

Rental Clothing Adoption in Sustainable Fashion: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Framework



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Abstract

The environmental impacts of the fashion industry have driven interest in sustainable consumption models such as rental clothing services, which allow consumers to access garments without ownership, thereby extending product lifecycles and reducing waste. However, inconsistent willingness to use these services shows the need for a stronger theoretical understanding of adoption factors. This study systematically reviews the literature on factors influencing consumers' willingness to use rental clothing services, guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, and evaluates 55 scholarly articles from 2000 to 2025. The findings show that economic, social, environmental, and experiential benefits promote adoption, whereas barriers include risk, hygiene concerns, social stigma, attachment to ownership, and practical issues. Trust, service quality, social influences, and ease of use are crucial in adoption decisions for rental clothing (Song et al., 2025). This study integrates the theory of planned behaviour, perceived value theory, and the trust-risk perspective to develop a conceptual framework explaining how perceived value influences attitudes and intentions to use rental clothing services. This study integrates previous findings into a comprehensive framework and offers practical insights for rental fashion platforms seeking to improve consumer acceptance.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion, Rental Clothing, Circular Economy, Consumer Willingness

Introduction

The fashion industry is among the most resource-intensive and environmentally damaging sectors, generating about 92 million tons of textile waste annually, much of which ends up in landfills (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Fast fashion has worsened this issue by accelerating production and consumption cycles, leading to frequent disposal. While affordable fashion has increased accessibility, it has shortened product lifespans and normalised “throwaway fashion” (Bick et al., 2018; Blazquez et al., 2020; Chua, 2019). As a result, sustainable fashion must balance providing variety and novelty with minimising overconsumption.

Rental clothing offers a potential solution by allowing consumers to use garments temporarily rather than owning them. This access-based model reduces ownership burdens, extends garment use, and supports circular economy principles (Durgee & O'Connor, 1995; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010; Pedersen & Netter, 2015). It also provides affordability, variety, novelty, and access to premium fashion.

The sustainability impact of rental clothing depends on consumer acceptance. Many hesitate due to concerns about shared use, garment hygiene and quality, social risks, and reliance on service providers (Becker-Leifhold & Iran,

2018; Mukendi & Henninger, 2020). Affordability, fashion experimentation, convenience, and environmental concern can encourage adoption. Ultimately, the success of rental clothing depends on consumers viewing it as valuable, trustworthy, and socially acceptable.

Theoretical understanding of rental clothing adoption is fragmented, as prior research often examines perceived value, attitude, trust, risk, social influence, or sustainability concerns in isolation (Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Lang, 2018). Although research on fashion rental is growing, integrated frameworks that link service features, consumer psychology, and behavioural outcomes are still needed (Jain et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025). This study addresses this gap by combining perceived value, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) constructs, and the trust-risk perspective into a unified conceptual framework. It explains the factors influencing consumers' willingness to adopt rental clothing services.

Research Objectives

Given the rising interest in rental clothing for sustainable fashion and scattered literature, this study aims to:

1. To review the existing literature on rental clothing adoption in the context of sustainable fashion consumption.
2. To identify the key drivers and barriers influencing consumers' willingness to adopt rental clothing services.
3. To examine the role of major theoretical perspectives, namely the theory of planned behaviour, perceived value theory, and the trust-risk perspective, in explaining rental clothing adoption.
4. To develop an integrated conceptual framework for understanding consumers' willingness to adopt rental clothing services.

Literature Review

Sustainable Fashion and Circular Economy

Sustainable fashion emphasises responsible resource utilization, waste minimization, product longevity, and conscious consumption. Circular

economy principles advocate for reuse, sharing, repair, and access-based models to decrease reliance on new production (Bocken et al., 2016; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Rental clothing aligns with these principles by allowing garments to circulate among multiple users rather than remain underutilised in individual wardrobes.

Previous research identifies rental clothing as a sustainable and circular practice. Pedersen and Netter (2015) characterise fashion libraries and rental models as mechanisms to extend garment use and reduce waste. Niinimäki and Hassi (2011) associate longer garment life cycles with reduced environmental impact. Fletcher (2014) similarly situates access-based fashion within broader initiatives to decrease overproduction and promote mindful consumption. Nevertheless, recent life-cycle analyses indicate that circular models are not inherently sustainable. Grey et al. (2025) report that circular clothing models can reduce environmental impacts, although the extent of the benefits depends on the specific model and context. Short-term rental, in particular, demonstrates comparatively limited gains. Therefore, the environmental value of rental clothing is contingent upon the actual displacement of new purchases, consumer adoption, and operational efficiency.

Rental Clothing as an Alternative Consumption Model

Rental clothing represents a distinct alternative consumption model. In contrast to conventional apparel purchasing, it provides temporary access without conferring ownership. This model is particularly relevant for premium, luxury, or occasion-specific garments, which possess high symbolic value but are used infrequently. Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) argue that renting mitigates the burdens associated with ownership, while Iran and Schrader (2017) characterize collaborative fashion consumption as a departure from linear clothing use. Jain et al. (2022) demonstrate that fashion rental is shaped by unique enablers and inhibitors, indicating that it constitutes more than a mere extension of traditional retailing.

Consumers' Motivations and Barriers to Adoption

Existing literature identifies economic, social, environmental, and experiential values as the primary drivers of adoption. Economic value refers to cost savings and access to premium brands (Armstrong et al., 2016; Lang & Armstrong, 2018). Social value in ethical consumption involves individual perceptions of image and participation in trends. Environmental value is associated with waste reduction and responsible consumption, particularly among eco-conscious consumers (Becker-Leifhold, 2018; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Experiential value arises from novelty, convenience, flexibility, and the opportunity to try new styles without long-term commitment (Iran & Schrader, 2017; Tukker, 2015).

Perceived risk, hygiene concerns, social stigma, attachment to ownership, and logistical inconvenience constrain adoption. Mukendi and Henninger (2020) show that consumer hesitation is linked to risk, trust, and ownership issues in the fashion rental context. Becker-Leifhold and Iran (2018) identify hygiene concerns and resistance to non-ownership as ongoing barriers in collaborative fashion consumption. Lang (2018) found that financial, performance, psychological, and social risks negatively affect attitudes toward fashion renting. These barriers cause consumers to view rental clothing not only as a sustainable alternative but also as a service marked by uncertainty.

Trust, Social Influence and Behavioural Perspectives

Trust, social influence, and perceived behavioural control are key to adopting collaborative fashion. Trust is crucial as consumers depend on platforms for hygiene, quality, delivery, and reliability. Lang and Armstrong (2018) and Iran et al. (2019) show that attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioural control impact adoption. Savelli et al. (2024) also find that social norms, perceived control, and benefits influence rental intentions. These studies indicate adoption increases when rental clothing is socially accepted, easy to use, and trusted.

Research Gap

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain. Most studies focus on initial willingness rather than repeat use, loyalty, or long-term engagement. Research is mainly based in Western contexts, limiting insights into cultural differences in ownership norms, hygiene expectations, and social meanings. Studies often analyse value, attitude, trust, risk, social influence, and environmental concern separately rather than within a unified model. Service design factors, such as platform usability, subscription options, and logistics, also need further exploration. This study addresses these gaps by synthesizing the literature and developing an integrated conceptual framework for consumer willingness to adopt rental clothing.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Review Protocol

This study adopts a systematic literature review to synthesise existing research and develop a conceptual understanding of consumers' willingness to adopt rental clothing services. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure transparency and rigour (Page et al., 2021). Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight for studies published between 2000 and 2025. Keywords included rental clothing, fashion rental, collaborative fashion consumption, sustainable fashion consumption, circular fashion, consumer willingness, and adoption intention.

Search Strategy and Study Selection

A total of 215 records were identified through database and manual searches. After removing 45 duplicates, 170 records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 85 were excluded for limited relevance. The remaining 85 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 30 were excluded for being non-academic, outside the research focus, or methodologically unsuitable. Finally, 55 studies were retained for qualitative synthesis. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and relevant scholarly book chapters on rental clothing, collaborative fashion consump-

tion, sustainable fashion, and consumer adoption. Blogs, news articles, and studies unrelated to fashion or rental models were excluded.

The study selection process is summarised in Figure 1.

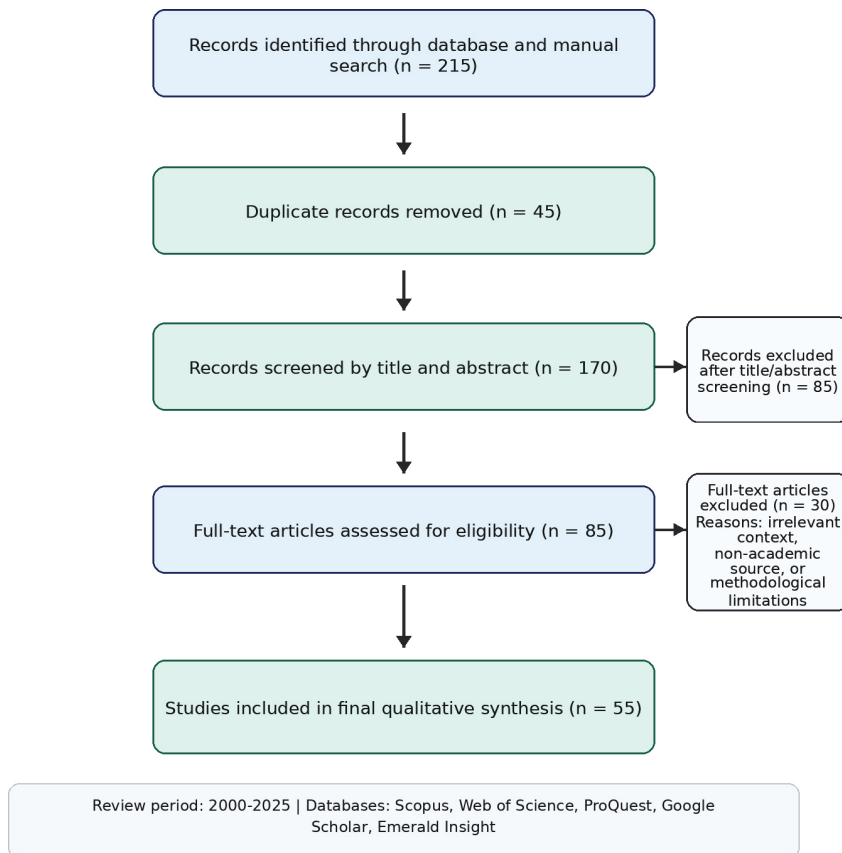


Fig. 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection. Source: Developed by the authors.

Data Extraction, Thematic Analysis and Framework Development

For each study, data on the author, year, context, method, theoretical lens, and key findings were extracted. Thematic synthesis was employed to analyse the studies. Four major themes were identified: the context of sustainable fashion and the circular economy; rental clothing as an alternative consumption model; consumer motivations and barriers; and trust, social influence, and behavioural perspectives. These themes were analysed using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Perceived Value Theory, and the Trust–Risk perspective to construct the integrated framework.

Findings and Discussion

The review finds that rental clothing is often presented as a circular fashion strategy, but its environmental benefits depend on specific conditions. Rental models only extend garment use and reduce waste when they replace new purchases and operate through efficient service systems. These findings support recent arguments that circular fashion should be addressed as both a behavioural and managerial challenge, not just an environmental claim (Abdelmeguid et al., 2024; Gray et al., 2025).

The findings indicate that consumer willingness depends on the balance between perceived

value and risk. Economic value promotes adoption through cost savings and access to high-end garments. Social value motivates consumers to experiment, express identity, and follow trends. Environmental value appeals to those seeking responsible consumption, while experiential value offers enjoyment, novelty, and flexibility. These factors suggest rental clothing should be marketed not only as sustainable, but also as desirable, convenient, and emotionally rewarding. Significant barriers remain, with hygiene concerns especially prominent due to shared use. Other perceived risks include fit, quality, damage, delivery, returns, and social judgment. Psychological attachment to ownership can also deter adoption, particularly when clothing is tied to identity and status. These barriers differ by demographic and cultural context. Younger, digitally active consumers may prioritize variety, convenience, and influencer endorsement, while those in ownership-oriented or socially conservative contexts may be more sensitive to stigma, hygiene, and status. Cross-cultural research, such as that of Iran et al. (2019), highlights that social norms and perceived control vary across markets.

Trust and effective service design are essential. Clear hygiene protocols, quality assurance, easy booking, reliable delivery, and simple returns reduce uncertainty and increase perceived control. Social media presence and peer approval help

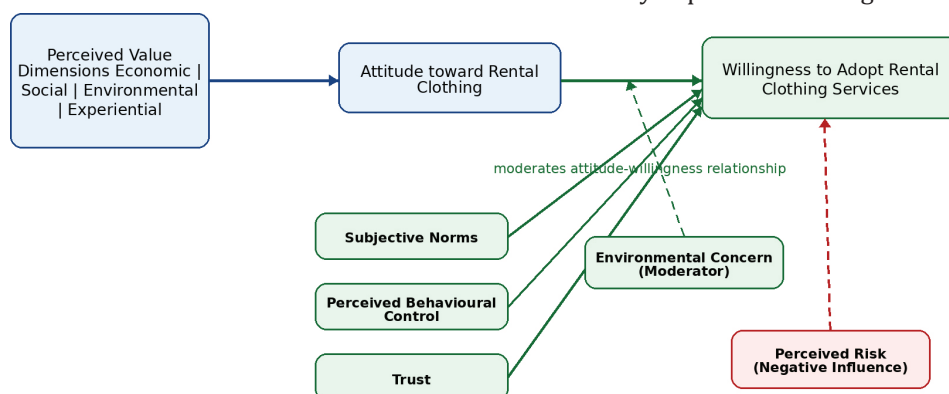
normalise the use of rental clothing. Overall, adoption is driven by value-based motivation, cultural meaning, service reliability, and perceived risk.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The study introduces an integrated framework that combines Perceived Value Theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and the Trust–Risk perspective. Economic, social, environmental, and experiential values shape consumers' attitudes toward rental clothing. These attitudes, along with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, influence willingness to adopt. Consumers are more likely to adopt rental clothing when they view it positively, perceive social acceptance, and feel confident in using the service.

Trust and perceived risk are central service-related factors. Trust in hygiene, garment quality, delivery, and platform reliability increases willingness to adopt, while concerns about cleanliness, fit, social judgment, and logistics reduce it. Environmental concern further reinforces the connection between a positive attitude and willingness, particularly for eco-conscious consumers. The model explains the adoption of rental clothing as the combined result of value perception, social acceptance, behavioural ease, trust, risk, and sustainability orientation.

The integrated conceptual framework proposed in this study is presented in Figure 2.



Based on Perceived Value Theory, Theory of Planned Behaviour and Trust-Risk perspective

Fig. 2: Integrated Conceptual Framework of Consumers' Willingness to Adopt Rental Clothing Services.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the reviewed literature.

Implications of the Study

Theoretically, this study integrates previously fragmented adoption factors into a unified conceptual framework. It extends Perceived Value Theory, TPB, and the Trust–Risk perspective to the context of rental clothing, demonstrating that adoption relies on the interplay among value, behaviour, trust, and sustainability.

Practically, rental platforms should emphasise not only environmental benefits but also affordability, fashion variety, convenience, and enjoyment. They should reduce barriers by ensuring visible hygiene standards, quality checks, transparent policies, easy returns, and reliable delivery. Customer reviews, guarantees, responsive support, and influencer or peer-based communication can further build trust and address social stigma.

For sustainability practice, the study finds that rental clothing supports circular fashion only when it is convenient, credible, and socially accepted. Platforms should design services that make sustainable consumption easy, rather than relying solely on environmental concern to drive adoption.

Future Research Directions

Future research should address repeat use, loyalty, satisfaction, and long-term engagement, rather than focusing solely on initial adoption. Additional cross-cultural studies are needed to clarify how ownership norms, hygiene expectations, and social meanings influence adoption in various markets, including non-Western contexts. The proposed framework should be empirically tested through quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Researchers should also examine how platform usability, subscription models, garment availability, and delivery and return systems affect both adoption and continued use.

Conclusion

This study systematically reviewed literature on consumers' willingness to adopt rental clothing services in sustainable fashion consumption. The findings show that adoption is encouraged by economic, social, environmental, and experiential values, but limited by perceived risk, hygiene

concerns, social stigma, attachment to ownership, and logistical inconvenience. Trust, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are critical in translating positive attitudes into willingness to participate.

The study presents an integrated framework connecting perceived value, attitude, trust, risk, social influence, behavioural control, and environmental concern. Rental clothing represents both a circular fashion opportunity and a consumer-behaviour challenge. Its future in circular fashion systems will depend on whether platforms can make renting trustworthy, convenient, socially acceptable, and effective in reducing unnecessary new consumption.

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