building, economic efficiency, environmental and social sustainability, and identity expression. This final chapter synthesises the findings and the implications of this research for the academic and practical realms of fashion sharing. Section 8.2 begins with a comprehensive research overview that revisits the study's core purposes and speaks to the four pivotal research questions. This is followed by Section 8.3, an examination of the theoretical and methodological contributions made by this research, highlighting its value in filling gaps in the existing literature. Section 8.4 then shifts to the practical implications and recommendations, providing strategies and insights for fashion sharing companies/platforms. Finally, Section 8.5, addresses the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for future research, ensuring that the foundation laid by this thesis is not an end, but rather a steppingstone for future academic endeavours.

8.2 Research Overview

This research explored individuals' fashion sharing experiences. A qualitative research design was employed through the lens of identity theory and was guided by four research questions:

- *RQ1*: What are the nature and characteristics of fashion sharing?
- *RQ2*: What are the experiential differences between owning and sharing fashion items?
- *RQ3*: What benefits do consumers derive from their fashion sharing practices?
- *RQ4*: What is the connection between fashion sharing and sustainability meanings and motives for consumers?

This research focused on reviewing and exploring previous theories and empirical studies concerning the concept of sharing behaviour (Chapter 2), fashion sharing and consumer experience (Chapter 3), and adopting identity theory (Chapter 4) as the theoretical lens, laying a strong theoretical foundation for this research. This focus aimed to establish a foundational understanding of fashion sharing practices, thereby enriching both the theoretical framework and the empirical robustness of the research.

To answer the research questions, 40 semi-structured online interviews with photo-elicitation and thematic data analysis were used to dive deeper into individuals' fashion sharing experiences. The following subsections address the research questions, based on the findings of the research.

8.2.1 The Nature and Characteristics of Fashion Sharing

This research recognises fashion sharing as a sociocultural and economic activity, allowing individuals to temporarily access fashion items. This practice occurs in various forms, including borrowing/lending, renting, co-purchasing and temporary fashion swapping. Eight characteristics have been identified to define fashion sharing, including benefit exchange, identity engagement, temporary material possession, sociality, trust, digitalisation, sustainability and de-ownership. The first five are fundamental characteristics of sharing while the last three are new characteristics due to the development of the internet. Fashion sharing allows individuals to engage with fashion in a way that is economically efficient, socially enriching and environmentally sustainable, while also offering a platform for identity expression and community building.

8.2.2 The Experiential Differences Between Owning and Sharing Fashion Items

The current study addresses this research question by identifying three types of sharing states and exploring the factors influencing consumers' fashion sharing usage experiences. When discussing the differences between owning and sharing fashion items, consumers express identical experiences, unfavourable experiences and enhanced experiences. Generally, consumers' fashion sharing experiences are influenced by their personal values, their fashion sharers, different usage feelings, shared fashion items, expected reactions from others and the perceived benefits from their fashion sharing experiences.

The findings suggest that although individuals may perceive differences in the experiences of owning and sharing fashion items, these experiential disparities are temporary and are only felt when wearing shared fashion items. For example, some participants expressed experiencing enhanced positive feelings via the shared fashion items. They expressed that the enhanced feelings, such as confidence, would disappear when they took off the shared items. However, different usage feelings may resurface when consumers access items that trigger memories of the shared fashion items, such as viewing photos or videos in which they wore those shared items.

The research findings also indicate a fluid relationship between sharing and owning. Particularly, due to the burden of fashion ownership, such as the pressure of storage and maintenance, individuals choose to share instead of owning fashion items. However, individuals can also come to desire to own a brand-new fashion item that they previously shared

due to the enhanced feelings they experienced while wearing the item previously. Sometimes, the desire converts into actual purchasing behaviour.

8.2.3 The Benefits That Consumers Derive from Their Fashion Sharing Practices

There are three types of benefits that individuals can derive from their fashion sharing practices, including social benefits, utilitarian benefits and hedonic benefits. Unlike traditional ownership-based consumption, fashion sharing facilitates an intricate benefits exchange, giving rise to both tangible and intangible benefits for fashion sharers. These three types of benefit dimensions are not mutually exclusive and coalesce in varying combinations to comprise the multi-motivations of people to engage in fashion sharing.

The interaction among fashion sharers creates social benefits. This research elucidates that fashion sharing not only fortifies social networks but also serves as a medium to express care, affection and group identity. Shared fashion items embody social relationships, and the act of sharing itself becomes an instrument to shape social identities, particularly in online communities.

The utilitarian benefits of fashion sharing not only represent the monetary aspect, like saving money but also include the utility of saving storage space, making full use of idle fashion items and helping people live a thrift life. This research also suggests that some fashion sharers choose to be thrifty while others have to be thrifty, which then translates into different fashion-sharing experiences. For example, sharers, having to be thrifty, may have to acquire essential garments through sharing, like what Alice (female, 21, Greece) mentioned about the fashion sharing activities occurring in her community after the financial crisis (in 6.3.4.1.4).

The hedonic benefits acknowledge the joy and commitment-free happiness that fashion sharing provides. This research extends previous studies by asserting that joy is not solely attached to the shared items but also to the act and experience of sharing. It serves as an affirmation of individual taste and offers an expansive playground to explore different fashion styles without the obligations of ownership.

8.2.4 The Connection Between Fashion Sharing and Sustainability Meanings and Motives

Individuals' sustainability concerns interact with the whole process of their fashion sharing experiences, from the start of their fashion sharing journey, and are maintained throughout. The sustainability concerns of consumers motivate them to engage in fashion sharing. Specifically, the findings reveal that individuals consider fashion sharing as a way to avoid fashion overconsumption which is regarded as the antithesis of sustainability, and a means to provide the long-term wellbeing for future generations. Findings suggest that sustainability is a key driver of fashion sharing and can generate positive feelings for people, such as pride and satisfaction, which are amplified by fashion sharing behaviours. The engagement in fashion sharing in this context is considered a symbol of individual environmental responsibility. The continuous positive feelings derived from fashion sharing are beneficial for building and maintaining long-term fashion sharing practices, which effectively become a part of sustainable lifestyles. The findings also show that people who share fashion items while pursuing a sustainable lifestyle actively engage in encouraging others to share fashion items in the following ways: 1) posting relevant information on social media; 2) hosting offline events and 3) WOM.

The findings suggest that the sustainability meanings of fashion sharing relate to extending the active lifespan of fashion items particularly idle ones, reducing the desire for and purchase of new fashion items, and forming a community for sustainability. These positive sustainability meanings of fashion sharing help consumers embrace a flexible fashion consumption portfolio.

However, findings reveal that consumers do not perceive fashion sharing as an optimal resolution to address their sustainability concerns. Fashion sharing also gives rise to environmental concerns for individuals, such as concerns about over-sharing. According to this research, consumers are concerned about issues such as carbon emissions during transportation and the environmental impacts of packaging and garment cleaning methods, particularly in the case of company/platform-mediated fashion sharing.

8.3 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes five theoretical contributions to consumer research concerning sharing behaviour. The first contribution is that this research establishes individuals' sharing practices within the fashion context, enriching the understanding of individuals' sharing experiences. Existing literature has largely focussed on the economic and usage benefits engendered by non-ownership consumption within the framework of the sharing economy and within certain contexts, such as car sharing and space sharing (Edelman and Luca, 2014; Moon et al., 2019; Magno, 2021; Jani and Philemon Mwakyusa, 2022). However, this research shifts the research attention to sharing behaviour within a fashion context. This is not only because fashion is a significant component of consumers' lives but also an essential aspect of addressing current environmental and social issues. Also, fashion sharing is a common social practice that is frequently overlooked. Therefore, this research broadens the academic discourse to encompass

various forms of fashion sharing experiences. From interpersonal sharing with acquaintances and family to commercialised fashion sharing, from intragender to intergender fashion sharing, and from intragenerational to intergenerational fashion sharing, this research elucidates how these diverse practices influence individuals' fashion sharing experiences and attitudes, and the factors influencing them.

The second contribution is that this research provides a detailed definition of fashion sharing and identifies eight important characteristics, which helps academic and non-academic audiences better understand this social practice. The most significant contribution of this study, among these eight characteristics of fashion sharing, is the exploration and discovery of the benefits derived by people who engage in fashion sharing. Different from existing research mainly focusing on a single type of benefit, like Belk's (2010) social benefits in sharing and Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) use value in car sharing, this research contributes to establishing a more comprehensive perspective on the benefits that people derive from fashion sharing, including social, utilitarian and hedonic benefits, building on existing literature in this field. Furthermore, the research not only identifies the comprehensive benefits derived by consumers, but also the subtle nuances behind seemingly identical benefits. For example, in 6.3.2.2.2, *thrift* was recognised as a fashion sharing benefit. However, being thrifty in fashion sharing can mean different things to different people; for some, it is a necessity and for others it is a choice. These two forms of thrift reflect the participants' different mindsets and motivations for engaging in fashion sharing, leading to different fashion sharing experiences also. It is worth noting, however, that both forms of thrift can occur for the same person due in different life stages and as their identities develop over the life course, as illustrated by the younger Evelyn (female, 38, UK) compared to her present self (see 6.3.2.2.2).

The third advancement is that this research explored individuals' fashion sharing practices through the lens of identity theory, extending knowledge of how fashion sharing contributes to individuals' identity project construction. Mainly influenced by Cooley (1983), Goffman (1990), Giddens (1991) and McAdams (1996), this study applied these theories specifically to fashion sharing, to see how fashion sharing allows individuals to experiment with different aspects of their self-identity, and how fashion sharing not only reflects but also strengthens individuals' self-identities, providing a sense of affirmation and continuity. Specifically, the findings resonate with Cooley's (1983) looking-glass self in that people use the views and reactions of others to tailor their own fashion sharing concepts and behaviours. Fashion sharers, such as Amelia (female, 26, UK, in 6.3.2.3.2), receive recognition of their fashion taste by being borrowed by others, which is an important part of how they see themselves. Then, this study used Goffman's (1990) front stage and backstage theory to identify how people employ fashion sharing as the "backstage" to explore a hidden aspect of their identity that they may not be confident doing in front of everyone [see the example of Louis (male, 24, UK), in 6.3.2.3.3]. Finally, these discontinuous or even unrelated fashion sharing practices of individuals are threaded together into cohesive self-narratives about who they are through the means of fashion sharing (McAdams, 1996). This research, in addition to applying these identity theories, adds new understandings to identity theories, primarily by investigating how different benefits derived by people through fashion sharing construct and maintain their identities and how fashion sharing helps people to play with their identities. Furthermore, the concept of 'identity blending' is introduced, which documents the ways in which sharing another individual's fashion items can result in a merging or blending of identities, which is in line with the findings of research, such as Loussaïef et al. (2019). However, this research extends the understanding

of Loussaïef et al. (2019) by identifying fashion sharing's mutual influence on identities for both people sharing in and out, and how identity blending can malfunction, like when fashion sharers have strong personal concepts. Fourth, the current research reveals a transformative aspect of fashion sharing: it aids in the transformation of individual self-identity into a social identity through interactive engagements with others, thereby expanding the individual's sphere of identity influence. Finally, the current research adds another layer of complication by discovering that not all fashion sharing experiences or shared items contribute to the development of identity projects. This cautionary note is intended to counteract overly deterministic views that see all forms of consumption or sharing as having an equal influence on identity formation. The reasons behind it are complex, and mainly due to the fleeting or surface-level engagement or the lack of meaning attached to fashion sharing in some cases [see example of Aurora (female, 37, Japan), p. 119].

The fourth contribution is about the exploration of fashion sharing in relationships. Sharing is the result of interactions between people. While previous research has addressed various aspects of sharing behaviours within the fashion context (Battle et al., 2018; Lang, 2018; Liu et al., 2022), there is a dearth of literature addressing the intersection of social relationships and fashion sharing (Tinson and Nuttall, 2007; Klepp and Laitala, 2018). This study fills this void by identifying and analysing the different types of interpersonal relationships and fashion sharing relationship statuses. According to the findings, there are five major types of interpersonal relationships in fashion sharing: families, friends, couples, neighbourhoods and communities, and strangers. Previous research frequently focuses on generalised sharing behaviours rather than delving into specific interpersonal relationships (Benkler, 2004; Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010). Furthermore, this research identifies two fashion sharing statuses,

healthy and toxic fashion sharing relationships. This classification is critical because it emphasises that sharing practices are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of social relationships. Furthermore, this study sheds light on the factors that result in different fashion sharing statuses within social relationships, such as sharers' personalities, trust and communication. Previous research has highlighted the importance of trust and communication in sharing behaviours (Möhlmann, 2015; Tussyadiah and Park, 2018), but this is the first study to apply these concepts specifically to fashion sharing and analyse their impact on the resulting sharing statuses. This allows the current research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of fashion sharing practices within various social relationships.

Lastly, this research explores fashion sharing behaviour within the dynamics of everyday life. Thus, the final contribution of this study is that it determines how people establish social connections through their fashion sharing practices and the shared fashion items (Isabella, 29, Lebanon, in 6.3.2.1.1), including how they tighten bonds (George, male, 27, Mainland China, in 6.3.2.1.2), express love and care (William, male, 28, UK, in 6.3.2.1.4), and 'pass on' the love and care (Alice, female, 21, Greece, in 6.3.4.1.4) in their everyday lives through sharing. Moreover, it establishes how fashion sharing and sharers empower individuals (Charlotte, female, 25 UK and Louis, male, 24, UK, in 6.3.2.3.3), enhancing their sense of identity and belonging within social groups. It uncovers how people's identities resonate with those of others through fashion sharing practices (Evelyn, female, 38, UK, in 6.3.2.3.1).

This research enriches existing literature significantly by offering an enhanced understanding of non-ownership consumption that foregrounds the socio-affective dimensions of fashion sharing. It challenges and extends traditional economic models of consumer behaviour, which

have predominantly characterised non-ownership practices in terms of utility and cost-benefit analyses (Belk, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015).

Furthermore, by showing how fashion sharing serves as a tool for expressing and receiving love and care, this study contributes to the underexplored field of affective exchange in consumption. This is consistent with the findings of Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011), who emphasise the importance of possessions in connection creation and maintenance, and Cova and Dalli's (2009) work, who focus on the social linkages that emerge through consumer tribes. However, this work builds upon Lastovicka and Sirianni's (2011) and Cova and Dalli's (2009) works by demonstrating how these social dynamics manifest in the context of fashion sharing and by presenting a more complete map of the affective landscapes navigated by consumers.

8.4 Practical Implications and Recommendations

In this study, the majority of Instagram posts and interview participants expressed positive sentiments toward the different forms of fashion sharing, indicating that it is widely accepted and embraced by many individuals. This suggests that both profit and non-profit fashion sharing are likely to have a promising future. The finding also indicates the prevalence of fashion sharing in everyday life. However, the research finding shows that consumer engagement in platform/company-mediated fashion sharing is insufficient. Therefore, the practical implications and recommendations of the research mainly focus on platform/company-mediated fashion sharing, which may encourage more individuals to engage in fashion sharing.

The findings reveal that trust is at the centre of encouraging consumer participation in fashion sharing. Generally, trust is essential in the realm of online fashion sharing to facilitate seamless

and positive interactions between users. An implication is that this trust is best fostered through the creation of transparent user profiles that provide detailed insights into a person's transaction history, reviews and ratings. Integrating secure payment systems provides users with confidence in the security of their financial transactions, while a robust review and rating mechanism allows individuals to assess the credibility of their peers. Clear terms and conditions are critical because they define the boundaries and responsibilities of both lenders and borrowers. Companies/platforms that prioritise responsive customer support address user concerns effectively, increasing their trust quotient. Furthermore, testimonials and user stories highlight the positive experiences of other users, acting as trust-building endorsements. All of this, in conjunction with community-building initiatives, can create an environment in which users feel valued, secure, and more willing to participate in fashion sharing.

Additionally, clothing cleanliness is another concern among users indicated by the findings, particularly on P2P platforms, which may impair the trust between users. Addressing hygiene concerns in P2P fashion sharing is crucial, especially in a post-pandemic world where cleanliness is a top priority for many individuals. To tackle this issue, platforms could highlight and enforce rigorous cleaning and sanitation protocols for shared items. Offering guidelines on how to clean and sanitise various types of garments adequately could be an initial step. Platforms could introduce a "verified clean" badge or label for items that have undergone professional cleaning before being listed. Photographic proof or receipts from certified cleaning services could be beneficial, too. Collaborating with local cleaning services could provide sharers with discounts, motivating them to uphold high hygiene standards. Moreover, user reviews could also focus on assessing cleanliness, enabling borrowers to evaluate the lender's hygiene practices. Platforms could also initiate occasional awareness campaigns, underscoring

the importance of cleanliness in fashion sharing. By implementing such measures, users might feel not only more at ease sharing clothing but also more confident about the P2P fashion sharing community.

Further, this research also reveals the distrust of individuals towards fashion sharing companies/platforms. For instance, some participants raised doubts about environmental conservation being merely a marketing gimmick by certain fashion sharing companies/platforms. Existing data show that some companies' environmental performance is not as eco-friendly as they claim (Pucker, 2022). Moreover, some research participants questioned whether platform-mediated fashion sharing is a less sustainable consumption method due to carbon emissions generated during transportation and pollution caused by the cleaning process.

To address consumer mistrust of fashion sharing companies/platforms, a multi-pronged approach combining transparency, education and tangible actions is required. To begin, companies/platforms could substantiate their environmental claims, possibly through third-party audits and verifiable metrics that quantify the ecological benefits of shared fashion over traditional consumption. Transparently sharing these audit results and metrics can help dispel misconceptions about environmental claims being merely marketing ploys. Furthermore, to address concerns about transportation-related carbon emissions, companies/platforms could implement eco-friendly delivery options, collaborate with carbon-offset programmes, or even incentivise local sharing to reduce long-distance shipments. Concerning the environmental impact of the cleaning process, companies/platforms can advocate for and implement greener cleaning methods, such as the use of eco-friendly detergents and water-saving techniques.

Fashion sharing companies/platforms could gradually rebuild trust and reinforce their commitment to genuine sustainability by showcasing these tangible steps and consistently educating users about the net environmental benefits.

The three types of fashion sharing benefits identified in this research provide the managerial implications concerning how to make various marketing strategies based on different benefits derived and treasured by individuals. For example, this study emphasises the significant social benefits of fashion sharing; it is not just about utility or sustainability but also about personal narratives, memories and relationships. For example, sharing a garment that once belonged to a loved one can elicit strong feelings of nostalgia, making the item's story as valuable as the item itself, like the belt of Clara's (female, 23, UK) mother (in 6.3.4.1.1). Companies/platforms could capitalise on this sentiment by launching campaigns that encourage users to share the stories behind their products. In this context, nostalgia marketing can be a particularly effective tool. Encouraging users to delve into their memories and recount social stories associated with shared fashion items can foster deeper community connections. A contest in which the most touching or intriguing story wins a prize could not only increase engagement but also raise the perceived value of shared items. Furthermore, by emphasising and celebrating these personal narratives on social media, companies/platforms can enrich the sharing experience, making it more about community, history and personal connections than just transactional exchanges.

8.5 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

While contributing valuable insights into fashion sharing behaviour, the current study has several limitations that must be acknowledged but that also present areas for future research. Firstly, the scope of the study was broad, as it included participants from a wide range of cultural

backgrounds without focusing on any specific cultural context. While this allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, it made it difficult to isolate the influence of cultural factors on fashion sharing behaviour. Culture is an important determinant of consumption behaviour (Hofstede, 1980), and its impact on fashion sharing remains an important topic that warrants further investigation. The lack of specificity in the cultural context of this study limits the ability to draw conclusions about the role of cultural norms, values, and practices in shaping fashion sharing behaviour. Therefore, future research could look into fashion sharing in specific cultural contexts and investigate attitudes and practices towards fashion sharing in different countries or regions, taking into account socio-cultural factors such as collectivism and individualism, and socioeconomic factors and gender norms in diverse countries. Examining the cultural dynamics that shape fashion sharing could provide valuable insights into the factors that facilitate or impede non-ownership fashion consumption in various parts of the world.

The current research is within a general fashion context because the focus of this research is on sharing behaviour. However, different types of fashion may influence consumers' sharing experiences (Amatulli et al., 2021). Therefore, how consumers might experience fashion sharing differently depending on the kinds of fashion items they share can be a fruitful area for future research. More research is required to investigate how consumers perceive and interact with various types of fashion, such as luxury, fast fashion and high-street fashion. Do people share luxury fashion items differently than they do fast fashion? What are the underlying motivations and behaviours that lead to the sharing of various types of fashion? Understanding how a brand or type of fashion influences sharing behaviour may provide more insight into the nature of fashion sharing and the role of fashion brands in shaping these behaviours.

The third recommendation is for insights into online fashion sharing behaviour with various research designs. This study predominantly focused on UGC on Instagram and semi-structured online interviews. This approach provided valuable information about fashion sharing at a time when research could only be conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this research had the chance to obtain diverse fashion sharing experiences from research participants around the world. However, future research could delve deeper into online fashion sharing behaviours by employing different research designs, such as sentiment analysis, or conducting ethnographic studies offline or on online fashion sharing platforms. Exploring other social media platforms, such as TikTok or Pinterest, could also shed light on how different social media environments influence fashion sharing behaviour.

The fourth research direction is to explore the perspective of fashion lenders. This research has focused mainly on the individuals participating in fashion sharing, yet there is limited knowledge about the perspectives of fashion lenders. Future research could explore the experiences and motivations of fashion lenders who contribute to the fashion sharing ecosystem, including P2P platforms, rental services and fashion libraries. Understanding the perspective of fashion lenders would provide a holistic view of the fashion sharing ecosystem and offer insights into how fashion sharing can be encouraged and facilitated further.

The last recommendation is to further explore the role of fashion sharing in consumers' dynamic identity projects. This study has shown that fashion sharing can contribute to individuals' identity projects. To expand on this finding, future research could explore the deeper and evolving relationship between fashion sharing and identity construction throughout different life stages, starting from childhood. Investigating the role of fashion sharing in shaping a

person's self-identity and social identity across their lifespan would provide rich insights into the lifelong influence of fashion sharing on personal and social identity.

8.6 Chapter Summary

The research explores individuals' fashion sharing experiences through the lens of identity theory. This chapter summarised the research findings to address the four research questions that had been set, the methodological and theoretical contributions, limitations and the author's recommendations for future research.

Specifically, the key contributions of this research include the definition of fashion sharing, the identification of its characteristics and an exploration of the benefits that consumers derive from fashion sharing. Concerning other theoretical achievements, this research contributes to the understanding of the mutual relationship between fashion sharing and consumer identity project construction, the role of fashion sharing in relationships, the connection between fashion sharing and consumer concerns about sustainability and shifting the research focus from the economic to the affective aspects of everyday life. On a practical level, this research advises managers of fashion sharing platforms and companies to focus their marketing strategies primarily on resolving distrust between users/consumers, as well as between users/consumers and sharing platforms/companies. Additionally, they can utilise the fashion sharing benefits identified in this research to inform their marketing strategies.

APPENDICES

Appendix 6.1 Interview Discussion Guide

Discussion Guide - the experience of fashion sharing

1. The opening (5 minutes)

You are being invited to participate in this study which aims to explore consumers' experiences of temporarily accessing fashion items.

a. Before we start...

- Please confirm that you have received the participant information sheet;
- Please go through the informed consent form and sign the form online;
- Please note that you can leave the interview if you want.

b. Nature of the interview and how data will be used

- This conversation might take about an hour;
- During the interview, the conversation will be saved by the screen-recording software;
- Recording for recollection purposes/quotes;
- The data collected during the interviews will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, research publications and reports;
- All data from the research will be destroyed after 10 years;
- Your personal information will be safely and privately stored while our conversation will be treated as confidential;
- Please feel free to share your ideas and experiences.

2. Warm up (5 minutes) Can you tell me about yourself?

- Name
- Age
- Country/region
- Occupation
- Education
- Online habits
- Why choose to participate in our conversation

3. Exploring fashion and sharing experiences (10 minutes)

Please tell me in your own words:

- How do you define fashion?
- What does fashion mean to you?

Let's discuss some general questions about sharing fashion items:

- Do you engage in borrowing, lending, co-owning and fashion rental, or just one of them? (Have you ever heard about rental fashion business?)
- How often do you engage in sharing fashion items?

- Roughly how many items have you shared in the past month/year?
- Where do you share fashion items, online or offline? Or in what ways do you share the fashion item? Why?
- Who do you prefer to share with? Why?
- Why do you share fashion items with others?
- Do you have any preference regarding the types of fashion goods you are willing to share with others? Why?
- What are the benefits of accessing fashion items rather than owning them?
- Are there any negative aspects to sharing fashion items? Do you have any concerns about sharing items with others? If so, what are they?
- Is fashion sharing something that many people you know do? Is it a common practice among your friends and/or family?

4. The experiential differences between accessing and owning (25 minutes)

- Would you mind showing pictures of the fashion items you have shared with others? Screen sharing would be fine.
- Would you mind telling me a little bit more about your experiences of accessing and using the item(s) that you are showing me in this/these picture(s)?

If you are a **borrower/renter**, probe:

- When and how long did you access it for?
- Why did you access it (purpose)? Does your fashion sharing experience reach your purpose?
- Whom did you borrow/rent from, a) your friends or families, b) other users of fashion sharing or c) online platforms or offline companies?
- If from **your friends or families**, how did you tell them that you wanted to borrow this item from them? Or did they take the initiative to lend you this item?
- If from **other people engaging in fashion sharing**, how did you contact the owner? How did you feel about your interactions?
- If from **sharing platforms**, how did it work? How did you feel about the renting service provided by the platforms?
- How long did you keep it/them?
- How did you feel about the experience of accessing this item (e.g., feelings when you used it/them or self-identity)?
- What sorts of things do you like or dislike about your fashion sharing experience?
- Do you feel any difference when using shared items and items owned by yourself? If so, what are they?
- Do you think your experiences of sharing fashion items influence you in a positive or negative way? Why do you think that? And how does your fashion sharing experience influence you?
- How did others react to the item(s) you borrowed? What did they say? How did you feel about their comments?

- Did you actively or passively tell people you know that you shared this (these) item(s) with others? Why?
- Do you think that your self-identity, appearance or mood was enhanced when using the item(s) you shared? Was this 'enhancement' short or long term?
- How did you feel when you returned the item to its owner?
- Have you ever shared any fashion item with people from different genders or different generations? If so, why did you do that? And how did you feel? What are the differences between sharing fashion items with intergender/intergeneration and with the same gender/generation?
- What's your opinion or attitude toward the future of fashion sharing?

If you're a **lender**:

- When and for how long did you lend it to others?
- Why did you lend it (purpose)?
- Does your fashion sharing experience satisfy your needs?
- Whom did you lend it to, a) your friends or families, b) other users of fashion sharing via online platforms or offline companies?
- If to **your friends or families**, how did they tell you when they want to borrow this item from you? Or did you take the initiative to lend this item to them?
- If to **other people engaging in fashion sharing**, how did this work? Did the borrower contact you first and ask you any information about this item? If so, what did you talk about when they were about to share this item? How did you feel about your interactions?
- Did you talk with your borrower(s)/renter(s) about their fashion sharing experiences? What did you talk about? How do you feel about their experiences?
- How did you feel about the experience of lending this item?
- What sorts of things do you like or dislike about your fashion sharing experience?
- Did you actively or passively tell people you know that you have engaged in fashion sharing activities? Why?
- How did you feel when others returned the item to you?
- What kind of fashion items would you not like to lend to others? Why?
- Have you ever shared any fashion item with people from different genders or different generations? If so, why did you do that? And how did you feel? What are the differences between sharing fashion items with intergender/intergeneration and with same gender/generation?

If you're both a borrower/renter and a lender:

In this part, I will flexibly combine the questions from the previous two sets of questions depending on conversations between the participants and me. For example, if I didn't get information rich enough concerning one form (e.g., renting/borrowing) of fashions sharing activities, I will focus on another form (e.g., lending) of participants' fashion sharing experiences.

5. Fashion sharing and sustainability (10 minutes)

- Is sustainability a concern when it comes to fashion? How so?
- Do sustainability/environmental considerations play a role in your decision to share rather than own fashion items?
 - If yes, do sustainability/environmental considerations influence your sharing practices and experience? How?
- Have the fashion sharing experiences that you have had reduced your desire to buy or own new fashion items in the future? How so? Why?
- Have the fashion sharing experiences that you have had extended the lifespan of your fashion pieces? How so and why?
- *How does your fashion sharing experience relate to sustainability? (Be flexible about this question)*
- Have you ever considered sharing fashion items on an ongoing basis?
- Would/Do you encourage people to engage in fashion sharing activities? Why? How?
- Do you think engaging in fashion sharing activities is better than buying fashion products from the brands which claim to be sustainable? Why?

6. Fashion sharing and COVID-19 (5 minutes)

- Do you think the COVID-19 outbreak has influenced the way you think about and practice fashion purchasing and/or fashion sharing? How so and why?
- Do you think your attitudes towards fashion sharing activities have been changed by the pandemic?

7. The closing (5 minutes)

- The conversation is going to end now, so is there anything you would like to share which we haven't discussed previously? Or do you have any question for me and this research?
- Ensure the informed consent form has been signed.
- Thank you so much!

Appendix 6.2 Participant Information Sheet



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EXPLORING FASHION SHARING EXPERIENCES

Participant Information Sheet for Interview Participants

8th September 2020

Hello

My name is Yiqun (Kelly) Wang, a doctoral researcher from the University of Birmingham in the UK. You are being invited to participate in this study which aims to explore consumers' experiences of temporarily accessing fashion items (fashion sharing experience). Before you make a decision to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please feel free to discuss it with others if you wish. Thanks for reading this.

What is the purpose of the research?

This research aims to explore individuals' experiences of temporarily accessing fashion through sharing practices. Consumers can share fashion items by engaging in renting, lending and/or borrowing, whether it will be via online platforms or face-to-face through any type of informal sharing with friends and family, for example. This research seeks to understand the meanings that consumers make as they engage in various fashion sharing practices and whether and how such meanings and experiences relate to sustainability motives.

Why have I been chosen for the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you have indicated that:

- You are aged 18 or over;
- You have experience of sharing fashion items with others, which could be online or offline;
- You are willing to share pictures of the item(s) which you will mention during the interview and the story behind it/them.

Please note: If you do not meet the first two criteria, you cannot be recruited for this research.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

I guarantee that your personal information collected during the interview will be kept strictly confidential and your personal information will not be identified, but your answers to research questions and your images of fashion items will be used in research analysis, reports and publications. By consenting to having your interview video/audio-recorded, you are agreeing to all recordings being transcribed verbatim. Once transcribed, your interview video/audio-recorded will be destroyed. Full



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transcripts from the interviews will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisors. Transcripts will be stored in the Birmingham Environment for Academic Research (BEAR) Data Storage System. All data from the research will be destroyed after 10 years from the date of research publication.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you want to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a 'consent form' to show that you understand your rights as well as the requirements of the research. If you decide to take part, you are still free to quit the research by 31st May 2021 before data analysis and without giving any reason. No questions will be asked if you stop. However, I will be very grateful and pleased if you decide to participate in this research.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this research, I will contact you to arrange a date and time for our online interview. You could send me the pictures of the fashion item(s) you have shared in the past via e-mail before or during the interview. These pictures will be securely kept by me and will be used in my PhD thesis, research publications and reports.

Where will the research interviews take place and how long would the interview take?

The interviews will be carried out online via Skype, Zoom or other software supporting video meeting according to your preference. The time it takes for an interview varies, depending on how much you have to say, but most interviews last no more than an hour.

What will happen with the results of this research?

The results of this study will be presented through my PhD thesis, academic publications, posters and reports to various audiences interested in fashion and sustainability. Particularly, if you are interested in the research results, I will send you a summary of them when available.

Who is organising the research?

The researcher carrying out this study is Yiqun (Kelly) Wang, who is a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. She is under the supervision of Dr Caroline Moraes and Prof Isabelle Szmigin. If there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher at YXW1090@student.bham.ac.uk.

Thank you so much for reading this information sheet.

Yiqun Kelly Wang

Appendix 6.3 Consent Form



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EXPLORING FASHION SHARING EXPERIENCES

You are invited to participate in this research aiming to explore consumers' experience of sharing fashion items. Your participation will be in the form of **an online interview** via Skype, Zoom or other software supporting video meeting and you are required to have experience of sharing fashion item(s).

Before deciding to participate in this research, it is important for you to **read the accompanying participant information sheet**.

By consenting to have your interview audio/video-recorded, all audio/video-recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed verbatim. Transcripts from the research will only be viewed by the researcher (and the supervisors of the researcher) and will be stored in a secure location until they are destroyed (i.e., 10 years after the completion of this study).

Please take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to participate in this research. If there is anything not clear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research, please do not hesitate to contact Yiqun (Kelly) Wang at YXW1090@student.bham.ac.uk

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet dated 8 th September 2020 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES	NO
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw (including the information I provide) <u>until 31st May 2021</u> without giving a reason.	YES	NO
4	I understand that all the information I provide will be anonymised and personal details will be treated in confidence.	YES	NO
5	I am happy for my answers to research questions and the images I bring to the interview to be used in the researcher's PhD thesis, academic publications, posters and reports.	YES	NO
6	I am happy for my interview to be audio/video-recorded and transcribed.	YES	NO
7	I agree to take part in the above study.	YES	NO
Participant's Name		Date	Signature
If you would like to receive a summary of the research results when available, please provide your email address:		[Insert email here]	
Researcher		Date	Signature

Version 1.0 [8th Sep 2020]

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