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**WHEN DO SOCIAL NORMS
DRIVE ACCESS-BASED-CONSUMPTION?**
The role of message frame and product category

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Abstract

Considering the global challenge of overconsumption and the potential benefits of alternative consumption models such as access-based consumption, this research investigates the influence of social norms on trial intent for access-based service platforms. We leverage the focus theory of normative conduct as a framework to evaluate the influence of norms on trial of rental platforms.

We explore the influence of the type of norm (descriptive vs. injunctive) and the message framing (positive vs. negative) considering two product categories (i.e., fashion, tools) using a 2x2x2 online between-subjects experiment. We demonstrate the role played by injunctive norms in driving relatively new/uncommon behaviors such as access-based consumption. We also show a triple interaction effect of norm-type, message frame and product category on consumer trial intent. For fashion, negatively framed injunctive normative messages that convey disapproval for hoarding clothes have the strongest impact on trial intent. For tools, positively framed injunctive normative messages are the most effective. We also show the moderating effect of environmental consciousness on the impact of injunctive norms on trial intent in the context of the fashion category. The impact is stronger among consumers who are less environmentally sensitive.

We take these learnings a step further to understand the implication of platform-type (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) on the results. We test positively and negatively framed injunctive norms, for B-to-C and C-to-C platforms, for the two product categories (i.e., fashion, tools) in a second 2x2x2 between-subjects experiment. We demonstrate how hygiene concerns differ on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories (but not so for physically distal categories), and show that injunctive norms can help address these concerns. Positively framed injunctive norms are shown to have the strongest impact for C-to-C fashion rentals, while negatively framed injunctive norms remain most impactful on B-to-C fashion rentals. For tools, positively framed injunctive norms are the most effective on B-to-C platforms; such an effect is not observed on C-to-C platforms.

These results have practical implications for marketers of platforms and provide fruitful research avenues for scholars studying the sharing economy from a marketing perspective.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighted in its 2018 report¹ the magnitude and scale of the challenge to keep global warming at 1.5 degrees. Today, after five long years, that challenge only looks bigger and harder². Our consumption habits contribute to greenhouse emissions and thereby, climate change³. The UN Emissions Gap Report (2020)⁴ insists upon the importance of changing consumption behaviors by individuals and states that the richest 1% of the world's population contributes towards more than twice the greenhouse emissions produced by the poorest 50%.

The wealthier people become, the more they consume, the more they pollute, the more waste they generate, and of course, the more emissions they emit. As a greater number of people around the world start becoming more affluent, this problem of overconsumption and the resulting emissions only aggravates. It is said that if everyone started to live and consume like an American, humanity would need more than five Earths to live⁵.

This chapter will look at how overconsumption has become such a big issue of our generation. We shall review how consumption has increased in the past years and the ill effects of excessive consumption on our planet and society. We will then take a step back to consider why we overconsume in the first place. We will explore both our behavioral instincts that lead us to consume more, and the external factors such as advertising and media that have further nudged us towards excessive consumption. We will conclude the chapter by defending that the access-based consumption model can help reduce the overconsumption challenge, and highlighting the key managerial questions that this thesis aims to address.

¹IPCC (2018), Global Warming of 1.5 degrees, accessed on March 20th 2024 at:

https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2022/06/SR15_Full_Report_HR.pdf.

² IPCC (2023), Urgent Climate action can secure a liveable future for all accessed on March 20th 2024 at:

<https://www.ipcc.ch/2023/03/20/press-release-ar6-synthesis-report/>.

³ Columbia Climate School (2020), How buying stuff drives climate change accessed on March 20th 2024

at:<https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/12/16/buying-stuff-drives-climate-change/>

⁴ UNEP (2020), UN Emissions Gap Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at:

<https://www.unep.org/emissions-gap-report-2020>.

⁵Earth overshoot day (2022), How many Earths? How many countries? accessed on March 20th 2024

at:<https://overshoot.footprintnetwork.org/how-many-earths-or-countries-do-we-need>.

1.1 BIG ISSUE : OVERCONSUMPTION

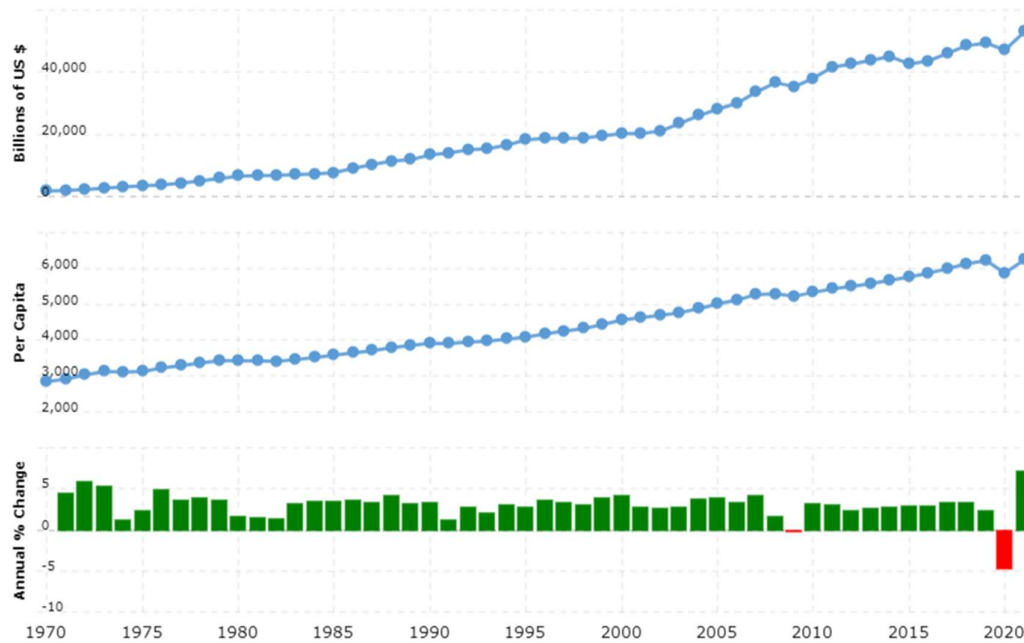
Defining “overconsumption” is complex. Let us therefore start with defining consumption first. The *American Marketing Association* defines consumption as “the direct and final use of goods or services in satisfying the wants of free human beings.” While consumption is nothing new, and people have been consuming goods for years, it was after the 1920s, that buying and consuming more became a sign of affluence or prosperity in the industrial economies of the West. In the past, people lived more conservatively, with fewer things and resources: buying and consuming were a lot more constrained.

But in the early 20th century, firms started churning out goods across different product categories and heavily advertising them. Very often, needs to buy and consume products were created, that had not existed before. This shift in the post-war period led to significant growth in ownership-based consumption that has today led to what is known as “Hyper-consumerism.” Botsman and Rogers (2011) define this as an endless acquisition of goods in ever-growing amounts.

According to the World Bank (2023), the total world consumer spending has been on a steady increase over the past years. Figure 1 shows how this has evolved over the last 60 years. The graph shows the continuous growth in consumer spending globally⁶. The consistent increase in consumption is observed clearly in this graph.

⁶ Macrotrends (2023), World Bank consumer spending accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/WLD/world/consumer-spending>.

Fig. 1. Consumer spending evolution⁷



While the numbers in Figure 1 are global, we also know that the richest 10% of the global consumers account for 60% of the total private consumption, according to World Bank’s consumption inequality indicators⁸. The richer and more developed a market becomes, the more it contributes towards consumption.

Here are a few disturbing statistics from the US market, which is recognized as the global leader in hyper-consumerism, as were presented in a recent paper (Stuart et al., 2020):

“Today, Americans have more cars than licensed drivers and, while they represent 5% of the world population, are responsible for 25% of fossil fuel consumption (Stuart et al., 2020). In addition, the average house size in the US grew from 1660 to 2740 Sq Feet (HUD, 2015). Correspondingly, credit card bills of an average household have increased to USD 16,883 with a total credit card debt of over 1 trillion”. Stuart et al. (2020) present these statistics to highlight the point that hyper-consumerism in the West (US in particular) is a real issue.

⁷ Macrotrends (2023), World Bank consumer spending accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/WLD/world/consumer-spending>

⁸ Our World, United Nations University (2009), Why do we over-consume, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/why-do-we-over-consume>.

In addition to hyper-consumerism, a term that is frequently discussed in reports in the context of man-made ecological damage, is overconsumption. Next, we try to explain how hyper-consumerism leads to the phenomenon of overconsumption. Hyper-consumerism has proven harmful effects on the environment: when we hyper-consume, a greater amount of Earth's resources is being used up; we say that Earth's resources are being overconsumed.

The total amount of resources our Earth has is limited. Only a certain limited amount of those resources can be consumed by society within a given timeframe (if we must ensure that the eco-system can sustain these consumption levels). Understanding the required limits helps us address the complex question of what is overconsumption. In objective terms, overconsumption is what happens when an eco-system can no longer sustain the use and consumption of its resources: its resources are being "overconsumed"⁹.

This will happen when we humans start consuming more of Earth's resources than we should consume in a given timeframe. Scientists have come up with a way to understand the amount of resources we have, and the intensity with which they are being used up¹⁰. This helps us understand when we have reached the threshold, and have started overconsuming. Scientists refer to this as the "Earth over-shoot day": the day on which we have used up the resources that we were allocated for the year, and have started overconsuming beyond the threshold.

Figure 2 brings the idea of overconsumption to life with two metrics: Earth's biocapacity and the Earth overshoot day¹¹. We observe on this graph that the over-shoot day has shifted significantly over the years, and since the start of the 21st century, is getting closer to July: only 7 or 8 months into the year, we are exhausting the resources that are allocated for the 12-month timeframe. With this level of consumption, we would require 1.6 or more Earths to sustain at a global level. The Earth's biocapacity represents the productivity of its

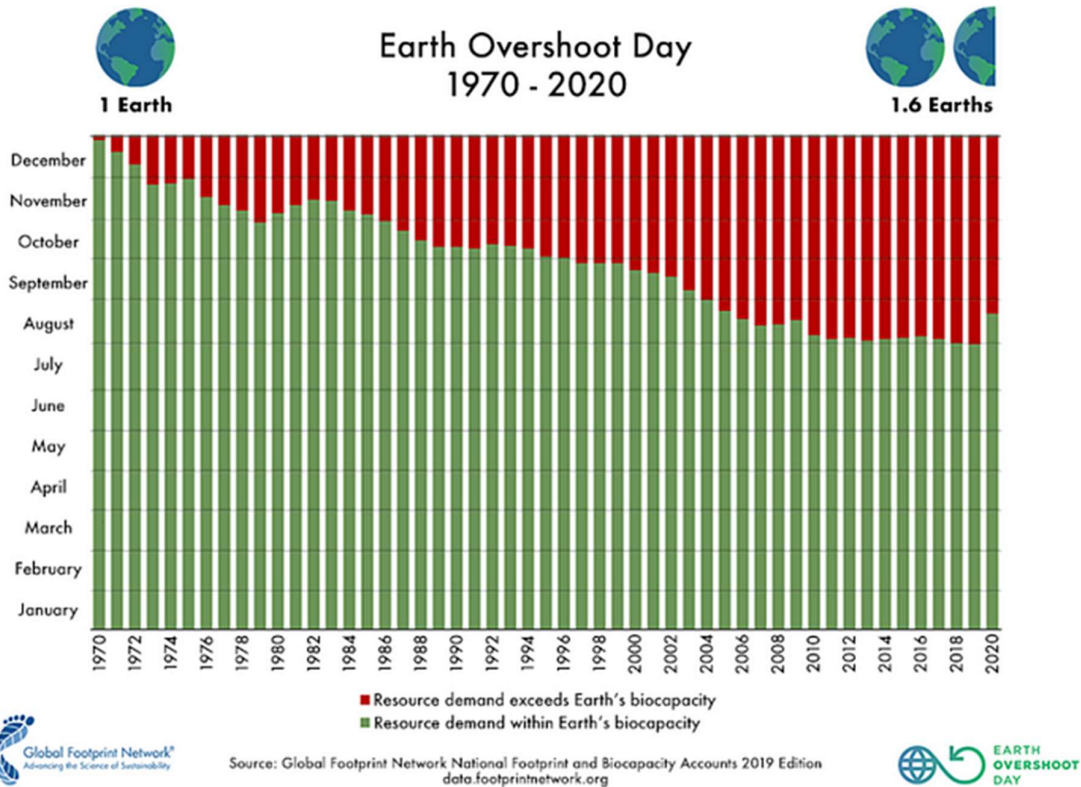
⁹ Netimpact.org (2020), Consequences of over-production and over-consumption, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://netimpact.org/blog/overproduction-overconsumption-consequences>

¹⁰ Medium, impactology (2021), What is overconsumption?, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://medium.com/impactology1/what-is-overconsumption-628449e62139>

¹¹ Earth overshoot day (2023), Earth overshoot day, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.overshootday.org/newsroom/past-earth-overshoot-days/>

ecological assets (e.g., cropland, grazing land, forests)¹². The graph shows the increasing strain on the Earth, with demand for resources exceeding Earth’s biocapacity.

Fig. 2. Earth overshoot day¹³



The level of overconsumption as provided by the number of Earths is shown to be higher in the developed countries than in the developing or under-developed ones. Figure 3 shows that countries scoring high on HDI: Human Development Index (which is an indicator of how developed a country is, and thereby how high its level of consumption is) score poorly on their ecological footprint (which is given by the number of Earths required to live and consume as if one lived in the given country). As a growing number of countries move

¹² How the footprint works? (2023), accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint/>

¹³ Earth overshoot day (2023), Earth overshoot day, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.overshootday.org/newsroom/past-earth-overshoot-days/>

towards development, the risk of more ecological damage with greenhouse gas emissions and pollution increases further.

Fig. 3. Ecological footprint and human development index¹⁴

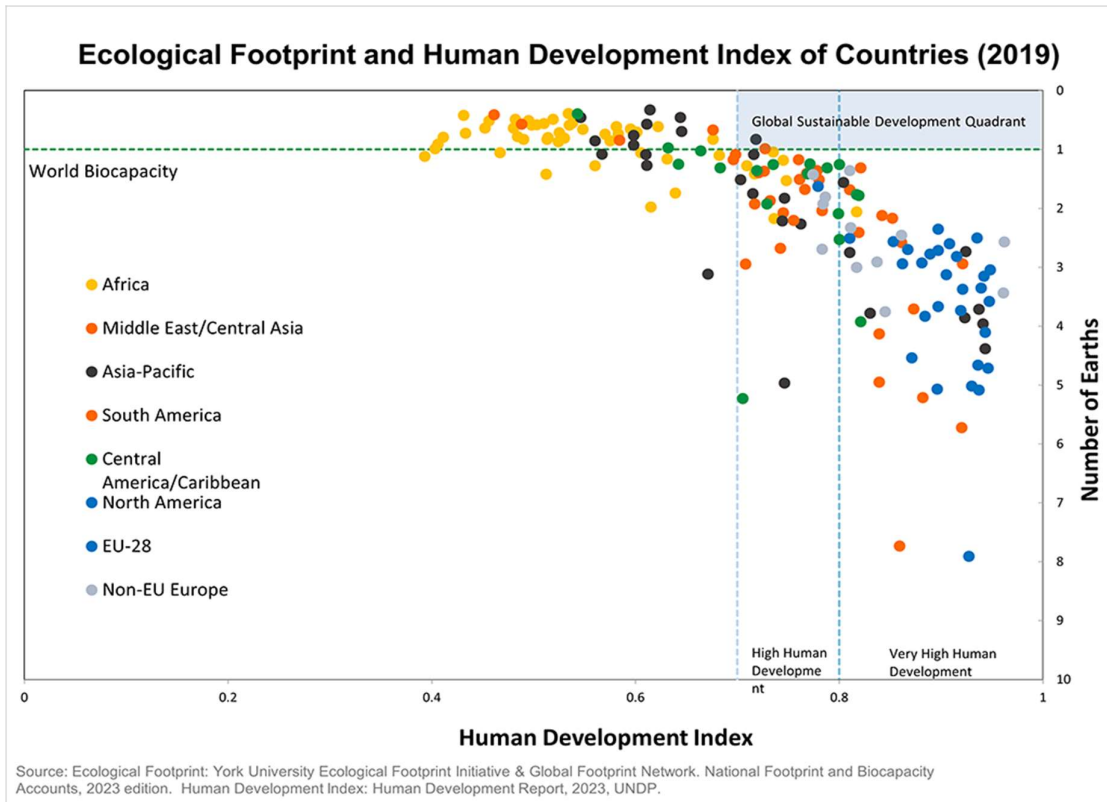


Figure. 3 shows that the blue quadrant at the top right is almost empty, meaning that high development, and thereby higher consumption, comes with an ecological cost. We see the most developed countries in the bottom right quadrant represented by a high development index, but also a higher ecological footprint, as represented by a higher number of Earths.

The top 10% of the world’s richest population produces half of the global carbon emissions¹⁵. The poorest 3.5 billion contribute towards only 10% of the carbon

¹⁴ Global Footprint Network (2019), Sustainable development accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/sustainable-development/>.

¹⁵ Oxfam media briefing (2015), Extreme carbon inequality, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: https://s3.amazonaws.com/oxfam-us/www/static/media/files/extreme-carbon-inequality-021215-en_UPDATED.pdf

emissions¹⁶. This statistic¹⁷ highlights the wide gap in carbon emissions between the rich and the poor. Figure 4 brings these statistics to life. Some estimates also show that the average lifestyle consumption carbon footprint of a person in the richest 1% of the world population could be 175 times that of someone in the poorest 10%¹⁸.

Similarly, some other estimates show that the richest 1% of Americans, Luxembourgers, Singaporeans, and Saudi Arabians contribute the most emissions in the world, with annual per capita emissions above 200tCO₂e¹⁹ (CO₂ equivalent). At the other end of the spectrum are the lowest-income populations of Honduras, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Malawi, whose contributions to emissions are almost 2,000 times lower, at around 0.1tCO₂e per person per year²⁰.

¹⁶ The conversation (2019), Emissions inequality: There is a gulf between global rich and the poor, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://theconversation.com/emissions-inequality-there-is-a-gulf-between-global-rich-and-poor-113804>

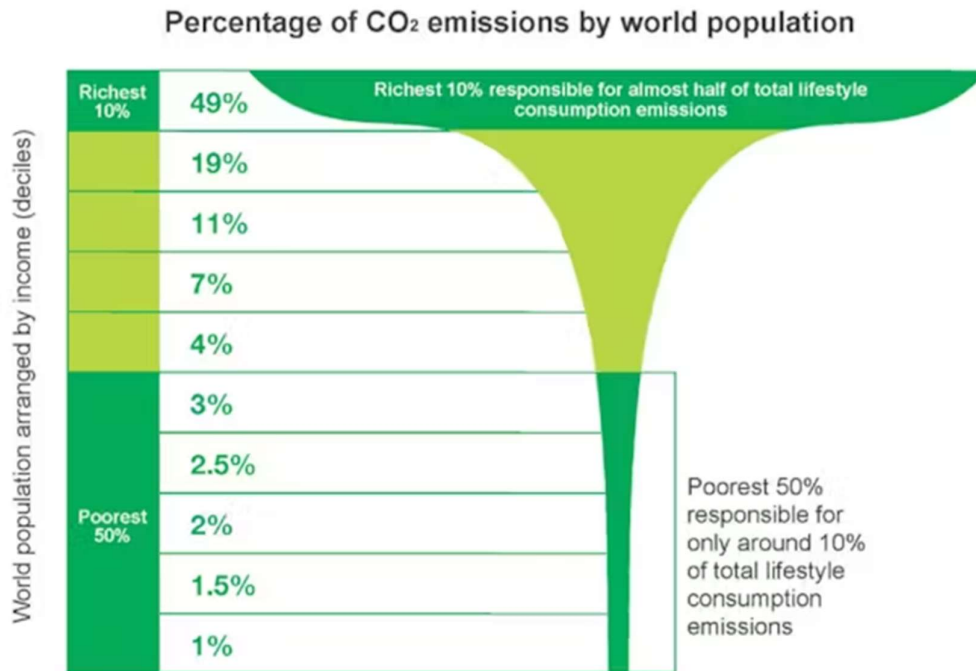
¹⁷ Oxfam. Org (2015), World's richest 10% produce half of carbone missions, while poorest 3.5 billion account for just a tenth, accessed on March 20th 2024 at : <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-carbon-emissions-while-poorest-35-billion-account>

¹⁸ Nature climate change (2019), Shift the from the super-poor to the super-rich, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-019-0402-3>

¹⁹ CEPR (2015), Carbon and inequality, from Kyoto to Paris, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/carbon-and-inequality-kyoto-paris>

²⁰ CEPR (2015), Carbon and inequality, from Kyoto to Paris, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/carbon-and-inequality-kyoto-paris>

Fig. 4. CO₂ emissions by world population²¹



Source: Oxfam

Source: Oxfam, World's richest 10% produce half of carbon emissions while poorest 3.5 billion account for just a tenth.

We dedicate the following section to look at some of the ill-effects that overconsumption causes. We provide a few additional details on the harms of overconsumption such as waste generation and pollution, and explain why this is a big issue that needs immediate action.

1.2 EFFECTS OF OVERCONSUMPTION

As discussed earlier, the ecological effect of overconsumption is summarized nicely in the statistics provided by the Global Footprint Network²² in the form of the Earth over-shoot day. Global Footprint Network is an international sustainability organization that expresses human ecological footprint. In 2023, Earth Overshoot Day fell on August 2nd; this means

²¹ Oxfam. Org (2015), World's richest 10% produce half of carbone missions, while poorest 3.5 billion account for just a tenth, accessed on March 20th 2024 at : <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-carbon-emissions-while-poorest-35-billion-account>

²² Global Footprint Network (2023), Earth overshoot day accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/>

that, on August 2nd, we exhausted nature's budget for the year²³. After this day, we lived on a deficit, using up extra resources and accumulating additional carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This means that in 2023, we humans used up as much ecological resources as if we lived on 1.7 Earths. Overconsumption in general leads to an increased use of Earth's resources. It has therefore become a major source of the ecological crisis.

Overconsumption also leads to waste generation, which has several harmful consequences for the planet and human health and well-being. According to the World Bank's report (2018)²⁴, global waste generation will outpace population growth by 2050, with the world generating 2.01 billion tons of solid waste annually. At least 33% of that waste is not managed in an ecologically safe way. It is projected that with population growth, continuous economic development across the world, and an increase in urbanization, global waste generated will increase by 70% over the next 30 years to 3.40 billion tons of waste annually²⁵. This is a concerning statistic that we need to take seriously.

A large part of the generated waste ends up in landfills and waste dumpsites. Take the example of clothing and fashion which is a category known to be a key polluter of the environment. Each year millions of tons of clothes are produced, worn, and thrown away. It is suggested by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, that: "Every second, the equivalent of a rubbish truck load of clothes is burnt or buried in landfills and dumpsites [...] Less than 1% of used clothing is turned back into new clothes²⁶ [...] Between 2000 and 2015, clothing production has doubled, while over the same period, utilization (i.e., the number of times an item of clothing is worn before it is thrown away) has decreased by 36%²⁷." On average, 85% of these unused/wasted textiles end up in landfills every year²⁸.

²³ Global Footprint Network (2023), Estimating the date of Earth overshoot day, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.overshootday.org/content/uploads/2023/06/Earth-Overshoot-Day-2023-Nowcast-Report.pdf>

²⁴ World Bank (2018), What a Waste 2.0 Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/what-a-waste/>

²⁵ World Economic Forum (2020), These facts show how unsustainable the fashion industry is, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/fashion-industry-carbon-unsustainable-environment-pollution/>

²⁶ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2023), Redesigning the future of fashion accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/fashion/overview>

²⁷ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021), Circular business models: redefining growth for a thriving fashion industry accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/fashion-business-models/overview>

²⁸ World Economic Forum (2020), These facts show how unsustainable the fashion industry is, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/fashion-industry-carbon-unsustainable-environment-pollution/>.

The waste generated and dumped in landfills poses environmental and health risks to humanity. It generates carbon emissions, contributes to global warming, pollutes oceans, and thereby leads to health hazards. According to the report by the World Bank (2018): “In 2016, 5% of global emissions were generated from solid waste management, excluding transportation²⁹”. Strong action against waste generation is vital today, in the absence of which, dump sites are projected to cause 8-10% of man-made greenhouse emissions by 2025³⁰.

It is reported that dumpsites receive 40% of the world’s waste and they serve over 3 billion people³¹. Waste and the emissions the sites generate have a direct impact on climate change. The trash in landfills releases methane gas and the burning of trash emits high levels of carbon dioxide which we know is a greenhouse gas causing global warming. Waste dumpsites and landfills pose a real danger to people living in their vicinity. According to the World Bank (2018)³², in 2017, landslides at these dumpsites accounted for over 150 deaths and hundreds of relocations in Colombo, Addis Ababa, Delhi, and Conakry; the fifty biggest dump sites in the world affect the daily lives of 64 million people.

Another important resource directly impacted by waste is the ocean. According to an article published in the Time magazine: “13 million tons of plastic end up in the world’s oceans each year³³”. In addition to dumping waste in the ocean, other human activities closely linked to our consumption patterns also contribute to plastic microfibers entering our oceans. Washing clothes, for instance, releases 500K tons of microfibers into the ocean each year which is equivalent to 50 billion plastic bottles³⁴. Many of the fibers found in the ocean are polyester, which is a plastic found in an estimated 60% of garments. It is

²⁹ World Bank (2018), An updated look into the future of solid waste management, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2018/09/20/what-a-waste-an-updated-look-into-the-future-of-solid-waste-management>

³⁰ International Solid Waste Association (2018), Closing Dumpsites accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.iswa.org/closing-the-worlds-biggest-dumpsites-task-force>

³¹ International Solid Waste Association (2018), Closing Dumpsites accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.iswa.org/closing-the-worlds-biggest-dumpsites-task-force/?v=11aedd0e4327>

³² World Bank Blogs (2018), Landslides, dumpsites and waste-pickers, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/landslides-dumpsites-and-waste-pickers>

³³ Time Magazine (2015), Here’s how much plastic ends up in the Earth’s oceans accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://time.com/3707112/plastic-in-the-ocean/>.

³⁴ World Bank (2018), What a waste – an updated look into the future of solid waste management, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2018/09/20/what-a-waste-an-updated-look-into-the-future-of-solid-waste-management>

estimated that 35% of all microplastics (i.e., very small pieces of plastic that never biodegrade) in the ocean come from synthetic textiles like polyester³⁵.

In addition to the challenge of increased greenhouse emissions and ocean pollution, poorly managed waste is contaminating the world in more than one way. In addition to the emission of greenhouse gases and pollution of the oceans, poorly managed waste also causes other ecological, economic, and health hazards. Water, air, and soil suffer from irreversible pollution because of waste. Burning waste releases toxic chemicals into the air, and leaks from landfills result in hazardous substances being left out in the soil which eventually would end up in the food that we consume. All of these have a direct, grave impact on human health. Increased waste, and its disposal into the environment cause serious diseases and conditions including (but not limited to) cancer, respiratory disorders, asthma, birth defects, cardiovascular diseases, etc.

The big issue of waste generated by overconsumption is not limited to the West but will soon become a global challenge. History has taught us that as countries become more developed, with growing disposable incomes for their citizens, their consumption patterns change and they start consuming more. Today the developed economies generate over a third of the waste globally, however, with economic development and increasing disposable incomes in the developing world, North Africa and Asia are likely to become large contributors to the world's waste by 2050. Overconsumption thus is posed to become a major source of a global ecological crisis.

Overconsumption leads to resource depletion and waste generation which are problems that lead to ecological disasters. The issue of waste and pollution generated by overconsumption is, therefore, a big one and needs immediate action. However, to identify actionable solutions to the problem, it is important to understand why we overconsume in the first place. The next section will take a step back to try and understand why we overconsume.

³⁵ International Union for Conservation of Nature (2017), IUCN Annual Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/47536>

1.3 WHY DO WE OVERCONSUME?

The ill effects of overconsumption and the waste that it generates are not unknown to people; they are mostly well-recognized. Irrespective of the well-known harms caused by overconsumption to the planet, to society, and to the individual, we continue to overconsume. The question this raises is, why do we do so?

Many human behaviors have an evolutionary basis. Evolutionary psychologists refer to this as the “ultimate reasons” for a behavior (reasons that explain why a behavior arises in humans), in contrast to the “proximate reasons” for the behavior (reasons that trigger a behavior). The fundamental motives framework proposed by Griskevicius and Kenrick (2013) identifies status-seeking as an evolutionary motive for people to acquire goods and possession. This means that at an evolutionary level, consuming more may be driven by the fundamental motive of attaining higher status among peers. As people climb up the social ladder, they continue acquiring even more stuff to fit with their peers at the higher social tier. It is therefore not entirely surprising that the consumption expenditures among the more developed markets are so significantly higher than the lesser developed ones. What we consume, and how much we consume, thus contribute to how we participate in society, and how we are perceived socially.

In addition to status-seeking, another fundamental motive that leads to consumption is mate acquisition (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013). From an evolutionary perspective, after self-protection, the second most fundamental need of human beings is to pass on their genes to future generations to achieve reproductive success. One way in which our ancestors secured mating partners was through the display of their resources. Those who could secure more resources were able to secure better mating partners. This fundamental motive is another “ultimate” reason that drives society towards overconsumption.

The above-described evolutionary factors are further complemented by another evolutionary element: our tendency to prefer immediate gratification over longer-term rewards. The costs of overconsumption such as ecological damage, or longer-term health issues are all complex, long-term, and uncertain. In contrast to that, the benefits of overconsumption such as social status or recognition among peers are simple, immediate, and certain. Our evolutionarily designed perceptions and action systems focus on these immediate benefits which are more salient in our attention (Arbutnott, 2010).

These evolutionarily designed tendencies make it easier for manufacturers and advertisers to persuade and train consumers to believe that they need to buy goods excessively. Overconsumption thus has become a socially conditioned behavior. This means that people in the society have been trained to overconsume. They have been conditioned to believe that buying and owning more possessions is a sign of high status and affluence in society, among peers.

In the agricultural societies, overconsumption was not an issue. However, after the Industrial Revolution, people had access to more money that they could spend on acquiring more possessions, thereby leading to more consumption. This grew ever more significantly after the First World War, when consumption no longer remained need- (or demand-) driven, but became production-driven (Stuart et al., 2020). Stuart et al. (2020) describe this as follows: “Capitalist production requires and therefore creates increasing rates of excess consumption... To support capitalist production, the individual must become a consumer who buys more and more” (p.206). They refer to the creation of “false needs” (p.204) by firms and advertisers to generate demand for goods that society does not need. This phenomenon of creating false needs by businesses, and leading people to buy and consume more goods has led to hyper-consumerism globally.

To increase consumption, advertising and marketing campaigns are used to motivate and persuade consumers to buy even when there is no real need to buy. It is estimated that an average person is exposed to over 4 000 advertising messages every day³⁶. In the US, which is the world’s largest advertising market, total expenditures on advertising have risen to over \$240 billion annually in 2019, up from \$180 billion in 2015³⁷ (Stuart et al., 2020). It has been projected that in 2023 the US ad revenue will increase to reach a record-high 352 billion U.S. dollars³⁸.

Globally advertising spending has been on an increase over the years. While some media platforms see a decrease in ad spending, this has been more than compensated by significant increases in spending on online platforms. Today, with the proliferation of

³⁶ Red crow marketing (2015), How many Ads do you see in one day? Accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.redcrowmarketing.com/2015/09/10/many-ads-see-one-day/>

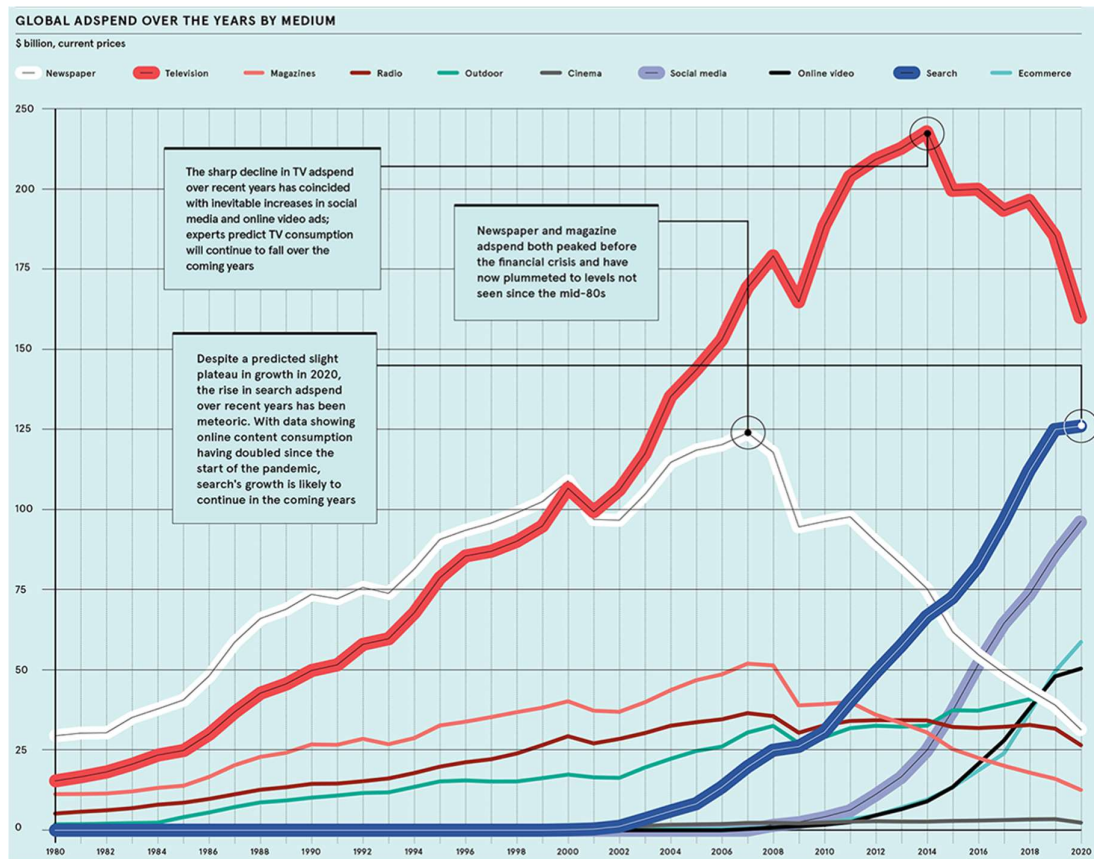
³⁷ Statista (2019), Advertising in the United States – statistics and facts, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/979/advertising-in-the-us/#topicOverview>

³⁸ Statista (2019), Advertising in the United States – statistics and facts, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/979/advertising-in-the-us/#topicOverview>

online platforms, brands can reach potential consumers anytime, anywhere in a much more targeted manner. Figure 5 shows how the global ad spending landscape has evolved over the years³⁹. While television and newspaper spending see some decline, we see the rise of social media, search, online video platforms and other such media. Projected growth in advertising will only lead to even higher levels of consumption.

³⁹ Visual capitalist (2020), Visualizing the evolution of Global Advertising Spend accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/evolution-global-advertising-spend-1980-2020/>

Fig. 5. Global ad spending



In addition to advertising, another factor that helps manufacturers drive overconsumption is the ease of shopping. Buying new things has been made even simpler today with easy e-commerce and the “buy now, pay later” options available to consumers. Internet shopping is a strong enabler of overconsumption, as it makes buying new things possible with only a few clicks, leveraging the power of a credit card. It has been shown that paying with a credit card leads to a significantly higher willingness to pay, than when paying by cash (Prelec & Simester, 2001). In an experiment, it was also shown that even viewing cues related to a credit card led to a significant increase in purchases and willingness to pay across multiple product categories (Feinberg, 1986). This happens because the credit card decouples buying from paying. It allows a consumer to acquire products even when (s)he may not have liquid cash to buy them.

Another factor that makes overconsumption easy, is the increase in manufacturing efficiencies. Efficiencies in manufacturing processes lead to increasing affordability (lower prices) thereby further boosting overconsumption. Take the example of one of the

most notorious polluters recognized today: fast fashion. Fast fashion's operating model speeds up the pace of design and production of fashion. According to McKinsey (2016)⁴⁰, in Europe alone, fashion companies have gone from offering an average of two collections in 2000 to five in 2011 and some offer much more than that: as an example, Zara offers on average 24 collections every year, and H&M offers between 12 and 16.

Lower prices driven by fast fashion result in a natural "throw-away" attitude among consumers. According to the European Environmental Agency (EEA), in the EU-28 as a whole, the prices of clothing grew by an average of just 3% between 1996 and 2012⁴¹. However, over the same period, the HICP (Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices) rose by over 60%. This corresponds to a 36% drop in the cost of clothing relative to the aggregate consumption basket of EU consumers. This drop has been even higher in some countries. The cost of clothing in the United Kingdom and Ireland dropped by 75% and 78% respectively. This slow rise in prices of clothing compared to other consumer goods makes clothes more affordable, thereby driving increased consumption.

Last but not least, another factor that is significantly impacting our consumption patterns is the "Made to break" nature of our goods: particularly applicable to electronic goods and tools. Planned obsolescence leads to millions of tons of waste generated by electronic goods that are made redundant after their short lifespan. In 2004, over 315 million PCs in America were retired, of which only 10% went into refurbishment (Slade, 2006). Every year over 130 million mobile phones in the US (which are in working condition) are being retired⁴².

In conclusion, overconsumption is socially conditioned and is ingrained in our behaviors. With the projected growth in advertising and growing income levels across the world, we can expect the trend of overconsumption to only increase in the future. Given the harmful effects this is likely to have on our environment and society, we must think of solutions to address this challenge. There is now an immediate and urgent need to consider circular approaches to consumption to address overconsumption and the waste management

⁴⁰ McKinsey Quarterly (2016), Style that's sustainable – A new Fast Fashion Formula accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/our-insights/style-thats-sustainable-a-new-fast-fashion-formula>

⁴¹ European Environmental Agency (2014), European Environmental Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/environmental-indicator-report-2014>

⁴² Treehugger (2020), The environmental costs and benefits of our cell phones, accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.treehugger.com/the-environmental-costs-and-benefits-of-our-cell-phones-4858551>

challenges it poses. In the next section, we explore alternative consumption models as a potential way to curb overconsumption and its associated ill effects.

1.4 ADDRESSING OVERCONSUMPTION: ACCESS-BASED CONSUMPTION

Due to its very nature (being socially conditioned over the years, encouraged by capitalism), overconsumption is a complex problem. Encouraging consumers to make changes to their lifestyle, to address the issue of overconsumption and the waste it generates will not be straightforward. The rest of this document shall primarily focus on how consumers could be motivated to make changes to their lifestyles and preferences to address the challenge of overconsumption.

We know that changes to consumer lifestyles can contribute to a meaningful reduction in overconsumption, and thereby an abatement of greenhouse emissions. Here is an example from the fashion industry, which as we saw earlier is one of the important polluters in the world. According to McKinsey's Fashion on Climate report (2020)⁴³, "the fashion industry can achieve a reduction in greenhouse emissions of 21% through changes in consumer behavior, if consumers adopt a more conscious approach to fashion consumption". This report suggests that "changes in consumer behavior during use and reuse of fashion, and the introduction by brands of new business models that encourage conscious choices could contribute to 347 million metric tons of emission abatement in 2030". One of the main levers identified in this effort would be an increase in circular business models promoting alternative consumption behaviors such as garment rental, resale, repair, and refurbishment⁴⁴.

The framework of Reduce / Reuse / Recycle / Redistribute has been presented and discussed across innumerable forums, websites, and platforms as a means to educate and

⁴³ McKinsey Quarterly (2020), Fashion on Climate Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/fashion%20on%20climate/fashion-on-climate-full-report.pdf>

⁴⁴ McKinsey Quarterly (2020), Fashion on Climate Report accessed on March 20th 2024 at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/fashion%20on%20climate/fashion-on-climate-full-report.pdf>

encourage consumers to manage their consumption patterns. In the last few decades, with the emergence of the sharing economy, alternative modes of consumption have been proposed and explored by scholars and practitioners. One of these is the model of “collaborative consumption.” Time Magazine has suggested that collaborative consumption is one of the “10 ideas that will change the world”⁴⁵. Collaborative consumption is an emerging socio-economic model that if adopted can help address our overconsumption and waste management challenges. It includes borrowing, sharing, renting, buying second-hand, swapping, and donating resources that may otherwise remain idle or unused. The model has been proposed and promoted by researchers (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Borusiak et al., 2020; Eckhardt et al., 2019; Iran & Schrader, 2017) and practitioners (e.g., World Economic Forum Young Global Leaders, 2013) as a promising solution to address the overconsumption problem we face today. While the model can have its limitations (Parguel et al., 2017), it remains an encouraging alternative to address hyper-consumerism.

One form of collaborative consumption that can be particularly impactful in addressing the overconsumption challenge is access-based consumption. As the name indicates, this mode of consumption involves providing access to the benefits of products, without having a transfer of ownership. Several access-based consumption platforms have been established in the recent past. The most common examples of these are Uber (for commuting) and Airbnb (for accommodation). In addition to these more globally accessible services, several other product categories have moved on to access-based consumption platforms in recent years. This includes fashion (e.g., Rent the Runway, Poshmark, Vestiaire Collective, Sharewear), toy and baby products (e.g., MiniLodgers, Daisy’s Party Toys), food (e.g., Eatwith, Divvy, Munchery), books (e.g., bookcrossing, Bookmooch), women’s handbags (e.g., Bag borrow or steal). Access-based consumption in these product categories leads to less consumption of material goods, as consumers get temporary access to products without having to buy them (and thereby waste them). The current thesis is interested in exploring access-based consumption in the context of consumer categories that will have a positive impact on reducing hyper-consumerism, thereby driving down overconsumption of resources.

⁴⁵ Time Magazine (2011), 10 ideas that will change the world – Today’s smart choice, don’t own, share accessed on March 20th 2024 at:
https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2059521_2059717_2059710,00.html

With the development and growth of Internet-based platforms (Product Service Systems also referred to as PSS), access-based consumption is generating new opportunities for intermediates, startups, and consumers. While access-based consumption is a promising model that if adopted widely can address the overconsumption challenge, the success of such an approach to consumption largely depends on the volume of consumers who would participate in the model. Access-based consumption ideas are heavily influenced by network effects; the collective power of having a large number of consumers connected via platforms is critical for the success of access-based services. Therefore, it is important to bring a greater number of consumers to the platforms and have them try these alternative modes of consumption.

Marketing of platforms and of the services they offer is different from traditional marketing that is associated with selling products to consumers. Traditional marketing principles may therefore not apply to the marketing of platforms that “share” but not “transfer ownership” of products. This brings us to the key managerial question that this thesis will aim to address.

How can marketers drive more consumers towards access-based consumption platforms? And more specifically, what type of marketing messages and positioning can drive consumers to adopt access-based consumption? It is important to note here, that the platforms we refer to cover a list of different product categories, usage occasions, and price ranges. Another aim of this thesis is therefore to understand broadly how different product categories would influence choices made by potential consumers on whether to use an access-based platform or not.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Overconsumption has become the source of a global ecological crisis. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we recognize the harmful effects of overconsumption (increased greenhouse emissions, waste at dumpsites leading to health hazards, water and air pollution, etc.). Yet, we continue to overconsume.

Manufacturers and advertisers have “trained” consumers to believe that they need to buy more and more. Increased advertising, ease of shopping, and availability of easy credit: all make overconsumption very easy. Overconsumption is thus a socially conditioned behavior. Addressing this big issue is a complex challenge. Scholars and practitioners have proposed alternate consumption models such as collaborative and access-based consumption as a potential solution to reduce the ill effects of overconsumption. While these models show great promise at addressing the issue, their success largely depends on the number of consumers who will get on board with these platforms. Access-based consumption platforms rely on network effects: the more the number of consumers on the platform, the better their experience will be.

This thesis will therefore address the question of how the above can be achieved. What can marketers do to drive consumers towards access-based consumption? Broadly, the thesis is structured as follows:

We start with a detailed academic literature review in Chapter 2. This chapter is divided into two components: the first part presents a literature review of access-based consumption. Here we discuss what access-based consumption platforms mean, how they work, and the different definitions proposed by academic scholars. Marketing scholars studying the sharing economy have suggested that core marketing principles need to be adapted to the context of access-based consumption, as these platforms involve no transfer of ownership. Traditional marketing principles are primarily based on the idea of buying and selling products that involve ownership transfer. We therefore unpack the concept of access-based consumption to understand what barriers the platforms face from a consumer adoption perspective.

We identify two key barriers as studied in the literature: perceived contamination risks and perceived social risks. The research learnings on the barriers to access-based consumption show that there is uncertainty surrounding these behaviors: on the quality/cleanliness of products and on the social perceptions that adopting these relatively uncommon behaviors can lead to. This points us to the need for trust and social confidence that the adoption of access-based consumption behaviors depends upon. One of the techniques that has been used in the past to drive relatively uncommon behaviors is that of social norms, and we propose that this under-leveraged technique be considered in the context of access-based consumption.

This leads us to the second part of Chapter 2, where we review the literature on social norms. We discuss how this technique has been successfully applied to drive desired behaviors such as recycling, grass-cycling, healthy eating, energy conservation, etc. We also consider the possibility of boomerang effects that social norms can create if prevalent behaviors in society are undesirable, as is the case with hyper-consumerism. We then review the focus theory of normative conduct as the framework to guide us as we apply social norms in the context of access-based consumption. The focus theory implies that when prevalent behaviors are undesirable, messages communicating “what is approved” (injunctive norms) are more impactful at driving desired outcomes than messages communicating “what is common” (descriptive norms). This implication guides us as we develop the first set of hypotheses for the research.

We then consider the potential impact of two other important factors: message frames and product categories. A social normative message that is framed negatively is likely to have a stronger impact than the one framed positively (due to our inherent negativity bias), however, would that apply to all product categories? We argue that a negatively framed injunctive norm is likely to impact a publicly consumed category such as fashion differently from a privately consumed category such as household tools. We develop a list of hypotheses that integrate social norms, message frames, and product categories so that the interaction effects across these variables are fully accounted for.

We then consider the additional implications of the type of platform: B-to-C vs. C-to-C on how the framed social norms can influence the trial for access-based consumption for different product categories. We argue that the hygiene concerns about rented products on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms are likely to be different, particularly for product categories that are physically proximal: concerns would be higher on C-to-C platforms than on B-to-C platforms. Therefore, framed normative messages can have a different influence on trial intent, based on whether the platform in question is a B-to-C or a C-to-C platform.

To test these hypotheses, we develop an experimental design that is described in Chapter 3. This chapter provides rationale for selecting the fashion and tools categories: fashion and household tools were selected for the research as they differ along two dimensions: public vs. private consumption and physically proximal vs. physically distal. The fashion category is consumed publicly and is used close to the skin, while the tools category is consumed privately and is used away from the skin. We then discuss the details of the

stimuli used for the research, and the manipulation checks conducted to validate the readiness of the stimuli. We review in detail the experimental procedure followed across two online studies that were conducted to answer all our research questions.

This first study was a 2 (norm type: injunctive vs. descriptive) by 2 (message frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (product category: fashion vs. tools) between-subjects experiment conducted in the US. It included two control cells (one per category) with a neutral message to test the baseline response. The second follow-up study was conducted to integrate the implication of platform type (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) on the results observed in Study 1. We took the most promising type of norm from the first study: injunctive norm, and tested it in the follow-up study. Study 2 was also a 2 (platform type: B-to-C vs. C-to-C) by 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (product category: tools vs. fashion) between-subjects experiment. It included four control cells: one for each category and platform type (B-to-C fashion, C-to-C fashion, B-to-C tools, and C-to-C tools). The different measurement instruments and standardized scales used in both studies to gather and analyze consumer responses are also presented in the chapter 3.

This is followed by two chapters (4 and 5): each of these chapters double-clicks on the results obtained across the two studies. Chapter 4 provides the first set of results from the research (Study 1). The hypotheses developed are tested with a set of ANOVA tests in this chapter and the findings are presented. The key findings from the first study show that as predicted by the focus theory, injunctive norms have a role to play in driving trial for access-based consumption platforms, and their impact is stronger than that of descriptive norms for this unfamiliar behavior, and that of the baseline control message. In addition, we observe a triple interaction effect of norm type, message frame, and product category. A series of planned contrasts show that negative frames can benefit injunctive norms if the product category is publicly consumed (fashion), but not when it is privately consumed (household tools). Social sanctions communicated via negatively framed injunctive norms have a significantly strong impact on trial intent in the context of the fashion category, while positively framed injunctive norms show the most promise in the context of household tools. The moderating role of environmental consciousness in the impact of injunctive norms on trial intent is corroborated for the fashion category.

In addition, as anticipated, positively framed descriptive norms that bring the desired behaviors in focus (by being framed as dynamic norms highlighting evolving trends

towards renting instead of buying) are shown to have a stronger impact than negatively framed descriptive norms that bring undesired behaviors of overconsumption in focus, once again corroborating one of the key predictions of the focus theory.

Last but not least, this chapter also presents some interesting ancillary findings on the impact of descriptive norms on hygiene perceptions. We find that descriptive norms can negatively affect hygiene perceptions for the physically proximal fashion category. Hygiene perceptions in turn are shown to have a significant impact on trial intent for access-based consumption. We also present a few additional findings on the impact of social norms on prosumers' intention to share on rental platforms. These ancillary findings that were not hypothesized earlier provide additional food for thought when studying marketing principles in the sharing economy.

The results presented in Chapter 4 are enhanced with the results from the second study described in Chapter 5, which bring out the nuances of a B-to-C vs. a C-to-C access-based consumption platform. The effects of social norms as observed in the first study are also observed in the second study, but in the context of B-to-C platforms only. We observe that a C-to-C platform is associated with higher levels of hygiene concerns than a B-to-C platform, for a physically proximal category such as fashion (an observation not made in the context of tools, which is a physically distal category). While negative injunctive norms remain effective for fashion rentals in the B-to-C context, positive injunctive norms show more promise on a C-to-C fashion rental platform. We notice that a positively framed injunctive norm communicating social approval of the platform can help in addressing the hygiene concerns of consumers, and can drive stronger trial intent than a control message for a C-to-C fashion rental.

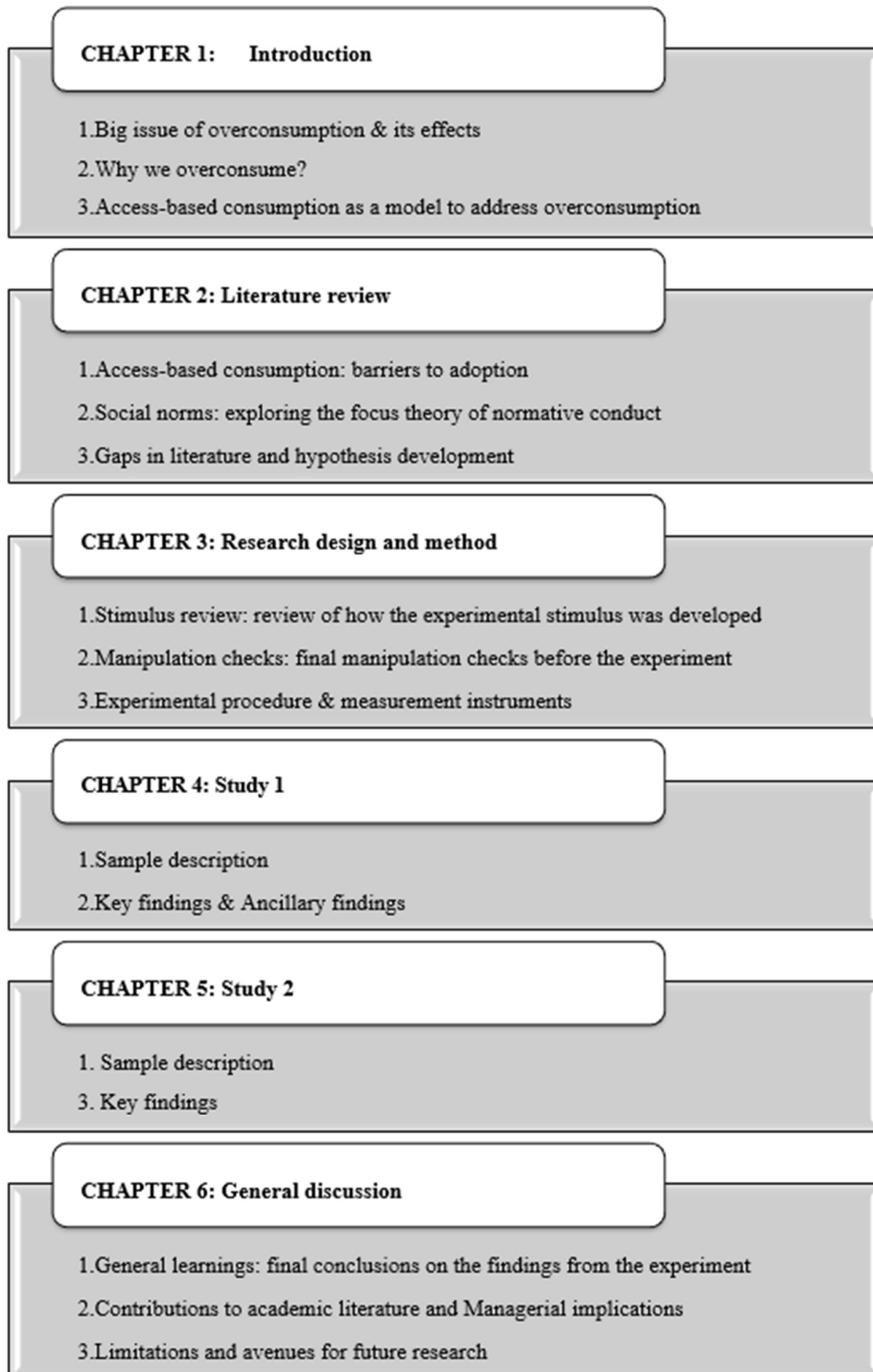
The insights from these results are generalized in Chapter 6 where the academic and managerial contributions of the research are presented in detail. In summary, the current research is the first one to apply social norms to drive the trial of access-based platforms. It is the first study that explores the triple interaction effect of norm types, message frames, and product categories on impacting the trial of access-based consumption services. In addition, it takes it a step further to examine the implications of the B-to-C and C-to-C contexts on consumer trial intent.

The research contributes to the growing literature on marketing in the sharing economy, and to the existing literature on social norms and message framing. It calls for additional cross-category studies to be conducted in the area of access-based consumption and provides several interesting thought starters to marketing scholars in the field. In addition, the study also provides learnings to platform owners and marketers to consider social norms in their communication/advertising campaigns to drive trial. Today, we observe that most platforms communicate on cost, variety, or sustainability benefits. This research shows the potential upsides to using the under-leveraged idea of social normative approaches in the context of access-based consumption platforms.

The document concludes with academic references and an appendix. The appendix includes all descriptive statistics. More importantly, the appendix includes a short paper based on the key learnings from this research that was selected for presentation at the **ANZMAC conference on December 6th, 2023**.

Figure 6 summarizes the structure of the document as described above.

Fig. 6. Structure of the thesis



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, we identified the big issue this thesis aims to focus on, i.e., overconsumption. We discussed how hyper-consumerism has led to the phenomenon of overconsumption in the world. We established that this is a complex issue that has global implications. It leads to ecological damage and needs to be corrected urgently. We discussed that alternative consumption models such as access-based consumption are one of the promising solutions proposed to address the overconsumption challenge by both practitioners and scholars. Access-based consumption is an emerging socio-economic model that if adopted can help address our overconsumption and waste management challenges. It includes borrowing, sharing, and renting resources that may otherwise remain idle or unused.

This chapter will focus on the academic literature review of alternative consumption models and social normative approaches as a potential way to drive these consumption behaviors in society. We shall begin with a review of the extant literature on access-based consumption models and how different scholars have elaborated on the idea as a potential solution to overconsumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Eckhardt et al., 2019; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). We discuss the barriers to adoption from a consumer perspective that these alternative models face and the opportunities they can benefit from.

We will then propose social normative messaging approaches as one way to help drive the adoption of access-based consumption platforms and review the extant literature on social norms. The technique of using social norms to drive desired behaviors has been used in the past, and we shall review the learnings we have from this literature (Cialdini, 2007; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Goldstein et al., 2008; Griskevicius et al., 2006; Schultz et al., 2007). We will then review the focus theory of normative conduct as the theoretical framework this research shall use (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000). We will apply the postulates of the focus theory to the relatively uncommon behavior of access-based consumption. Based on the reviewed literature, we will identify theoretical gaps, formulate research questions, and develop a set of hypotheses.

2.1 ACCESS-BASED CONSUMPTION

As the name indicates “Access-based consumption” refers to a consumption model where consumers get temporary access to goods they need, without a transfer of ownership. Access-based consumption allows consumers to get access to the product they would like to use, to meet a specific requirement, without having to buy the product, thereby leading to no transfer of ownership. Consumers pay a fee for the temporary access, without having to buy the goods for the full price. This term has been used to describe those transactions that may be mediated by the market, in which no transfer of ownership takes place (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). In describing how access-based consumption works, Bardhi and Eckhardt suggest that: “Instead of buying and owning things, consumers want access to goods and prefer to pay for the experience of temporarily accessing them” (p. 881). Other researchers have described access-based consumption models as marketer-managed systems that provide customers with an opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership (Lamberton & Rose, 2012).

Access-based consumption follows the principles of the sharing economy (Botsman & Rogers 2011), which leads to a more efficient use of resources, while also keeping consumption levels down. It is not an entirely new concept, however, with the emergence of the Internet, it is now becoming more popular. Airbnb, Uber, BlablaCar, and Zipcar are a few examples where principles of the sharing economy have been applied. This is not limited to cars and real estate but has gathered academic interest across several other categories. As an example, fashion rental platforms are grabbing consumer attention in several markets (Iran & Schrader, 2017). In the past, these were limited to thrift shops or flea markets, but now with the emergence of peer-to-peer systems, these have moved online. Rent the Runway, Tulerie, and Style Lend are a few known initiatives that are focused on renting fashion.

Scholars have provided five key characteristics that describe the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al., 2019):

- It is access-oriented, i.e., it provides temporary access, but no ownership
- It is economically substantive
- It uses a technology-based matching platform (connecting buyers and sellers)

- It involves an enhanced customer role (customer plays a role in maintaining the products being accessed; users are both buyers in a consumer role, and sellers on the platform in a prosumer role)
- It typically requires a crowd-sourced supply (items tangible or non-tangible sold on the platform are sourced from the crowd)

All Access-Based-Service (ABS) platforms incorporate one or more of the above five characteristics of the sharing economy. For example, BlablaCar is a platform that has all the above characteristics. However, a subscription-based service such as Zipcar has some of these characteristics. The cars on Zipcar are not crowdsourced. Access-based platforms can thus be business-to-consumer (B-to-C), where the service provider or platform owner rents out the products to consumers (Zipcar), or consumer-to-consumer (C-to-C), where consumers rent out their own products to other consumers (BlablaCar). Some scholars also refer to the consumer-to-consumer platforms as peer-to-peer or P-to-P, where consumers share their belongings on the platform for others to borrow in exchange for a fee (Iran & Schrader, 2017).

A term often used in the context of access-based consumption is “Product Service Systems” (Mont, 2002) or PSS. These are systems of products and services powered by internet-based platforms to support and meet a consumer need. The over-arching idea of a PSS platform is to help consumers find, buy, and pay for the benefits of a product (i.e., what the product does for them), rather than requiring them to make the purchase. PSS platforms are thus systems that enable access-based consumption.

In the literature, the concept of access-based consumption has sometimes been referred to with different terms. Table 1 provides an extended list of descriptions of access-based consumption/collaborative consumption platforms taken from academic literature. As examples, Belk (2007) refers to “sharing”, Bardhi and Eckhardt refer to “access-based consumption” (2012) and “liquid consumption” (2017), Lamberton and Rose (2012) refer to “commercial sharing systems”. Across most of these definitions, there are a few key elements that stand out, describing the overall idea:

- Sharing of underutilized resources, and monetizing them
- Temporary access over transfer of ownership (access-based)
- Often involves a monetary transaction, i.e., sharing resources in exchange of a fee

- Powered by scalable, internet-based technology platforms or systems that connect consumers

This thesis shall use the term “access-based consumption” to describe the models of consumption that encapsulate the above key ideas at a broad level. The definition provided by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) is well aligned with this and describes access-based consumption as providing temporary access to products for a fee. This definition nicely describes the model of a rental platform which is a viable economic model that if adopted broadly could be one of the solutions to the hyper-consumerism challenge that the world faces. As described in the following chapters, this thesis will develop an experimental design to study access-based consumption in the context of rental platforms (that provide temporary access to products in exchange of a fee) for two product categories.

Table 1. Definitions/descriptions of access-based/ collaborative consumption

Source	Definition
Acquier et al. (2017)	“The access economy covers a set of initiatives sharing underutilized assets (material resources or skills) to optimize their use” (p. 4) Platform economy: “Intermediation of decentralized exchanges among peers through digital platforms” (p. 4)
Akbar et al. (2016)	“A relevant business concept that provides access to product benefits without ownership” (p. 4215)
Bardhi & Eckhardt (2012)	“Transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place” (p. 881)
Belk (2014)	“People coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation” (p. 1597) Note - Belk suggests that compensation can be non-monetary as in swapping or bartering.
Botsman (2013) ⁴⁶	“An economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or nonmonetary benefits”
Breidbach & Brodie (2017)	“Access rather than ownership, the use of ICT-enabled engagement platforms, monetary rewards for the sharing of resources, and among multiple interdependent economic actors who engage in sociotechnical exchange processes within service ecosystems” (p. 764)
Eckhardt et al. (2019)	“A scalable socioeconomic system that employs technology enabled platforms to provide users with temporary access to tangible and intangible resources that may be crowdsourced” (p. 7)
Felson & Spaeth (1978)	“Events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others” (p. 614)
Frenken & Schor (2017)	“Consumers granting each other temporary access to underutilized physical assets (idle capacity), possibly for money” (p. 4-5)
Hamari et al. (2016)	“The peer-to-peer based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services” (p. 2049)

⁴⁶ Botsman (2013): Sharing economy lacks a shared definition; accessed on April 4th 2023 at - <https://www.fastcompany.com/3022028/the-sharing-economy-lacks-a-shared-definition>

Source	Definition
Hazée et al. (2017)	Services “which grant customers limited access to goods without any transfer of ownership, are unique technology-based service innovations requiring the substantial involvement and collaboration of customers without employees' supervision” (p. 441)
Kathan et al. (2016)	“Characterized by non-ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of material goods or less tangible assets such as money, space, or time” (p. 663)
Kennedy (2016)	“The sharing economy is a socio-technical system for the exchange of goods and services. The sharing economy refers to a collection of services that enable private and commercial owners of particular resources to make them available to others. Internet based services aggregate assets and services for access” (p. 466)
Kumar et al. (2018)	“The monetization of underutilized assets that are owned by service providers (firms or individuals) through short-term rental” (p. 148)
Lamberton & Rose (2012)	“Marketer-managed systems that provide customers with the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership” (p. 109)
Laurell & Sandström (2017)	“ICT-enabled platforms for exchanges of goods and services drawing on nonmarket logics such as sharing, lending, gifting and swapping as well as market logics such as renting and selling” (p. 63)
Lessig (2008)	“Collaborative consumption made by the activities of sharing, exchanging, and rental of resources without owning the goods” (p. 143)
Möhlmann (2015)	“Often associated with the sharing economy, takes place in organized systems or networks, in which participants conduct sharing activities in the form of renting, lending, trading, bartering, and swapping of goods, services, transportation solutions, space, or money” (p. 193)
Mair & Reischauer (2017)	“We define the sharing economy as a web of markets in which individuals use various forms of compensation to transact the redistribution of and access to resources, mediated by a digital platform operated by an organization” (p. 12)

Source	Definition
Milanova & Maas (2017)	“What characterizes the sharing economy, besides its prevalently digital nature, is the interplay between the compensation aspect of collaborative consumption and the prosocial character or pure sharing” (p. 160)
Luri Minami et al. (2021)	“The practice of using and sharing products or services with the support of the Web 2.0 and between a platform provider, a peer service provider and a customer (user) - triadic exchange -, in exchange for monetary compensation” (p. 127)
Narasimhan et al. (2018)	“The recent phenomenon in which ordinary consumers have begun to act as sellers providing services that were once the exclusive province of ordinary sellers” (p. 93)
Perren & Kozinets (2018)	“A market that is formed through an intermediating technology platform that facilitates exchange activities among a network of equivalently positioned economic actors” (p. 21)
Piscicelli et al. (2015)	“An emerging socioeconomic model based on sharing, renting, gifting, bartering, swapping, lending and borrowing” (p. 21)
Schaeffers et al. (2016)	“Market mediated transactions that provide customers with temporally limited access to goods in return for an access fee, while the legal ownership remains with the service provider” (p. 571)
Schor & College (2016)	“Sharing economy activities fall into four broad categories: recirculation of goods, increased utilization of durable assets, exchange of services, and sharing of productive assets” (p. 9)
Wirtz et al. (2019)	“Two or more-sided peer-to-peer online platforms through which people collaboratively provide and use capacity-constrained assets and resources” (p. 458)

2.1.1 Typology of access-based consumption platforms

The study of the sharing economy and access-based consumption is still in its infancy and several scholars have now started to look at classifying sharing economy platforms based on several different characteristics. In general, access-based platforms are governed by the principles of the sharing economy as described in the previous section. Attempts to build taxonomies/typologies of sharing platforms have been made by academic scholars in the recent past (Gerwe & Silva, 2020; Khalek & Chakraborty, 2023; Muñoz & Cohen, 2017).

Muñoz and Cohen (2017) consider seven conditions as they develop their typology of sharing platforms:

- Presence of a platform for collaboration and sharing
- Reliance on under-utilized resources and/or excess capacity of users
- Level of peer-to-peer interaction
- Presence of collaborative governance or involvement of users in decision making
- Evidence of social/environmental impact in the mission statement
- Type of funding used
- Reliance on technology

After analyzing several different platforms and businesses on these conditions, they propose a set of models described in Table 2.

Table 2. Models proposed by Muñoz & Cohen (2017)

Business model typology insights.

Inquiry	Insights by business model type				
	1	2	3	4	5
Causes of BM emergence	Seeking scalable solutions aligned with angel and venture capital investor expectations	This type is driven by an underlying efficiency logic, seeking to optimize under-utilized resources	The recognition of efficiencies that can be gained from company owned resource optimization models	The desire for optimizing resources at a local level.	Founders with nearly altruistic motives of applying technology to facilitate social and/or ecological impact
Connected characteristics	Dependence on technology and the heavy focus on P2P interaction are what facilitates the scalability of most sharing business models. Meanwhile alternative finance and collaborative governance would restrict pace of scale.	In order to achieve the desired outcomes of optimization of under-utilized resources, significant focus on technology and P2P activity for the sharing of end-user resources are critical	This type combines technology platforms with company acquired resources for widespread sharing by users.	None of the factors identified need to be present to enable Type 4 to function.	In this type, firms harness all but under-utilized resources to facilitate sharing between peers
Outcome of BM configuration	Scalable solutions backed by a strong intermediary platform	Scalable models for resource optimization, although potentially less attractive models for outside investors	From carsharing to dress sharing, this model permits control not only of the platform but the resources to be shared. While the investment required for this model is greater than Type 1, it can still be scalable while permitting more quality control.	Highly localized, low-tech, primarily space-based sharing.	Potential global impact on communities although attractiveness to traditional investors may be low.

As observed, not all sharing economy / access-based consumption models support the cause of addressing overconsumption. Most of them have been developed and funded to leverage technology-based platforms to build scalable solutions to facilitate efficiencies and return on investment for investors. The models that build upon the efficiency logic of the use of under-utilized resources contribute towards reducing overconsumption. Models 2 and 3 rely on using under-utilized resources. Models 2 and 5 also integrate a social/environmental impact in their mission statement.

Based on the typology above, not all access-based platforms have a positive impact on the environment. A low-impact platform would be a platform that uses the principles of the sharing economy (i.e., uses an internet-based platform, sometimes uses crowdsourcing, involves an enhanced customer role), however, is primarily a replacement for an existing service offered in the non-sharing economy. Such a platform is less likely to positively contribute to reducing overconsumption. Examples of such platforms include Uber which replaces traditional taxi services and Airbnb which replaces traditional hotel services. These platforms offer economic benefits (lower prices) and convenience (Internet-based platforms connecting buyers and sellers) however, their environmental benefits are lower.

A high-impact platform would be a platform that uses the principles of the sharing economy, and is not just a replacement for an existing service in the non-sharing economy; on the contrary, it offers a direct impact of reducing consumption by providing consumers with

temporary access to goods that they would typically have to buy in the non-sharing economy. These platforms offer higher environmental benefits and a high impact on reducing overconsumption. Toy libraries, clothing rentals, and second-hand buying platforms (redistribution platforms) are examples of platforms that have a high impact.

This thesis is interested in exploring access-based consumption platforms that are likely to have a high impact on overconsumption. The platforms such as Uber and Airbnb that offer economic and convenience benefits but do not necessarily have a high environmental impact are not in the scope of the current thesis. The current thesis will explore access-based consumption in the context of platforms that offer products such as clothes, fashion items, or household tools for rent so that consumers are not obliged to buy these items when they are likely to be used only occasionally.

2.1.2 Marketing Access-based consumption

Marketing scholars have discussed the implications of access-based consumption platforms on traditional marketing principles (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Traditional marketing, which focuses on the marketing of products and brands, is based at its core on the transfer of ownership: when consumers buy products from sellers, they claim ownership of these products. However, not all principles of traditional marketing may be entirely relevant to access-based consumption platforms where no ownership transfer happens, and where access to a product is granted only for a temporary period (Eckhardt et al., 2019). While traditional marketing concerns the exchange between consumers and brands, access-based consumption marketing often deals with the exchange between consumers and other consumers (referred to as “prosumers”) or consumers and platforms. In the traditional world, firms control the quality and performance of products they sell; thereby traditional marketing focuses on conveying to consumers the benefits, quality, performance, or value of the brand. On the other hand, access-based service platforms have limited control over the quality, performance, or value of the products they rent.

Access-based service platforms often depend on the behavior of consumers who borrow these products: Do they use the products with care? Do they return them in good condition? Do they clean them thoroughly? Researchers have identified the role played by other users (their

behavior and reliability) as one of the key challenges to access-based service platforms (Hazée et al., 2017, 2019). It has been shown that undesirable behaviors of other users such as leaving thrash in a shared car can affect the motivation of subsequent users to try the access-based service (Schaefers et al., 2016). Thus, marketing messages conveying quality, benefits, or performance of products are not always relevant to access-based service platforms.

It has therefore been proposed that marketers of platforms and marketing scholars studying the sharing economy must think differently and adapt the core marketing principles to the context of access-based service platforms, where consumers only access products temporarily (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Ownership-based marketing is not meaningful to access-based service platforms. Marketers must understand the barriers to access-based services from a consumer perspective, and develop ways in which these can be overcome to drive trial of platforms. The next sub-section describes some of the barriers to access-based service adoption that have been discussed in academic literature.

2.1.3 Barriers to access-based consumption

Scholars have identified important barriers to the adoption of access-based consumption across multiple categories from a consumer perspective. The two key barriers discussed in literature are perceived contamination and quality concerns (concerns of disgust that the product is contaminated or that the product is not of the desired quality) and perceived social risks (risk of appearing poor and lacking resources when one chooses to rent over buy) (Argo et al., 2006; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Borusiak et al., 2020; Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019).

Perceived contamination and quality risks

Argo et al. (2006) explore proximity to contact, time elapsed since contact, and number of contact sources as product contamination cues in the retail purchase context. They bring to life the consumer contamination theory which suggests that touching objects that have physical contact with others will transfer some properties from others to the users. They show in their research that when consumers become aware that another individual has touched a product their evaluation and purchase intention of that product fall. Their research highlights

one of the most important barriers to the adoption of access-based service platforms: hygiene concerns (Argo et al., 2006).

Concerns about health, hygiene, and contamination that may be associated with using rented, swapped, or second-hand products are discussed by researchers as one of the key reasons people hesitate to try access-based service platforms. In research on car sharing, scholars have discussed the disgust that consumers feel when they know that an object has been touched or used by others. This has been referred to as contagion (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). This disgust is shown to be even higher when the others who have touched or used the shared object are strangers.

Unsurprisingly, these perceived physical risks are also applicable and are very relevant to categories that are physically proximal or used closer to the skin, for example, fashion. Hygiene and health concerns are associated with customer anxiety about the contamination of shared/used/rented fashion items that are worn close to the skin (Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019). The perceived performance and hygiene risks of renting have a negative influence on consumer attitudes toward fashion renting and perceived enjoyment of fashion renting (Lang, 2018). In research conducted with Chinese and American consumers, it was found that quality risks have a negative impact on consumers' attitudes toward fashion rentals (Lang et al., 2019). Lang and Zhang (2019), in their work exploring clothes swapping, found that perceived performance risks (concerns about contamination and quality) hurt the intentions of consumers to swap clothes. Quality risks refer to the concerns that the product will not meet the functional requirements of the consumers. Perceived negative product attributes such as quality and cleanliness are concerns that lead to feeling less secure about the used fashion product (Hur, 2020).

The moderating role of contamination concerns in the relationship between attitudes and intentions has also been studied by researchers. It has been shown that the impact of functional, economic, emotional, green, and social values on attitudes towards second-hand or used fashion consumption is moderated by contamination concerns of consumers (Baek & Oh, 2021). The link between attitude and intention weakens when contamination concerns among consumers are high. Along similar lines, studies have also shown that used merchandise retailers (but not retailers of equivalent new products) report lower revenues in communities with high disease prevalence rates (Huang et al., 2017) and thereby higher contamination concerns.

Interestingly, hygiene concerns are observed when the product has been used by a stranger, but not by a friend. While it has been shown that when people are concerned about germs, their preference for used products decreases and their willingness to pay for brand new products increases, this tendency is observed only when the used product is advertised by a stranger, but not by a friend (Huang et al., 2017). People prefer to receive their used clothing from their friends and family members as compared to strangers (Borusiak et al., 2020). Evaluations of access-based service platforms for products used near the skin are affected negatively when the product is shared with unfamiliar users (Hazée et al., 2019). It has been shown that product-body proximity affects contamination concerns for access-based service and this relationship is moderated by inter-personal familiarity.

Perceived social risks

Another important barrier to access-based consumption is the social risk associated with using rented, swapped, or second-hand products, as it is often associated with poverty and/or lack of resources. Access-based service platform users do not want others to know about their sharing participation (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). In the access-based consumption research on car sharing, some consumers reported that they feel embarrassed when they drive a car marked with the banner of a platform provider. Bardhi and Eckhardt refer to this phenomenon as the “deterrence of brand community” (p. 888) and suggest that for some consumers “ownership still remains the ideal normative mode of consumption” (p. 893).

Unsurprisingly, these social risks are also applicable, and arguably very relevant to categories that are consumed publicly and are often associated with self-identity, for example, fashion. Researchers have discussed the social barriers to renting, buying second-hand, swapping, and sharing of fashion items (Henninger et al., 2021; Lang et al., 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019; Pedersen & Netter, 2015; Tao & Xu, 2018). The social risk of appearing poor to others leads to the stigmatization of access-based services and second-hand buying platforms in the context of fashion and clothing.

Ownership gives consumers a feeling of control and social status (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). Lack of ownership and the associated social risk of perceived low status is one of the most important barriers to access-based service platforms identified by researchers in the context of fashion/clothing (Lang et al., 2019). The negative influence of social risk on fashion rentals indicates that wearing rented instead of purchased clothing may harm self-image and

social standing among peers. In the research conducted with Chinese and American consumers, it was found that social risks have a negative impact on consumers' attitudes toward fashion renting. The stigmatization of using rental platforms, in general, is even higher when the sharing platform is marketed to convey the affordability benefit to consumers (Guo & Lamberton, 2021).

Researchers have also identified the negative consequences that wearing used clothes may have on consumers' social identity around others (Lang & Zhang, 2019). In a study on clothes-swapping behavior, it was found that perceived social risks negatively impact the intention of respondents to swap clothes even with family and friends. Research on second-hand clothes consumption has shown that subjective norms have a negative impact on second-hand fashion buying intentions (Borusiak et al., 2020). Perceived subjective norms conveying disapproval of used clothes negatively impact intentions to wear used clothes. This further highlights the social risk and stigma associated with access-based consumption of clothing and fashion. Renting clothes or buying second-hand is not considered a socially desirable behavior by many consumers. Some research also shows that subjective norms have a greater impact than attitudes on intentions to pursue online fashion renting. Such results may be partly because renting fashion items is not yet a common behavior among consumers (Lee & Chow, 2020).

Hur's (2020) research on used clothing attempts to understand the possible reasons behind the perceived social risks associated with used/rented clothing. Hur shows that the concerns about expression of self-identity can arise from the perceived negative attributes of used clothes among non-buyers (i.e., consumers who have never rented or bought used clothing). Non-buyers of used clothes perceive rented/second-hand clothing as poor quality, lacking cleanliness, having an unpleasant smell, and lacking style. This, according to Hur, leads to psychological consequences of unpleasant feelings about the product being unclean and concerns about the expression of self-identity. These in turn lead to perceived risks to social acceptance, and social image related to appearance and social status (Hur, 2020). In addition, Hur's research shows that there is a preference for buying new clothes among those who are non-buyers of used clothing, to not feel poor and thereby avoid the risk to social status.

Thus, we have seen that while forms of alternative consumption models that stand for access over ownership have gained interest and are growing gradually, there is still social stigmatization around them. Consumers are concerned about how others think about them when they engage in access-based consumption.

Other barriers to access-based consumption

In addition to the two main barriers discussed above (contamination/quality risks and social risks), a few other barriers to access-based consumption intentions have been identified through qualitative and survey-based research. Some studies suggest that access-based consumption can be difficult to accept by customers as it reduces their pleasure of impulse purchases (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). Some research describes the existence of ‘compatibility concerns’ derived from the fact that access-based consumption modes involve behavioral changes that are not always consistent with the existing values, beliefs, and experiences of customers (Tao & Xu, 2018). Access-based consumption is a relatively new behavior that is not necessarily aligned with consumers’ habits.

The research learnings on the barriers to access-based consumption highlight the nature of these behaviors: these new behaviors are surrounded by uncertainty. There is uncertainty about the quality/cleanliness of products and uncertainty about the social perceptions that adopting these relatively uncommon behaviors can lead to. This points us to the need for trust, reassurance, and social confidence that the adoption of access-based consumption behaviors depends upon. Botsman and Rogers (2011) consider trust, as one of the most important pre-requisites of the sharing economy. This is why, it is not surprising that people find it easier to trust their kin and friends than complete strangers when using shared or used goods. We therefore argue for the importance of building trust and providing reassurance to consumers, to drive trial of access-based service platforms. Platform marketers need to consider marketing messages that reassure potential consumers of the social acceptance and physical safety of the access-based service platform.

2.1.4 Drivers of access-based consumption

In addition to studying barriers to access-based consumption, researchers have also studied the drivers and factors that motivate people to engage in such behaviors. The drivers of access-based consumption identified by most researchers (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Lang, 2018; Lang & Zhang, 2019) are cost benefits, convenience (if applicable), hedonistic factors, and sustainability factors. Research has shown that cost benefits are the key driver of access-based consumption behaviors (people would consider buying or renting used items to save money).

Other drivers discussed by scholars are the pleasure of finding rare treasures and variety seeking (e.g., people would consider rare luxury items second-hand). Sustainability factors have been identified as drivers of access-based consumption but to a much lesser extent.

Several access-based services and second-hand buying platforms use cost benefits to market the platform to potential consumers. However, we argue that using cost as a lever to drive behavior is not ideal in this context, as this risks consumers moving back to old habits when manufacturers move to price promotions on new items (e.g., in the context of clothing, consider fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion). Research on the perceived value of fashion brands in second-hand/flea markets found that the price of the product, in addition to its design, authenticity, origin, and quality played an important role in how consumers valued a product sold second-hand (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). Consumers compare the price of the used product with the price of its brand-new counterpart when they make decisions on whether to buy the item. It was also found that economic motivations overlap other drivers of second-hand buying (such as recreational or ecological) (Machado et al., 2019). Saving money has been highlighted as the number one motivating factor in renting and buying used fashion products (Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019).

These findings imply that if rented or second-hand products are more expensive than new products, consumers opt for the latter for economic reasons. Given the growing disposable incomes in most parts of the world and the increasing affordability of new products, together with the discount promotions that bombard consumers, using price as the only key driver of access-based consumption is not sustainable. Using pricing as the only lever to convince people to buy or rent used products instead of buying new ones does not solve the problem of overconsumption and waste management at hand. It risks moving people back to old habits once the prices of new items fall.

On using environmental concerns as drivers, academic literature remains divided (and limited). The role of altruism and sustainability as a motivational factor for engaging with access-based consumption is not clear. Some researchers (i.e., Balderjahn et al., 2018; Khan & Rundle-Thiele, 2019; Kim & Jin, 2020) suggest that environmental concerns can influence access-based consumption; consumers engage in sharing/renting/buying second-hand clothing out of concern for the environment. Some others (i.e., Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019) have found no evidence supporting altruistic motivations, or have found that altruistic considerations were outweighed by economic considerations (Khan & Rundle-Thiele, 2019).

Park and Armstrong (2019) bring to light the fact that environmental concern does not emerge as a motive to engage in both rental and resale behaviors. On the contrary, they show that most consumers who tried to resell their possessions did so to make room for more. Similar learnings have also been established through other research (Parguel et al., 2017).

In their research on the impact of types of appeal on driving access-based service consumption, Guo and Lamberton (2021) also highlight the risks of communicating money saving as a motive to use rental clothing. Economic benefits increase the social stigmatization of the platform. According to Guo and Lamberton, communicating on variety can influence consumers more positively than communicating on price (2021). In the next sub-section, we shall explore different approaches to help drive the trial of access-based consumption.

2.1.5 Driving trial of access-based consumption: Can social norms play a role?

The consumer adoption research on access-based consumption, in general, has primarily focused on identifying barriers and drivers of this relatively new behavior (as highlighted in the previous sections). Research on how to drive people towards these behaviors, and what type of messages/interventions could drive people towards these (so far uncommon) behaviors is limited, but being explored increasingly by scholars. As an illustration, Guo and Lamberton (2021) have studied messages communicating variety vs. price and have shown that communicating on variety has a stronger impact on driving trial than communicating on price. This is aligned with other research on access-based consumption that shows risk of appearing poor (lacking resources) as one of the key barriers to adopting these behaviors. Researchers have also suggested highlighting parallels between sharing vs. owning and addressing product scarcity risks through communication (Lamberton & Rose, 2012) to drive access-based services. Further, messages depicting physical contact (vs. no physical contact) between shared objects and other users have been tested to demonstrate that showing physical contact in your messaging can negatively influence trial due to contamination concerns (Hazée et al., 2019).

While these interesting results provide great insights into developing stronger communication for access-based service platforms, there is still a gap to be filled in the evaluation of other

types of interventions and messages (through experiments or field studies) to drive consumers towards these alternative consumption models. There are multiple interventions and messages that could be considered to drive the desired change, including awareness campaigns, regulatory interventions, normative messages, positively vs. negatively framed messages (valenced framing), etc. Testing the impact of these different message types in the context of access-based and collaborative consumption is an area of research that is ripe for investigation.

One type of message that may be considered is the one focusing on sustainability benefits: making people aware of how their actions can benefit/harm the environment. However, we know that changing human behavior to support environmental sustainability will often require delaying gratification of consumption goals. Many of the temptations that promote environmentally harmful actions, such as overconsumption or fossil fuel use, are concrete and very perceptually available; our attention is constantly drawn to them through advertising, price promotions, and other media (Arbuthnott, 2010). The benefits to the environment of restrained, environmentally conscious behaviors are not immediate; they are longer-term and abstract. This is why behavioral interventions focused on driving awareness of the environmental effects of one's actions are likely to be less impactful. As stated earlier, academic literature remains divided on the role of altruistic concerns for sustainability as a motivational factor for engaging with these desired behaviors. Some authors (Balderjahn et al., 2018; Khan & Rundle-Thiele, 2019; Kim & Jin, 2020) propose that environmental messaging can influence collaborative behavior positively, while others (Khan & Rundle-Thiele, 2019; Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019) differ.

Another type of behavioral intervention often considered to drive green behaviors is regulatory enforcement (e.g., banning plastic). Although such interventions can drive compliance with desired behaviors, they tend to produce negative feelings of resentment and reactance. In addition, they lead individuals to believe that regulations must exist in opposition to the preference of "people like me" (Cialdini, 2007). Therefore, driving behaviors towards sustainable ones such as access-based consumption will need interventions that are based on behavioral constructs outside of driving awareness and regulatory enforcement.

All the research on barriers to access-based consumption and/or second-hand buying highlights the fact that these are relatively new behaviors associated with uncertainty. People need to be reassured psychologically (for perceived quality, contamination, and social risk concerns) that it is safe (both in terms of performance and social acceptance) and beneficial

to take on these behaviors. To get more consumers to try the platforms, it is necessary that the platform builds trust and reassures potential consumers of a positive experience. This calls for marketers to think differently when building their marketing messages for access-based service platforms. Marketers will need to reassure consumers that using a platform is safe and socially approved.

One of the proven techniques used in the past to drive behaviors that are not very common and need additional reassurance (e.g., green behaviors, behaviors involving sacrifice or risk, altruistic behaviors) is the use of social normative messages: messages/interventions that use the principles of social influence. A learning we have from social psychology is that when people need reassurance and when they are uncertain about a certain action, they rely on the behaviors of others around them for guidance. The literature on social norms provides a wealth of insights that can be “imported” into marketing to devise meaningful, trust-building campaigns for access-based service platforms.

We reviewed several US and EU-based access-based platforms across categories to understand how these platforms have been marketed today. We observe that most access-based service platforms today focus on communicating benefits (variety, cost, convenience, sustainability). None of the platforms, to our knowledge, leverage social normative messages to build reassurance and trust. The two key barriers that access-based consumption platforms face as discussed earlier are: perceived hygiene perceptions, which will lead to a lack of trust and uncertainty about the safety of using rented products, and perceived social risks, which will lead to fear of stigmatization and thereby a lack of social confidence to try using rented products. These barriers to consumer adoption point to the need to build reassurance among consumers, which we believe could be achieved through social normative messages. We propose that this under-utilized concept should be explored by marketers of platforms to drive trial. The approach of using social norms has to date never been explored and tested in the context of access-based consumption. In the next section, we present a brief review of the vast social norms literature and its relevance in the context of access-based consumption.

2.2 SOCIAL NORMS

Impact of social influence on behavior has been studied by researchers for almost a century. Early experimental studies (e.g., Duncker, 1938; Marinho, 1942.) conducted on children (2- to 5-year-olds) observed their food choices and showed that they were influenced by choices made by other children. Deutsch and Gerard (1955.) discuss why individuals conform to perceived social norms: to be accepted by their social group or to gather more information on how to behave in a certain situation, and thus guide their behavior.

Studies from the past have also researched the impact of crowds on behaviors of individuals. For a simple behavior like looking up at the sky, it was shown that the larger the size of the crowd performing a behavior (looking up at the sky), the greater the number of people who react to it (Milgram et al., 1969). Studies on choice behaviors for consumer products have shown that people conform with their peer groups when making their decisions: people rely on the information provided by their peer group on things such as quality or style, which are hard to evaluate objectively (Venkatesan, 1966).

These early foundational investigations have highlighted the impact that others can have on people's behavior and choices. This impact of social influence can become a driver of behavior change. Social influence-based messages have been applied by researchers in several contexts in the recent past: recycling (Schultz, 1998), littering (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000), energy conservation (Goldstein et al., 2008; Idahosa & Akotey, 2021; Schultz et al., 2007), plastic avoidance (Borg et al., 2020), speech volume and table manners (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003), tax evasion (Wenzel, 2004), healthy eating (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; Gonçalves et al., 2021) among others. These studies have shown how social influence can be successful at driving behavior changes compared to other types of appeals.

In the context of online shopping, a meta-analysis of over 6.700 online e-commerce experiments (primarily in the retail and travel industries) showed that cosmetic updates to a website's appearance have a much lesser influence on key success metrics (revenue per visitor), compared to treatments based on behavioral psychology (Browne & Jones, 2017). The researchers categorized roughly 2.600 experiments into 29 categories (e.g., pop-ups, banners, product recommendations, scarcity of products, buttons, urgency, and social proofs) and showed that social proof was the second most effective nudging strategy, only after scarcity.

This indicates that social normative messages can potentially be an impactful way to drive behavior change. There is rich literature on social norms that can provide us with valuable insights on how such an approach could be applied to access-based consumption.

In the next section, we review the literature on social norms in the context of driving green behaviors. These behaviors are mostly characterized by being less common and socially approved, or desirable.

2.2.1 Social norms to drive green behaviors

Research on green behaviors has shown that messages based on social norms are often more predictive of behavior than other types of interventions. These have been tested by scholars across several types of green behaviors through experimental and field studies. Social norms have proven to be effective at driving waste reduction/management, energy conservation, healthy food consumption, and green shopping behaviors. The following paragraphs describe some of the learnings from this research.

Recycling of waste is a socially desirable behavior. An experimental study in the US showed that telling people how much recycling is done by their neighbors (group feedback) increases the amount of recycling overall (Schultz, 1998). As recycling is today a socially approved behavior, providing feedback about such behavior nudges people towards engaging in it themselves. Interestingly, this research showed that group feedback (telling what others do) had a more long-lasting impact than individual feedback on recycling behaviors. Similarly, in a study to understand the impact of social and moral norms on household waste separation in South Africa (Issock et al., 2020), it was found that normative influence had an impact on behavioral intentions. In a field experiment study looking into the lesser practiced behaviors of grass-cycling and composting, White and Simpson (2013) also found evidence of social influence on driving these desirable behaviors.

In another study, normative interventions showed a positive impact on reducing littering in public places (Cialdini et al., 1990). This research showed that littering decisions changed depending upon the salience of the norm at the time of the behavior. In a second study on

littering behavior that followed, the researchers found consistent evidence that showed the positive impact of norms on reducing littering (Kallgren et al., 2000).

In a field experiment to test energy conservation behaviors in hotels, it was found that guests were more open to reusing their towels (to save energy) when they were exposed to a social normative message (asking them to join their fellow guests to help protect the environment) (Goldstein et al., 2007, 2008). Interestingly, this research also showed that those guests who were informed that most people who stayed in their room in the past had participated in the towel reuse program were the most likely to participate in the program themselves.

Another study about energy conservation showed that behavior in temperature settings is also socially constructed (Idahosa & Akotey, 2021; Leoniak & Cwalina, 2019). The research showed that social norms impacted hotel guests' room temperature settings. Normative messages have also been tested and shown to influence light-switching behavior in public places (Oceja & Berenguer, 2009; Leoniak & Cwalina, 2019).

Many interventions to encourage the consumption of healthier foods have in the recent past been tested and implemented in cafeterias and restaurants (Cadario & Chandon, 2020). Social nudging has proven to be successful at driving healthier choices. In a field experiment conducted with a French retailer (Auchan) in Portugal, normative messages were used to change the behaviors of soft and medium fruit/vegetable buyers towards consuming more fruit/vegetables (healthier options). Telling people that the healthiest families who shopped in the store bought at least eleven fruits and vegetables drove consumers who consumed less healthy options towards healthier choices (Gonçalves et al., 2021). In a study conducted in the context of social media (Twitter), it was demonstrated that using a social media account with larger number of followers (a social nudge) to promote healthy eating, led to higher intentions to try healthier food (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). Another survey-based study conducted in cafeterias (Salmivaara et al., 2021) showed how perceived social norms can impact actual and potential food choices.

Social nudging and normative messages have also been tested in the context of shopping behaviors. Researchers have validated the impact of different normative messages on driving consumers towards more sustainable products (e.g., low CO₂ emissions, and products made of sustainable material) (Pristl et al., 2021).

Interestingly, while social normative messages have been shown to influence green behaviors, people are themselves unaware of this influence: they do not recognize that the reasons for their actions are the actions of others around them (Cialdini, 2007). This was demonstrated in a large-scale survey of residential energy users. Respondents were asked their views on reasons for conserving energy at home (Schultz et al., 2007). Respondents rated “because other people are doing it” in the last place, after “it will help save the environment”, “it will benefit society”, and “it will save me money”. However, a strong relationship between the belief that others are conserving energy and the level of reported energy saving was observed in the results. The belief that others were conserving correlated twice as highly with reported energy-saving efforts than did any of the reasons that had been rated as more important motivators.

Along similar lines, in another energy conservation experimental study, Nolan et al. (2008) found that even though people believed that the behavior of their neighbors did not affect their own energy consumption behavior, the results of the experiment showed that the opposite was true: behavior of neighbors had the highest impact on conservation behaviors (Nolan et al., 2008). According to their research, although people say that they would conserve energy for environmental reasons and social responsibility, neither of these reasons succeeds in reducing energy conservation. What works the best is showing people that others are engaging in the desired behavior of energy conservation. Results such as these show that social norms operate outside of an individual’s awareness (Göckeritz et al., 2010). The impact of others on our behaviors is nonconscious: the stimulus is perceived but is not evaluated as or believed to be influential by consumers.

2.2.2 Social norms to drive unfamiliar behaviors

In the previous section we have discussed how social norms can be impactful in driving desired green behaviors. But very often, the behavior that is desired is relatively uncommon, and sometimes, also unfamiliar. Take the example of buying an unpackaged product from a store. In a study to test the unfamiliar behavior of choosing to buy unpackaged goods (Elgaaied-Gambier et al., 2018), researchers showed that normative approaches may be applicable to drive relatively uncommon behaviors only when combined with a credible advertisement, in the presence of a recognized endorser.

Social norms may thus not always work when the behavior that is desired is uncommon. Particularly, when the prominent behavior is not the desirable one (e.g., access-based consumption), but an undesirable one (e.g., buying brand new products), the effect of using normative messages can cause boomerang effects. These effects have been studied by researchers in several contexts.

In an energy conservation study, Schultz et al. (2007) found that providing people with information about what others are doing had a significantly different effect depending upon what their own baseline behavior was. Providing normative information (how much energy is consumed by the average household in the neighborhood) to households that were in general, high on energy consumption, i.e., their consumption levels were greater than the average of the neighborhood, led to a decrease in energy consumption. This communication had the desired impact on these households. In contrast, for households that were already engaging in the desired behavior of low energy consumption (i.e., their consumption was lower than the average household in the neighborhood), the same normative message (telling them how much energy is consumed by the average household: which in this case was higher than their own) produced a destructive boomerang effect, leading to increased levels of energy consumption (Schultz et al., 2007).

A similar boomerang effect was also observed in other studies. Littering behavior increased when the surrounding context was already littered but decreased when it was clean (Cialdini et al., 1990). Boomerang effects were also observed in studies such as healthy nudging in the context of fruit/vegetable retail (Gonçalves et al., 2021). While social nudging to encourage people to consume more fruit/vegetable worked successfully with soft and medium buyers, it had the opposite effect (leading to buying less fruit/vegetable) among the hard buyers who already consumed more healthy food.

Highlighting what others are doing can thus be detrimental when the common behavior observed in society is environmentally harmful; the approach of using descriptive norms, i.e., showing people what others are doing, will be effective only when the prevalent behavior is environmentally favorable. This puts into question, the role that social nudging and normative messages could play in driving positive behaviors that are uncommon.

Access-based consumption behaviors are relatively new behaviors. They have not yet become the standard norm. They are today practiced by minority of consumers. The standard norm in

this context is that of buying and consuming new: as discussed earlier, hyper-consumerism is on an increase. The standard norm is thus an undesirable behavior leading to overconsumption. In this case would social normative messages have the desired effect?

We turn to the focus theory of normative conduct for guidance, to build our hypothesis on this. The next sub-section discusses the theory and its postulates, and its applicability to the context of access-based consumption.

2.2.3 Focus theory of normative conduct

The focus theory of normative conduct has two main postulates (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000):

1. “There are two types of norms: descriptive and injunctive, and activating one or the other of the two types of norms produces significantly different behavioral responses.
2. Norms influence behavior directly when they are focal in attention and, thereby, salient in consciousness.”

Postulate 1: Two types of norms

The focus theory of normative conduct differentiates between two types of norms – descriptive and injunctive because each refers to a different source of human motivation (Cialdini et al., 1990). A descriptive norm tells you what most people do, or what is normal behavior, and an injunctive norm tells you what behavior is approved or disapproved by most people in society. Descriptive norms thus provide social proof and injunctive norms provide information about social approval.

Descriptive norms guide behavior by providing information about the behavior of others in a certain situation, thus suggesting what is the right way to act; with that descriptive norms help us make accurate decisions. Especially, when the situation at hand is unfamiliar or uncertain, or when outcomes of acting a certain way are unclear, descriptive norms can provide people with confidence and reassurance to behave a certain way. Several studies have shown the value of descriptive norms in situations that involve ambiguity and uncertainty (Griskevicius et al., 2006; Tesser et al. 1983). The fundamental idea here is that of mimicry in the presence

of uncertainty: if others are behaving a certain way in an uncertain situation, then it must be the right way or the safest way to behave.

Thus, descriptive norms function as “social proof” and serve as a mental shortcut, often referred to as a “heuristic,” when people make decisions on how to behave in a given situation (Cialdini, 1984). Descriptive norm provides you with the reassurance and confidence that if many people do it, then it must be the right thing to do: proof that the behavior works and that one should not worry about engaging in the behavior. As Cialdini describes it, “descriptive social norms send the message: ‘If a lot of people are doing this, it is probably a wise thing to do’, which serves to initiate norm-congruent behavior” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 264).

An injunctive norm provides information about social approval. In contrast to descriptive norms, which specify what others do, injunctive norms specify what is the behavior approved or appreciated by others. Injunctive norms influence behaviors because they serve our fundamental need to belong: our need to be liked by others around us. We follow injunctive norms because we have an implicit desire to obtain social approval and avoid disapproval of others (Cialdini et al., 1990; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). The basic idea here is that if we do what others approve of, and avoid behaviors that are disapproved of, we will be liked and accepted (Jacobson et al., 2011).

While both injunctive and descriptive norms influence behavior, they are likely to do so through different psychological routes (Cialdini et al., 1990). The effects of descriptive norms (mimicking the behavior of others) occur through a “rather nonconscious peripheral route of information processing” (Göckeritz et al., 2010, p. 514). On the other hand, injunctive norms are believed to have a more conscious or deliberate effect on people (Göckeritz et al., 2010). The motivation to comply with a descriptive norm is social proof, so the impact of descriptive norms on behavior is more direct (Melnyk et al., 2019) and is often automatic. For injunctive norms, the motivation to comply is the need for social approval or fear of social sanctions (Melnyk et al., 2019). This leads to injunctive norms requiring more elaborate and conscious thinking/processing than descriptive norms. Therefore, injunctive norms seem to have a more indirect influence on driving behaviors; descriptive norms affect behavior directly whereas injunctive norms rely on the indirect effect through intention.

The direct influence of descriptive norms on behavior may have evolutionary explanations. We are social animals, and our tendency to automatically copy and mimic others’ behaviors

increases our possibility of survival. It thus has evolutionary benefits (Griskevicius et al., 2012). In ancestral environments, people who followed or copied what others were doing in the face of danger had adaptive advantages, in situations that were uncertain or risky. Feelings of fear and uncertainty have been shown to increase conformity in experimental studies (Griskevicius et al., 2009). A self-protective goal (vs. other evolutionary goals such as attracting a mate or seeking status) has been shown to trigger higher conformity among both men and women in experimental studies (Griskevicius et al., 2006). The fundamental motives framework in evolutionary psychology (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013) explains that self-protection is one of our ancestral motives that led people to make safe choices, conform more, and believe in the “strength of numbers”, thereby leading them to follow the crowd.

The fundamental, evolutionary nature of the conformity behavior among humans explains why the influence of descriptive norms is nonconscious and direct. This subliminal instinct to mimic others results in people engaging in behaviors that are most prevalent or frequent. This explains the previously discussed boomerang effect of descriptive norms: people litter less, when the place is clean, and litter more if the place is already littered. This brings us to the second postulate of the focus theory of normative conduct.

Postulate 2: Norm salience

The mimicry instinct discussed earlier that leads to the influence of descriptive norms on behavior often results in limiting the impact that descriptive norms would have to drive desirable behaviors when they are not yet prevalent, or not yet the norm. Appeals that urge consumers to behave a certain way are set to fail if people are convinced that the others around them are not behaving in the same manner, or even worse, are engaged in the opposite behavior. A descriptive norm is likely to have a positive influence on behavior only if the norm is focal at the time of the behavior (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000). This explains why it was observed that littering behavior increased when the surrounding area was littered (the salient norm showed that others litter too) while littering behavior decreased when the surrounding area was not littered (the salient norm showed that others did not litter).

The focus theory of normative conduct implies that sometimes descriptive norms (what people do: e.g., they litter) and injunctive norms (what they ought to do: e.g., they ought to keep the streets clean) are in conflict. It is important to know how they interact: sometimes they may combine additively, and sometimes they may inhibit or undermine one another

(Oceja & Berenguer, 2009). Normative prompts will lead to high compliance when they are aligned with congruent cues. In a situation where norm-conflicting cues are salient, the influence of the normative message will be dampened (Leoniak & Cwalina, 2019). This key implication must be considered when we apply the focus theory of normative conduct to the case of access-based consumption, which today is not the most common behavior observed among people, but is a behavior that is desired and that we want to encourage. The next subsection will discuss the application of the focus theory to the relatively uncommon behavior of access-based consumption. (access-based consumption across most categories is not yet popular, and is only adopted by a minority of consumers)

2.2.4 Applying the focus theory to access-based consumption behaviors

According to the focus theory, in situations where the prevalent behavior in the society is undesirable (e.g., high consumption of plastic bottles, or high consumption of gas, hyper-consumption of fashion), focusing the audience on the negative behavior can be counter-productive. Instead, any attempt to eliminate or reduce undesirable behaviors when they are prevalent can focus the audience on what is approved or disapproved. For example, if the majority of citizens keep their surroundings clean and litter-free, campaign developers should include such descriptive normative information in their campaigns intended to reduce littering. However, if the majority of citizens do not engage in such positive behavior, then including this negative information in the campaign can cause an undesired boomerang effect. In such situations where the common behavior is an undesired one, campaign developers would be wise to incorporate the injunctive normative information or the approved behavior (i.e., keeping surroundings clean is approved as a good behavior) in the campaign, instead of highlighting the descriptive norm (that is not necessarily showing a desirable behavior).

Paradoxically, we can notice that many environmental campaigns depict undesirable behaviors. Messages such as “80% of people don’t recycle”, “Millions of plastic bottles are discarded every day”, “85% of clothes are discarded and thrown into landfills”, or “Hyper-consumption is on the rise” may be intended to drive positive change. However, keeping the focus theory in mind, these messages may be focusing the audience on the wrong behavior. As Cialdini put it, within the statement “Look at all the people who are doing this undesirable

thing” lurks the powerful message “Look at all the people who are doing it” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 266). By putting the undesired behavior into focus, the non-conscious mimicking tendency will lead people to follow this behavior.

In the context of access-based consumption, the prevalent behavior today is that of buying new products and over-consuming. Access-based consumption in general is a relatively new behavior that has not yet become a descriptive norm. The desired behavior is that people consider consuming used, rented, or refurbished products before they explore brand-new ones (with the goal of addressing the overconsumption and waste management challenge the world faces). Thus, the descriptive norm here is in opposition to the injunctive norm: the descriptive norm shows that people buy new products and overconsume, while the injunctive norm (approved behavior) should be to consider consuming more collaboratively with access-based consumption platforms.

Keeping the focus theory in mind, the injunctive norm is likely to have a significantly stronger impact on driving trial interest for access-based services than the descriptive norm (given the relatively uncommon nature of the access-based consumption behaviors), or a non-normative message. In addition, descriptive norms have a more direct influence on behavior, while injunctive norms affect behavior indirectly through intention (Melnyk et al., 2019). The injunctive normative messages should therefore have a stronger impact on driving trial intention than the descriptive normative message.

As the descriptive norm in the context of access-based consumption does not reflect the desired behavior, one way to phrase it more effectively is to position it as a “dynamic norm” to reflect how prevailing consumption behaviors are evolving (Loschelder et al., 2019; Sparkman et al., 2020; Sparkman & Walton, 2017). By saying that a growing number of people are now moving towards access-based consumption over buying brand-new products, we would bring a positive spin on the prevalent behavior (descriptive norm), thus putting the desirable behavior into focus. The idea here is that by bringing the dynamic norm into focus, we will be aligning the dynamic norm (what more and more people are doing) with the injunctive norm (what people ought to do). In this case, the descriptive norm (framed dynamically) should have a stronger impact on driving trial interest for access-based services than a non-normative message.

In the next sub-section, we shall take our thinking one step further, to identify important gaps in the literature on social norms and access-based consumption and formulate the research questions this thesis shall aim to address.

2.2.5 Gaps in literature and research questions

Literature on social norms has shown that normative appeals can be more effective than other types of appeals at driving green behaviors. With the focus theory of normative conduct, it has been established that when the desired behavior is rare or less prevalent, injunctive messages that describe what behavior is approved are more impactful than descriptive messages that describe what behavior is popular. This has been proven through experimental research across several green behaviors as discussed in the previous section. However, this has not yet been tested in the context of access-based consumption. The current research will fill this gap and validate the use of social norms in the context of access-based consumption.

While one can anticipate that injunctive messages will affect access-based consumption behaviors positively, just as they do for other types of relatively uncommon behaviors (focus theory), there are three factors that nuance access-based consumption behaviors from other green behaviors. The following paragraphs discuss these factors and uncover additional important gaps in the literature that this thesis will try to address.

First, we consider the product category that is being rented. Willingness to engage in access-based consumption is likely to be highly category-driven. Cars vs. toys, furniture vs. clothes, or children's clothing vs. electronics or tools, have completely different profiles. What may work for one category need not apply to another. People rent ski equipment, books, and cars frequently, however, renting clothes or household tools and equipment may not be as common. Product category will have implications on trial intent for access-based services.

Given the barriers to access-based consumption that were discussed earlier (physical/contamination risks and social risks), it is possible that a product category that is consumed publicly and/or is physically proximal (e.g., fashion) may be affected differently by normative messages compared to a category that is consumed privately and is physically not proximal (e.g., household tools). There is a clear gap in the literature on understanding the

role of the product category in the impact that injunctive and descriptive norms may have on driving trial of access-based consumption. What may work for one category need not for the other, and this phenomenon needs to be studied and researched further.

Second, we consider how the norm is framed:

- positively framed injunctive messages conveying social approval,
- negatively framed injunctive messages conveying social sanctions,
- positively framed descriptive messages conveying the desired behavior,
- negatively framed descriptive messages conveying the undesired behavior.

Message framing refers to the different ways in which a message can be constructed and articulated: specific aspects of the communication are highlighted to make them more salient. A common message framing strategy involves positive (gain) and negative (loss) frames: either the positive consequences of engaging in a desired action or the negative consequences of not engaging in the desired action (or engaging in an undesired action) are brought into focus. It has been shown by researchers that people's preferences or choices are often inconsistent when the same choice is presented to them in a different form (gain/positive vs. loss/negative frames) (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979.).

A social norm may be framed either positively or negatively. While there is limited research done on this topic, combinations of norms and frames have been tested in some experimental studies that have shown the effectiveness of negatively framed injunctive norms in driving desired behaviors (Cialdini et al., 2006; Mollen et al., 2021). There is no research done so far to test this double interaction effect of norms and frames in the context of access-based consumption. We argue that while negatively framed injunctive norms are likely to be more impactful at driving desired behaviors than positively framed injunctive norms in most contexts, access-based consumption is nuanced by the factor of product category: a product that is consumed publicly, in the presence of others is likely to be affected differently by a negatively framed injunctive norm vs. a product that is consumed in private, at home; in addition, a product used close to the skin may see a different impact of social norms vs. a product consumed away from the skin. There is a gap in the literature on understanding the triple interaction effect of norm type, product category, and message frames on driving access-based consumption. This thesis aims to fill this gap and test the triple interaction effect in the context of access-based service platforms.

Finally, another factor that will need to be considered is the type of rental platform in question. As discussed earlier, there are two types of rental platforms: B-to-C platforms which offer products for rent, and C-to-C platforms that offer people the opportunity to put up their own products out for rent. Given the barriers to access-based consumption that were discussed earlier, how comfortable a consumer is with borrowing a product from a platform, and the impact a social normative message would have on that level of comfort will likely depend upon who the consumer is borrowing from: a business/platform, or another consumer.

We have thus established that social norms (particularly injunctive norms) may have a role to play in driving access-based consumption (following the focus theory of normative conduct). However, their impact would depend upon the type of norm, the way it has been framed, and the product category being considered. Further, the influence of the injunctive norm will also depend upon whether the platform is B-to-C or C-to-C.

We will take this understanding a step further to formulate the research questions that this thesis will aim to answer.

The overall research question this thesis will address is: **When do social normative approaches drive trial intention for access-based consumption?**

More concretely, the above broad research question will be addressed by answering the following detailed research questions:

- Will social norms drive stronger trial intent than a non-normative message?
- Will an injunctive norm drive stronger trial intent than a descriptive norm?
- Which combination of norm-type (injunctive vs. descriptive) and frame (positive vs. negative) has the strongest impact on trial intent for access-based service?
- Will this differ for publicly vs. privately consumed product categories?
- Will this differ for B-to-C vs. C-to-C (or peer-to-peer) platforms?

The next sub-section will be used to develop the hypotheses based on the literature review.

2.2.6 Hypotheses development

Social norms are likely to drive the trial of access-based consumption behaviors. However, their impact is likely to be different for publicly vs. privately consumed categories. In addition, the type of norm (descriptive vs. injunctive) and how the message is framed (positively vs. negatively) will also play a role in the relationship between the message and the trial of access-based consumption. Therefore, the joint role of the product category, the norm type, the frame, and how they interact together need to be considered in the research hypotheses.

In addition, whether a platform is B-to-C (where a consumer borrows from a platform or brand) or C-to-C (where a consumer borrows from another consumer: referred to as a prosumer), will have a role to play in how social normative messages influence trial intent for access-based services. The hypothesis will therefore also include the B-to-C and C-to-C perspective.

The literature reviewed in the previous sub-sections and the gaps thus identified are used to develop a set of hypotheses that will help address the research questions we have raised earlier. The hypotheses discussed in the present section are divided into two sections: first, we consider the impact of type of norm, message frame and product category on driving trial intent; second, we consider the impact of these factors in the context of B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms.

Impact of social norms, message frame and product category

Here we consider how framed social norms would affect the intentions of consumers to try a rental platform to borrow products for temporary use. This perspective will be affected by the implications of the product category and message frame as discussed previously. The first set of hypotheses is organized as follows: we start with the hypothesis on the effect of social norms as compared to a baseline control message and the moderating role of environmental consciousness on this impact. We then hypothesize on how the two types of norms (descriptive vs. injunctive) can have a different impact. Finally, we integrate the interaction of message frame and product category into the hypotheses.

Effect of social norms (vs. control)

Literature in social psychology has demonstrated the impact that social norms can have in driving desired behaviors. Messages based on social norms have been shown to be more impactful than other types of appeals in driving green behaviors (Goldstein et al., 2008; Gonçalves et al., 2021; Idahosa & Akotey, 2021; Schultz, 1998; Schultz et al., 2007). The first postulate of the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000) describes two types of norms: descriptive norms that convey what most people are doing, and injunctive that convey what behavior is approved in society. Both types of norms have been shown to impact behaviors positively. This impact of social norms should apply to driving access-based consumption behaviors.

We therefore hypothesize that:

H1: A message displaying a social norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service platforms than a control message.

Moderating impact of environmental consciousness

How much concern an individual has for the environment can affect how much impact a message will have on his or her behavior. In some cases, higher environmental concern can lead to a stronger impact of message appeals (Amatulli et al., 2019). Some research has shown that environmental concern moderates the impact of a framed message on consumer response such that, higher concern is associated with a stronger impact. For instance, negatively framed appeals have shown to impact people differently based on whether they had high or low involvement with the issue at hand: negatively framed messages were more impactful among high-smoking-involvement individuals, but not so among low-smoking-involvement individuals (Jung & Jorge, 2011). Similarly, people with high environmental consciousness/involvement were impacted more by negatively framed green buying messages than those with low environmental consciousness (Chang et al., 2015). People with high involvement were also more influenced by a negatively framed appeal for blood tests than those with low involvement. (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990).

On the other hand, in some cases, lower environmental concern has been shown to cause a stronger impact of message appeals (Göckeritz et al., 2010). Particularly in the context of social normative messages, personal involvement in conservation and environmental issues

has been shown to moderate the relationship between norms and conservation behaviors (Göckeritz et al., 2010) such that the effect of norms on desired behavior is higher when the involvement in environmental issues is lower. Moreover, other research has also shown that a threat communicated via a negatively framed message will be effective only if the threat is relevant to the individual (Nash et al., 2011).

Applying this to our case of rentals, people who score high on environmental consciousness may already be using alternative consumption models such as access-based services, so there is likely to be less room for improvement. The threat of being frowned upon, or the benefit of gaining social approval would be less relevant the environmentally conscious individuals. The impact of the normative message on trial intent for access-based service is therefore likely to be higher for people who are not environmentally conscious.

We therefore hypothesize that:

H2: Environmental consciousness moderates the influence of social norms on trial intent for access-based service platforms such that, the influence is stronger when consumers score low on environmental consciousness.

Comparison of descriptive and injunctive norms

The second postulate of the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000) highlights the importance of norm salience in its impact on driving behaviors. Appeals that urge consumers to behave a certain way are set to fail if people are convinced that others around them are not behaving in the recommended manner, or even worse, are engaged in the opposite behavior. The focus theory implies that if the desired behavior is uncommon, as is the case with access-based consumption, while the prevalent behavior is not the desired one (such as buying brand new items without considering the option of rentals), an injunctive norm that provides social approval (or disapproval) is likely to have a stronger positive impact on driving the desired behavior than a descriptive norm. Research on the boomerang effect of descriptive norms in the context of less familiar or uncommon behaviors has shown that in such cases where the prevalent behaviors are undesirable, injunctive norms are more likely to drive positive results than descriptive norms (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000; Schultz et al., 2007).

We therefore hypothesize that:

H3: A message displaying an injunctive norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a descriptive norm.

Effect of negative frames

Research shows that negative frames have a higher impact on behaviors than positive frames. Extant work on the topic of message framing has shown that negatively framed messages are more impactful than positively framed messages, including in driving green consumption behaviors (Amatulli et al., 2019). Applying a charge on a disposable coffee cup (loss/negative frame) has proven to be more effective at promoting the use of reusable cups than applying a discount on bringing your own reusable cup (gain/positive frame) (Poortinga & Whitaker, 2018). Negative frames have also proven to be more powerful in influencing decisions about public spending (Arbuthnott & Scerbe, 2016).

Kahneman and Tversky demonstrated that people tend to dislike losses much more than they like gains. This is referred to as loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). It has been shown that people are more conscious of and are reactive to facets in their environment that involve negative rather than positive influences or consequences (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003; Crawford & Cacioppo, 2002), and this happens because people process negative information more elaborately than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001). Negative triggers or motives claim more attention processing compared to positive triggers (Pratto & John, 1991). It has been discussed that the different impact of positively versus negatively framed messages emerges from the fact that people in general have a “negativity bias” (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Rozin & Royzman describe negativity bias as: “In most situations, negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations and generally efficacious than positive events” (Rozin & Royzman, 2001, p. 2).

As negative message frames are processed more elaborately than positive message frames, how these frames combine and interact with the rest of the message can influence behaviors (Argo et al., 2011). This is also reflected in the combination of positive or negative frames with social norms. We argue that the effect of the message frame (positive or negative) on the social norm will depend on the type of norm (injunctive or descriptive). We also argue that this is further dependent on the product category being considered: is the category consumed publicly in the presence of other observers? Or is the category consumed privately at home?

In the following paragraphs, we build our hypothesis on how social norms would interact with message frames and product categories in the context of access-based consumption.

Negatively framed injunctive norms

Injunctive norms, when framed positively, communicate social approval: describing what behaviors are approved of in society. When framed negatively, they communicate social sanctions: describing what behaviors are frowned upon in society. There is a limited amount of research done on framed social norms. As an example, researchers have investigated how positively and negatively framed injunctive and descriptive norms affected the amount of petrified wood stolen (a negative behavior) in a U.S. national park (Cialdini et al., 2006). They showed that injunctive norms were most effective when framed negatively. Negative frames combined with injunctive norms require more attention processing and are more effective at driving behaviors than positive frames combined with injunctive norms. Research on framed normative messages in food consumption (Mollen et al., 2021) also shows that injunctive norms benefit from a negative (vs. positive) frame. As injunctive norms are typically processed more elaborately than descriptive norms, combining them with a negative frame has thus shown to be most promising.

While this finding holds good in many situations, we argue that in the context of access-based consumption, this will depend upon the product category. Whether a category is symbolic and is publicly consumed or is more functional and privately consumed will influence how the message frame (positive vs. negative) interacts with the norm. For a privately consumed category such as household tools, perceived risks of social disapproval or sanctions (negative injunctive norms) are less relevant, as the consumption happens in private. On the other hand, for a publicly consumed category such as fashion, perceived risks of social disapproval or sanctions are highly relevant, as the consumption happens socially and is observed by other members of the social groups. We refer to the literature on status consumption to build our hypothesis.

Literature on status consumption suggests that one of the important characteristics of status signals is being visible to the members of the social group to which the individual wants to belong, as is the case with publicly consumed categories such as fashion products. Attaining social status by consuming products that put the individual in a positive light among others can be a strong purchase motivation for consumers. People have a basic desire to belong to a

group, and one way in which consumers try to affiliate with a preferred group is by buying products or engaging in activities that signal their association with the group. Researchers have shown how consumers use products and brands to signal their belonging to specific desired social groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Mcshane et al., 2012). Research on brand concept also shows how symbolic brands vs. functional or non-symbolic brands are perceived differently by consumers (Mimouni Chaabane & Pez, 2017).

Consumers also engage in conspicuous/status consumption to signal their disassociation with certain undesirable groups. Researchers have found that individuals try to dissociate themselves from low-status groups by abandoning the products that those groups purchase (Berger & Heath, 2008). People do this to avoid the risk of signaling an identity that is undesirable to them. Research in compensatory consumption has also shown that when social status is threatened, people engage in behaviors that compensate for the threatened aspect of their identity (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). A threat to social status can make people reaffirm their status by engaging in forms of compensatory consumption, for example, through higher willingness to pay (Ivanic et al., 2011).

In addition, researchers have also shown that people are less likely to choose products that are undesirable to their social status (or that pose a social risk) and that this is moderated by whether the product is consumed in public or private (White & Dahl, 2006). Publicly consumed products (where the consumption is observed by other members of the social group, and where the products are more symbolic) are affected by this phenomenon; avoiding social risk by signaling an identity through disassociation with an undesirable group is less relevant to privately consumed products.

A social sanction in the form of social disapproval through a negatively framed injunctive norm provides information on what behaviors are disapproved of, or are frowned upon in society, thereby making them socially risky. Engaging in socially risky behaviors can be a threat to social status. If an undesired behavior (e.g., buying and accumulating brand-new clothes without considering alternatives) is positioned to be associated with social disapproval, people may feel motivated to dissociate themselves from this undesired behavior to avoid the risk of the social sanction. In the context of rentals and access-based consumption, a threat to social status conveyed through a negatively framed injunctive norm can thus lead to a desire to try the rental platform (desired behavior). Telling consumers that buying and accumulating things is a behavior that is disapproved (or frowned upon) by their social groups

and thereby communicating the risk of a social sanction may thus lead them to engage in the desired behavior of access-based consumption.

This social risk would exist when consumption of the product is socially visible, as in the case of fashion products. As discussed earlier, the negativity bias and loss aversion bias will lead to a stronger impact of a negative injunctive norm (social disapproval) than a positive injunctive norm (social approval) for publicly consumed categories.

For private consumption of products such as household tools which are not symbolic, this social risk does not exist (consumption is not observed socially). The perceived risk of loss in social status because of buying and accumulating household tools is not relevant in the case of this category. Therefore, unlike for fashion, injunctive norms are not likely to benefit from a negative frame in the context of the household tools category. Further, the act of “buying and accumulating household tools” is by itself less relevant as compared to “buying and accumulating clothes.” The frequency of buying a household tool is much lower than that of buying fashion items. Thus, adding a negative frame on the injunctive norm in the context of household tools and positioning it as a sanction against buying and accumulating objects reduces its relevance and suitability as a message. The negative frame will therefore dampen the influence of the injunctive norm instead of benefitting it.

Negatively framed descriptive norms

Negatively framed descriptive norms (that show what most people do not do, or avoid doing) bring the undesired behavior top of the mind. As an example, telling people that “more and more people avoid buying and accumulating new things”, makes “buying new and accumulating” salient. Highlighting an undesirable behavior, such as wasteful consumption or unhealthy eating in a message has shown to be counterproductive. For example, it was seen that littering increased when the place was already littered, energy consumption increased when average energy consumption was higher, and consumption of fruits and vegetables decreased when average consumption of fruits and vegetables was lower. This boomerang effect of the descriptive norm when the desired behaviors are uncommon has been proven in several contexts (Cialdini et al., 1990; Gonçalves et al., 2021; Kallgren et al., 2000; Schultz et al., 2007).

As the descriptive norm in the context of access-based consumption does not reflect the desired behavior, one way to phrase it with a positive frame is to position it as a “dynamic norm” to reflect how consumption behaviors are evolving or trending (Loschelder et al., 2019; Sparkman et al., 2020; Sparkman & Walton, 2017). By saying that “a growing number of people are now moving towards access-based consumption over buying brand new products”, we would bring a positive spin on the prevalent behavior (descriptive norm), thus putting the desirable behavior into focus. Following the observations made in previous research on the impact of making negative behaviors salient, the positive descriptive norm (framed dynamically) should have a stronger impact on trial intent than the negatively framed descriptive norm (that brings the undesirable behavior into focus).

The type of norm (descriptive vs. injunctive), message frame (positive vs. negative), and product category (publicly consumed vs. privately consumed) are therefore likely to have an interaction, that will influence the intention of consumers to try a rental platform. We include this triple interaction effect in our hypothesis.

We hypothesize that:

H4: The product category (publicly vs. privately consumed) will interact with the message frame (positive vs. negative) and the type of norm (injunctive vs. descriptive) to influence trial intent for access-based service platforms such that:

H4a: A message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm, when the category is publicly consumed.

H4b: A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm, when the category is privately consumed.

H4c: A message displaying a positively framed descriptive norm describing desirable behaviors will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a negatively framed descriptive norm describing undesirable behaviors.

Impact of B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms

An access-based consumption platform can be B-to-C (where the platform or the store rents out products to consumers for temporary access and charges a fee), or C-to-C (where prosumers put up their own products for rent, and consumers borrow these for a fixed duration in exchange of a fee). The effect of social norms on trial intent is likely to be affected by what type of rental platform is being considered. B-to-C and C-to-C platforms are likely to be associated with different levels of hygiene concerns, and whether social norms would play an equally strong role in both cases is a question that we try to address in the following paragraphs.

Effect of injunctive norms (vs. control) on B-to-C and C-to-C platforms

Following the postulates of the focus theory of normative conduct, as discussed earlier (see Hypothesis 3), injunctive norms should drive positive behaviors of access-based consumption versus a baseline control message. This should apply to all access-based platforms: both B-to-C and C-to-C. We therefore re-iterate the general hypothesis made earlier in the context of B-to-C and C-to-C platforms.

H5: A message displaying an injunctive norm (positive or negative) will drive stronger trial intent for access-based service platforms than a control message for both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms for both publicly and privately consumed categories

Effect of negative injunctive norms on B-to-C and C-to-C platforms

It was hypothesized earlier (see Hypothesis 4) that negative frames should benefit injunctive norms in the context of publicly consumed categories, but not so in the context of privately consumed categories. The risk of a social sanction, as discussed earlier is relevant to categories consumed in public, but not to those consumed in private. However, this interaction of message frames with norms and for the publicly consumed categories is likely to be different for B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms. In the following paragraphs we elaborate this argument by considering the extant literature on access-based consumption and contamination concerns.

Research on the sharing economy has discussed the critical role played by other users in driving positive experiences with access-based platforms (Hazée et al., 2017). The behavior of other users (how careful they are, whether they return the product in a good condition etc.)

are factors that influence whether consumers feel comfortable with an access-based platform. This is highly applicable to product categories that are used closer to the skin (physically proximal) (Hazée et al., 2019).

In addition, hygiene concerns that consumers have about using rented products close to the skin are likely to be higher when the service provider offering the product for rent is less known and has lower brand equity (Hazée et al., 2019); hygiene concerns are lower when the service provider is a brand well-known and/or is recognized by the consumer. It is therefore likely that C-to-C platforms where the renter is another individual (and not a well-known brand) are associated with higher concerns or risks of contamination than B-to-C platforms where the renter is either a brand or a platform.

In the case of C-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories, where the potential risks of contamination are higher, the effect of a negatively framed injunctive norm communicating a social sanction against buying new things that are publicly consumed (Hypothesis 4) is likely to be dampened by the hygiene concerns that people have (fashion items are publicly consumed, so can benefit from social sanctions, but they are also consumed closer to the skin and therefore the impact of the sanctions would be dampened by the higher contamination concerns on a C-to-C platform). The impact of negatively framed injunctive norms (highlighting a social sanction or risk) for publicly consumed categories (as discussed with Hypothesis 4) would therefore be stronger than that of positively framed injunctive norms in the case of B-to-C platforms, where the likelihood of hygiene concerns/physical risks is lower. C-to-C platforms for categories that are public, but consumed closer to the skin, are less likely to benefit from a negatively framed injunctive norm.

Research on used clothing (Hur, 2020) explains the possible reasons behind perceived social risks associated with used/rented clothing. It has been shown that people who do not consider wearing used clothes perceive rented/second-hand clothing as poor quality, lacking cleanliness, having an unpleasant smell, and lacking style. They are affected by the unpleasant feelings about the product being unclean and concerns about the expression of self-identity. These in turn lead to perceived risks to social acceptance, and social image related to appearance and social status (Hur, 2020). This research shows that contamination concerns lead to the perceived social risks associated with using access-based consumption platforms in physically proximal categories.

Social approval by consumers, in the form of a positively framed injunctive norm, may be able to alleviate perceived contamination concerns: if most people approve of a platform, then it is likely that the products it offers are not unpleasant/unclean. Social approval can thus play a role in addressing hygiene concerns with C-to-C platforms and providing stronger reassurance to consumers on the risks associated with using physically proximal products (available on a C-to-C platform for rent). Consumers' approval for a C-to-C platform is thus likely to be more effective at addressing the higher physical risks than social sanctions against buying and accumulating new clothes.

For privately consumed products such as tools that are not symbolic, the social risk of a sanction against hoarding tools does not exist (as was described earlier through Hypothesis 4). Therefore, the perceived risk of loss in social status is not likely to be greater than the perceived benefit of social approval in the case of the tools category, for both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. Therefore, the negative injunctive norm (social disapproval) is not likely to have a stronger impact than a positive injunctive norm (social approval) for the tools category, irrespective of the type of platform. On the contrary, as discussed earlier, a negatively framed injunctive norm communicating a social sanction against "buying and hoarding tools" may be less relevant to the category, and may dampen the impact of the injunctive norm instead of benefiting it.

We therefore hypothesize that:

H6: The product category (publicly vs. privately consumed) will interact with the message frame (positive vs. negative) and the type of platform (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) to influence trial intent for access-based service platforms such that:

H6a: A message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm will drive stronger trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm for publicly consumed categories on B-to-C platforms.

H6b: A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm will drive stronger trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm for publicly consumed categories on C-to-C platforms.

H6c: A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm will drive stronger trial intent for access-based service platforms than a message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm for privately consumed categories on both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms.

Hygiene perceptions of C-to-C vs. B-to-C platforms

Following the discussion earlier about hygiene concerns, we include in our hypotheses the effect of social norms on hygiene perceptions. As stated previously, research has shown that physical proximity and brand equity of the platform (how well-known the platform is) influence the hygiene concerns of the rented products (Hazée et al., 2019). We would therefore argue, that for physically proximal categories such as fashion, a C-to-C platform (where the renter is an individual and not a brand) is likely to drive more negative hygiene perceptions than a B-to-C platform (where the renter is a brand or a business). Such a difference is not likely to be observed for physically non-proximal categories such as tools, where hygiene concerns are likely to be lower irrespective of whether the platform is B-to-C or C-to-C.

In addition, a positively framed injunctive norm that describes approval of a rental platform can provide reassurance to consumers about the hygiene concerns they may have. This impact is likely to be higher for C-to-C platforms for physically proximal product categories such as fashion. For categories such as tools where the concerns on hygiene would be lower to begin with, such an impact of social approval is likely to be lower.

We therefore hypothesize that:

H7: The product category will interact with the type of platform (C-to-C vs. B-to-C) such that:

H7a: C-to-C platforms will drive lower hygiene perceptions than B-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories but not so for physically distal categories.

H7b: A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm will drive higher hygiene perceptions than a control message for physically proximal categories, but not so for physically distal categories on C-to-C platforms.

*

In this chapter we reviewed the literature on collaborative and access-based consumption, identifying the two key barriers to adoption from a consumer perspective: social stigmatization of platforms and contamination concerns. We established that social norms can drive desirable green behaviors (as seen through several research papers). The under-utilized concept of social norms can be used to drive trial for access-based service platforms. The focus theory of normative conduct and its postulates applied to a relatively new behavior such as access-based consumption has several implications. First, given the uncommon nature of these behaviors, it is likely that injunctive norms would be more impactful than descriptive norms. Second, as the behavior of interest is relatively rare, a descriptive norm would have a desired effect if we position it in the form of a dynamic descriptive norm bringing the desired behavior into focus.

Research on framed norms has shown that as injunctive norms and negative frames are both processed more elaborately, the impact of an injunctive norm is enhanced when framed negatively to communicate a social sanction. However, this effect of frames may be more relevant to some product categories than others. Research on status consumption shows how social context shapes consumer decisions in publicly consumed categories, where the presence of others matters more. For example, a publicly consumed category such as fashion would be affected by social sanctions more than by social approvals. However, this may not be the case with a non-conspicuous category such as household tools. It is therefore important to consider the interaction of norm types, frames, and product categories when understanding what types of normative appeals work in what context.

Lastly, the impact of the type of platform (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) is important to consider in the research, as risks of contamination for physically proximal categories would be different for the two types of platforms (higher risks for C-to-C than for B-to-C). How a social normative message, framed with a certain valence (positive or negative) would interact with the type of platform, and how that differs by product category must be accounted for. We incorporated the above learnings into a set of hypotheses. These hypotheses will be tested experimentally in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The previous chapter presents a review of the access-based consumption literature and the social norms literature with implications of applying the focus theory of normative conduct to the context of access-based service platforms. It also presents the hypotheses that the norm type (descriptive vs. injunctive), frame (positive vs. negative), and product category (publicly vs. privately consumed) will influence how the message impacts trial intent for access-based service platforms. It is therefore important to consider the triple interaction effect of norm type, message framing, and the product category on access-based consumption. In addition, whether the platform is a B-to-C or a C-to-C one will also play a role in how the social normative messages impact trial intent.

This chapter will discuss the research design and method employed to answer the research questions the thesis raises. To address these questions, we use a positivist approach from an epistemological stand-point. This is the most classical and widespread epistemological positioning in research in marketing. The approach suggests the existence of an objective reality that is independent of the researcher. The positivist epistemology emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence and scientific methods in the pursuit of knowledge. It suggests that knowledge can be acquired through observation and experimentation. A method that is very often associated with positivism is called hypothetico-deductive. This is a scientific method which requires formulating a hypothesis, and using data and observations to test its validity. The current thesis uses such an approach. We have developed a set of hypotheses in the previous chapter, and we use an experimental set-up to gather data to corroborate the developed hypotheses.

To investigate the research questions and to test the hypotheses described in the previous chapter, we conducted two studies. The first study explored the triple interaction effect of the norm type, message frame, and the product category on trial intent for rental platforms: the type of platform (i.e., B-to-C or C-to-C) was not explicitly explored in the first study. A second follow-up study took the results from the first study a step further, by testing injunctive norms framed positively and negatively in the context of B-to-C and C-to-C platforms: the type of platform was explicitly explored in the second study.

The first study was a 2 (descriptive vs. injunctive norms) by 2 (positive vs. negative framing) by 2 (fashion rentals vs. tool rentals) between-subjects online experiment. Two control cells (one per category) with a neutral message were included to test the baseline response. The second study was also a 2 (positive vs. negative framing) by 2 (fashion rentals vs. tool rentals) by 2 (B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms) between-subjects online experiment. For both experiments we used the panel provided by the online platform Prolific. This online platform provides a reliable source of data that is representative of the general population and is well-recognized in the academic world (Peer et al., 2017). With this panel we were able to minimize the bias of using student samples or other convenience samples in the research. Each respondent was paid 1 GBP for their participation in the research.

This chapter describes the setup and design of the research, the manipulation checks, the procedure followed for the final experiments and the measurement instruments used. We will begin with the factors leading to the choice of the product categories included in the research. We will then present the stimulus and the different manipulation checks that were conducted before the final experiment. These checks were needed to ensure that the quality of the stimulus was acceptable. Finally, we will review the experimental procedure across both studies.

3.1 CHOICE OF PRODUCT CATEGORIES

Willingness to engage in access-based consumption is likely to be highly category-driven. Cars vs. toys, furniture vs. clothes, or children's clothing vs. electronics or tools, for example, have completely different profiles. What may work for one category need not apply to another. People rent ski equipment, books, and cars frequently, however, renting clothes or household tools and equipment may not be as common. Several factors would influence the decision to rent or buy:

- Investment (high vs. low): how expensive is it to buy
- Visibility (public vs. private): is the product consumed in public or private
- Physical proximity (proximal vs. distal): is the product used close to the skin
- Frequency of use (regular vs. rare): how often is the product used

- Duration of use (long-term vs. short-term): once bought, over how long a timeframe will the product be useful

Several product categories were considered before making the final choice for the present study. Table 3 shows a few examples that were reviewed earlier in the research design. The final choice was made keeping the characteristics of each product category in mind.

Table 3. Category characteristics

Category	Characteristics
Fashion: Clothing, jewelry, handbags	Publicly consumed, low duration of use, high frequency, physically proximal: product touches the body
Children's clothing	Publicly consumed, low duration of use, high frequency, physically proximal: product touches the body
Gaming consoles	Privately consumed, low duration of use, high frequency, physically distal: product does not touch the body
Electronics (E.g., - mobile phones, washing machines, dishwashers)	Privately consumed, medium durability, high frequency, physically distal: product does not touch the body
Furniture and home décor	Partially visible, medium duration of use, high frequency, physically distal: product does not touch the body
Toys	Privately consumed, low duration of use, high frequency, physically distal or proximal: product may or may not touch the body
Books	Privately consumed, low duration of use, high frequency, physically distal: product does not touch the body
House-hold tools	Privately consumed, high duration of use, low frequency, physically distal: product does not touch the body

Fashion and household tools were selected for the research as they differ along several characteristics, in particular two dimensions that are directly connected with the key barriers to access-based consumption that were discussed in the chapter on literature review: public vs. private consumption and physically proximal vs. physically distal. The fashion category is consumed publicly and is used close to the skin, while the household tools category is consumed privately and is used away from the skin.

The two key barriers to access-based consumption are perceived hygiene concerns and perceived social risks. Hygiene concerns are very likely higher when the product is used closer to the skin, i.e., it is physically proximal. Research in the past has shown that people respond differently to access-based consumption in product categories that are physically

proximal vs. distal (Hazée et al., 2019). We therefore think it is important to include a physically proximal category and a physically distal category to understand whether this aspect influences the impact of social norms on trial. Can a descriptive norm telling people that more and more people are choosing to rent help address these concerns? Or would they elevate these concerns? Would social approval play a positive role in dampening some of the concerns? Questions such as these would be better answered if we included two categories that differ on the physical proximity factor.

The second barrier of social stigmatization is likely to be most applicable if the product category is socially consumed. For example, research has particularly highlighted social risks as a barrier to car sharing (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) and fashion rentals (Baek & Oh, 2021). Both fashion and cars are socially consumed in public and are often associated with status and/or conspicuous consumption. The same may not be true of privately consumed categories such as books or household tools. Therefore, we think that it is important to include a publicly consumed category and a privately consumed category to understand whether social normative approaches and message framing would play a different role in each category context. Would social approval (positive injunctive norm) and social sanction (negative injunctive norm) have the same effect on a product category that was publicly consumed (in the presence of other observers) vs. privately consumed (at home)? Questions such as these would be better answered if we included two categories in the research that are privately consumed (non-symbolic) and publicly consumed (symbolic).

It was thereby decided that the two product categories most suitable to derive relevant and robust learnings would be household tools: privately consumed, physically distal and fashion/clothing: publicly consumed, physically proximal. The stimulus and survey were developed with these two categories in mind.

3.2 STIMULI

The main stimulus that was tested in both experiments was a news article snippet, followed by a description of how a rental platform works. The stimulus was presented to the respondents with the focus on one of the test conditions (Study 1: positive descriptive, negative descriptive, positive injunctive, negative injunctive and neutral control message;

Study 2: positive injunctive B-to-C, positive injunctive C-to-C, negative injunctive B-to-C, negative injunctive C-to-C, control B-to-C, control C-to-C). The wording of the messages reinforced the type of norm (descriptive vs. injunctive) and the frame (positive vs. negative). The structure of the stimulus was as follows:

- **Title of the news snippet:** The title reflected one of the normative conditions (positive descriptive, negative descriptive, positive injunctive, negative injunctive, neutral control) for one of the product categories
- **Content of the snippet:** The content of the snippet was a description of a study conducted by a hypothetical expert agency. The study claimed to show one of the experimental conditions (growing number of Americans using rentals, most Americans approving rentals, a growing number of Americans avoiding accumulating new things, most Americans disapproving of rentals or growth in fashion/tools industry: control)
- **A quote to reinforce the content:** The quote from the expert agency reiterated the content in the form of the normative condition or control condition.

Figure 7 displays the structure of the stimulus corresponding to each test condition. Each part of the stimulus was adapted to reflect one of the 5 conditions (descriptive/ injunctive, positive/negative, and control).

Table 4 displays the text that each tested stimulus consisted of. This was the first version of the stimulus that was tested in the first round of manipulation checks.

Fig. 7. News snippet format

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CITY HERALD



AMERICANS APPROVE OF FASHION RENTING

Most Americans approve of renting fashion items that are likely to be used only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by NASM (National Academy of Style and Mode). NASM is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.

“Most people believe it is a good thing to rent clothes, when you know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they recommend clothing rentals” says the team at NASM.

>FULL ANALYSIS ON PAGE 16

CITY NEWS PAGE 2

→ Title of the snippet

→ Content

→ Quote

Table 4. News snippet content tested in Pilot study 1

	Title	Content	Quote
Descriptive Positive	Americans prefer fashion rentals	A growing number of Americans prefer to rent fashion items that are likely to be worn only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode, which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.	"More and more people are choosing to rent their clothes, when they know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they prefer clothing rentals." says the team at the academy.
Injunctive Positive	Americans approve of fashion rentals	Most Americans approve of renting fashion items that are likely to be worn only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry	"Most people believe that it is a good thing to rent clothes when you know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they recommend clothing rentals." says the team at the academy.
Descriptive Negative	Americans do not prefer fashion hoarding	A growing number of Americans prefer not to hoard fashion items that are likely to be worn only occasionally - they choose to rent instead, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.	"More and more people are choosing not to buy & accumulate clothes when they know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they prefer clothing rentals" says the team at the academy.
Injunctive Negative	Americans disapprove of fashion hoarding	Most Americans disapprove of hoarding fashion items that are likely to be worn only occasionally - they recommend renting instead, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.	"Most people believe that it is a bad thing to buy and accumulate clothes when you know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they recommend clothing rentals." says the team at the academy.
Control	Americans and the fashion industry	The Apparel industry in America continues to see new fashion brands & retailers setting up shops across the country, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.	"Fashion brands sell products in physical stores or in online channels - ecommerce sites. Many new business models are now coming up. One of them is that of clothing rentals." says the team at the academy.

Manipulation checks: Pilot study 1

To ensure that the manipulation (news snippet) worked as desired, a pilot study for the fashion category was run. The study was conducted for the fashion category with a sample of 62 Americans recruited from Prolific. Respondents were asked to read one of the versions of the news article and answer a manipulation check question (Argo et al., 2011).

They were asked on a scale of 1 to 7 (1=Not at all true, 7=Absolutely true) to what degree the article talked about:

- something that Americans approve of (injunctive positive norm),
- something that Americans disapprove of (injunctive negative norm),
- something that more and more Americans do (descriptive positive norm),
- something that more and more do not do (descriptive negative norm).

The manipulation checks showed promising results:

The injunctive positive article communicated approval by Americans significantly stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.42$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.75$; $p<0.01$) and the descriptive positive article ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.42$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.23$; $p<0.01$)

The injunctive negative article communicated disapproval by Americans significantly stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=2.08$; $p<0.01$) and the injunctive positive article ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=1.5$; $p<0.01$)

The descriptive positive article communicated something that more and more Americans do significantly stronger than the injunctive positive article ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=6.15$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=4.92$; $p<0.05$), and marginally stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=6.15$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.33$; $p=.058$).

The descriptive negative article communicated something that more and more Americans do not do significantly stronger than the descriptive positive article ($M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=2.58$; $p<0.01$), and the control article ($M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=1.92$; $p<0.01$).

To further increase the discrimination between the norms and the control, we revised the stimulus slightly by highlighting the key words communicating the norms and retested the edited version in another manipulation check study. We also tweaked the content of the

article, to highlight the descriptive and injunctive norms making them more salient. Figure 8 shows the revised content that was then tested in the second round of manipulation checks.

Table 5 shows the revised content for all the experimental conditions.

Fig. 8. Edited news snippet format tested in Pilot study 2



Table 5. News snippet content tested in Pilot study 2

	Title	Content	Quote
Descriptive Positive	Many Americans use Tool Rentals	A GROWING number of Americans use tool rentals for tools/equipment that are likely to be used only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Consumer Tools, which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the household tools & equipment industry.	"MORE AND MORE Americans are renting their tools, when they know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they use tool rentals." says the team at the academy.
Injunctive Positive	Americans approve of tool rentals	Most Americans APPROVE of tool rentals for tools/equipment that are likely to be used only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Consumer Tools which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the household tools & equipment industry	"IT'S A GOOD THING to rent tools when you know that these will be used only occasionally - believe most Americans. Rather than buying new, they support tool rentals." says the team at the academy.
Descriptive Negative	Many Americans avoid hoarding tools	A GROWING number of Americans avoid hoarding tools/equipment that are likely to be used only occasionally - they choose to rent instead, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Consumer Tools which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the household tools & equipment industry.	"MORE AND MORE Americans are choosing not to buy & accumulate tools when they know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they use tool rentals." says the team at the academy.
Injunctive Negative	Americans disapprove of hoarding tools	Most Americans DISAPPROVE of hoarding tools/equipment that are likely to be used only occasionally - they support renting instead, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Consumer Tools which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the household tools & equipment industry.	"IT'S A BAD THING to buy & accumulate tools when you know that these will be used only occasionally - believe most Americans. Rather than buying new, they support tool rentals" says the team at the academy.
Control	Americans and the tools industry	The Tools industry in America continues to see new brands & retailers setting up shops across the country, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Consumer Tools which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the household tools & equipment industry.	"TOOL BRANDS SELL products in physical stores or in online channels - ecommerce sites. Many new business models are now coming up. One of them is that of tool rentals." says the team at the academy.

Manipulation checks: Pilot study 2

We retested this revised content for manipulation checks with the tools category with a separate sample of 70 Americans recruited from Prolific. Respondents were asked to read one of the versions of the updated article (see Table 5 to view the revised stimuli tested) and answer a manipulation check question (Argo et al., 2011). The measures were identical to Pilot study 1.

The manipulation check showed that the manipulation was successful.

The injunctive positive article communicated approval by Americans significantly stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.38$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.93$; $p<0.05$) and the descriptive positive article ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.38$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=4.69$; $p<0.05$)

The injunctive negative article communicated disapproval by Americans significantly stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=6.21$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=2.13$; $p<0.01$) and the injunctive positive article ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=6.21$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=1.23$; $p<0.01$)

The descriptive positive article communicated something that more and more Americans do significantly stronger than the injunctive positive article ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=6.62$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.54$; $p<0.05$), and marginally stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=6.62$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=5.53$; $p<0.05$).

The descriptive negative article communicated something that more and more Americans do not do significantly stronger than the descriptive positive article ($M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5.67$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=1.62$; $p<0.01$), and marginally stronger than the control article ($M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5.67$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=2$; $p<0.01$).

The results from these studies thus showed that the manipulations in the news article snippets worked as intended. This provided the needed confidence to move forward with the actual experiment.

3.3 EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

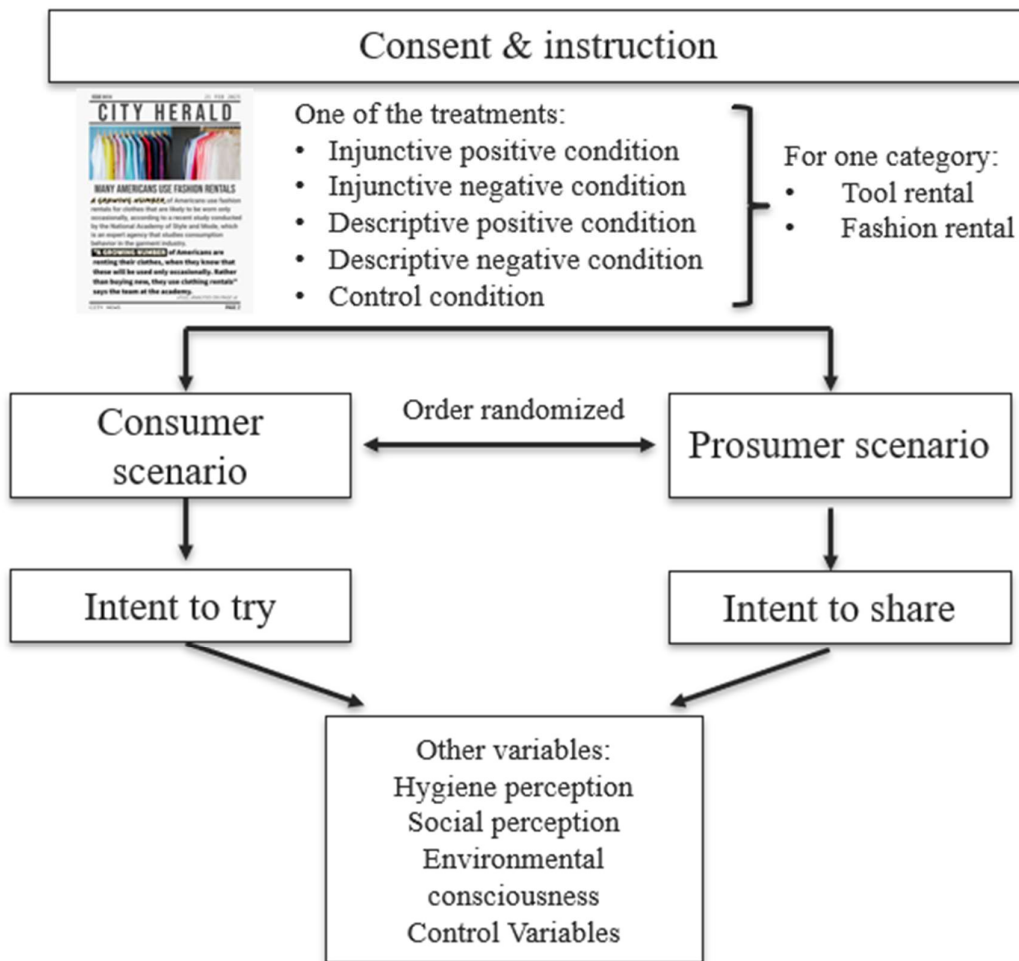
3.3.1 Study 1

Study 1 required a 2 (Norm type: descriptive vs. injunctive) by 2 (Frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (Category: fashion vs. tools) online between-subjects experiment. A control cell with a neutral non-normative message was included for each category (2 control cells in total) to measure the baseline trial intent.

Procedure

Figure 9 describes the procedure followed in Study 1:

Fig. 9. Study 1 procedure



After the initial participant consent form, respondents were told that they would be asked to read a short news snippet that appeared in a local newspaper a few weeks back. They were told that they could take as much time as they needed to do the task. Following the instruction, they were put into a between-subjects set-up: each respondent was assigned randomly to one of the experimental treatments (one of the framed normative messages OR control) for one of the two categories. Depending upon which treatment cell they were assigned to, they had to read one version of the news snippet. Table 6 shows the final stimuli for both product categories. The news snippet was a short write-up that discussed fashion (resp. tool) rentals and was presented with a social normative message: either descriptive or injunctive, framed either positively or negatively. The neutral control news snippet described the growth in the fashion (resp tools) industry with a reference to fashion (resp tool) rentals.

The snippet had a visual (of the relevant category: tools or fashion), a title that included one of the framed normative messages (neutral message for the control cell), a claim made by a hypothetical agency that described one of the framed normative messages (or the neutral control message) and a quote from the hypothetical agency that re-iterated the framed normative message. As was validated in the manipulation checks, key parts of the framed normative messages were stated in bold or capitalized fonts to reassure norm salience

Table 6. Final stimuli

	Descriptive – Positive Frame	Injunctive – Positive Frame	Descriptive – Negative Frame	Injunctive – Negative Frame	Control
Fashion					
Tools					

The stimulus was followed by a comprehension check to ensure people had read the snippet. Respondents were asked a close-ended question: *The article refers to which of the following:*

- *a recent fashion-show (resp. house-hold tools) in the city,*
- *a recent study in the garment industry (resp. house-hold tools),*
- *a recent movie about fashion (house-hold tools),*
- *a recent debate about a fashion magazine (resp. house-hold tools).*

If they failed the comprehension check, their data was excluded from analysis.

Respondents were then explained how fashion (resp. tool) rentals work: they had to read a short description of how a rental platform works. Table 7 provides the description. This was once again followed by a comprehension question to ensure people understood how rentals work. Respondents were asked a close-ended question: *Based on the instruction above, which of the following two statements is correct? Select one of the two:*

- *Rental Websites do not offer you delivery services*
- *Rental Websites offer you delivery services*

If they failed the comprehension check, their data was excluded from the analysis. Respondents were then put into 2 situations, one after the other: consumer situation and prosumer situation. Some respondents went through the consumer block first, followed by the prosumer block and others did the opposite. The order of the blocks was randomized.

The consumer situation asked them to imagine that they had to buy clothes for a gala (resp. an electric drill for some DIY work at home). Table 7 provides the detailed instructions. They were informed that they were likely to use these clothes (resp. electric drill) only occasionally. Once again, to ensure people had read the instruction correctly, this was followed by a comprehension check. Respondents were asked a close-ended question: *The text above asks you to imagine which of the following?*

- *You will have to plan the dinner menu for the gala*
- *You will have to go shopping for new clothes*
- *You will have to go shopping for a camera*

They were then asked how likely they were to rent the clothes from an access-based service platform for the gala (electric drill for the DIY work).

The prosumer situation asked them to imagine that they had an opportunity to put out their own clothes (resp. electric drill and projector) for rent on a rental platform (see Table 7 for detailed instructions). They were informed that they were likely to use these clothes (resp. electric drill) only occasionally.

Once again, to ensure people had read the instruction correctly, this was followed by a comprehension check. Respondents were asked a close-ended question: *The text above asks you to imagine which of the following?*

- *You find old albums in your closet*
- *You find expensive, designer clothes in your closet that you rarely use*
- *You find an expensive antique tea-set rarely used*

They were then asked how likely they were to put these clothes (resp. tools) on a rental platform for others to borrow.

This main block of questions was followed by a set of additional blocks where we collected the moderators and the control variables. All variables were collected on established 7-point Likert scales. The details are all covered in the section on Measurement Instruments (Section 3.4).

Table 7. Instructions

	Rental platform instruction	Scenario imagination instruction
Fashion	<p>The article referred to clothing rentals. Here is some more information on how a clothing rental website works. Read it carefully before you answer the next questions: Clothing rental websites/stores allow you to rent clothes for temporary use.</p> <p>Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the catalogue on the website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The websites offer you delivery services. • You pay a fee for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). • You return the item back after it has been used. 	<p>Consumer Situation: Imagine you have been invited to a special event - a party or a gala or a reception. It is expected that you look sophisticated for the event. You realize you don't have the right outfit, so you will have to go shopping for brand new clothes. You know that you are likely to use these new clothes only occasionally.</p> <p>You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p> <p>Prosumer Situation: You find a couple of great, designer outfits that you have rarely used in the past six months. These are expensive clothes that you would consider wearing only on special occasions. You love these clothes, but you also know that you'd use them only occasionally.</p> <p>You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p>
Tools	<p>The article referred to tool rentals. Here is some more information on how a tool rental website works. Read it carefully before you answer the next questions: Tool rental websites/stores allow you to rent tools for temporary use.</p> <p>Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the catalogue on the website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The websites offer you delivery services. • You pay a fee for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). • You return the item back after it has been used. 	<p>Consumer Situation: Imagine you are working on some household repair work using DIY (Do-it-yourself) tools. You realize you really need an electric drill to get your work done and you don't have one at home. So, you will have to go shopping for a brand-new electric drill. You know that you are likely to use this tool only occasionally.</p> <p>You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p> <p>Prosumer Situation: Imagine you start organizing your "rarely used" items at home. You find a couple of great, rarely used equipment – such as an electric drill and a projector. These are expensive products, that you would consider using only on rare occasions. You love these items, but you also know that you'd use them only occasionally.</p> <p>You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p>

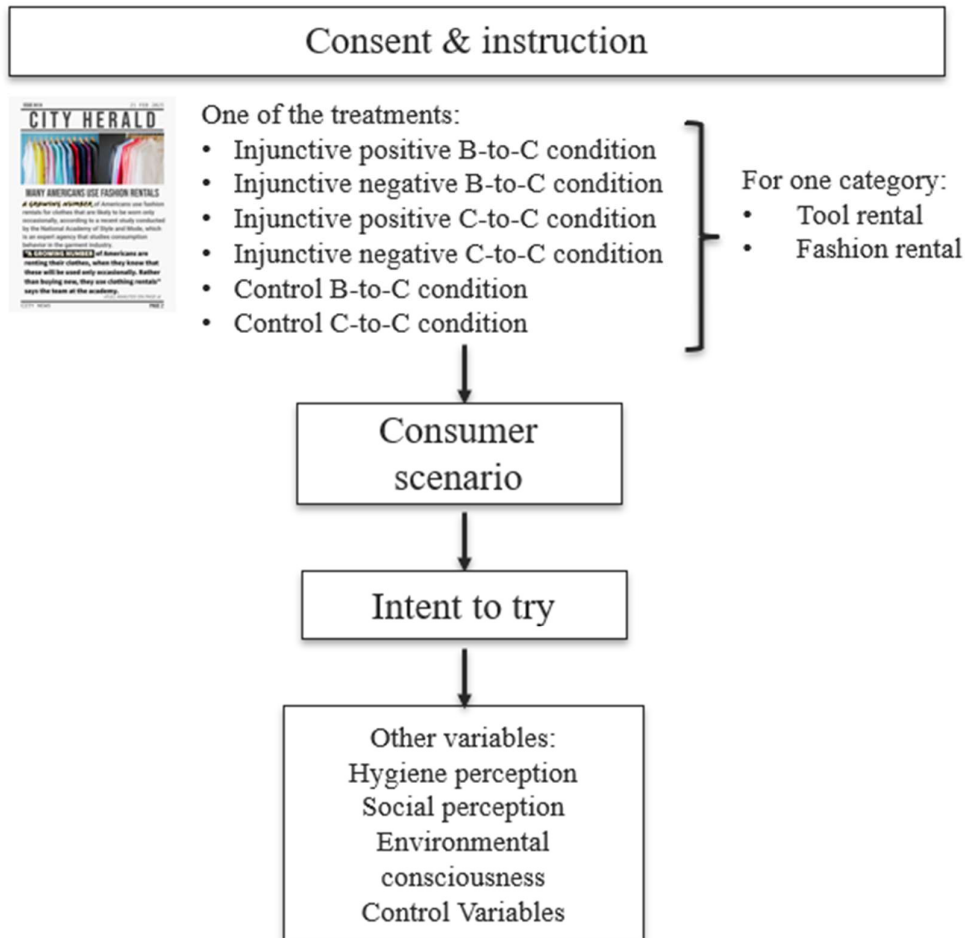
3.3.2 Study 2

The second study was conducted to test our hypotheses on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms. It was also a 2 (Frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (Category: fashion vs. tools) by 2 (Platform-type: B-to-C vs. C-to-C) online between-subjects experiment. A control cell with a neutral non-normative message was included for each category and each platform type. There were 4 control cells in total to test the baseline trial intent for both categories (fashion and tools) and both platform types (B-to-C and C-to-C).

Procedure

The procedure was identical to that followed in Study 1, with the exception that the questions related to prosumers were all excluded. Figure 10 describes the setup and procedure.

Fig. 10. Study 2 procedure



The stimulus and procedure for Study 2 was identical to Study 1 though the two studies differed in the way the instructions on how a rental platform works were provided. Table 8 shows the descriptions and the instructions provided to the respondents. After the initial participant consent form, respondents were told that they would be asked to read a short news snippet that appeared in a local newspaper a few weeks back. They were told that they could take as much time as they needed to do the task. Following the instruction, they were put into a between-subjects set-up: each respondent was assigned randomly to one of the experimental treatments (one of the framed injunctive messages OR control) for one of the two categories.

Depending upon which treatment cell they were assigned to, they had to read one version of the news snippet. The news snippet was identical to the one used in Study 1: the snippet had a visual (of the relevant category: tools or fashion), a title that included one of the framed normative messages (neutral message for the control cell), a claim made by a hypothetical agency that described one of the framed normative messages (or the neutral control message) and a quote from the hypothetical agency that re-iterated the framed normative message. As was validated in the manipulation checks earlier, key parts of the framed normative messages were stated in bold or capitalized fonts to reassure norm salience.

As in Study 1, the stimulus was followed by a comprehension check to ensure people had read the snippet. Those who failed the check were excluded from the analysis.

Respondents were then explained how fashion (resp. tool) rentals work: they had to read a short description of how a rental platform works. Unlike Study 1, we differentiated the platform description between a B-to-C and a C-to-C platform. Each respondent saw one version of the description (either B-to-C or C-to-C). Table 8 shows the descriptions provided to the respondents. The description was once again followed by a comprehension question to ensure people understood how rentals work. If they failed the first check, their data was excluded from the analysis.

Like in Study 1, respondents were asked to imagine that they had to buy clothes for a gala (resp. an electric drill for some DIY work at home. They were informed that they were likely to use these clothes (resp. electric drill) only occasionally. They were then asked how likely they would be to rent the clothes from an access-based service platform for the gala (electric drill for the DIY work). Prosumer scenario was not included in the Study 2.

Table 8. All instructions

	Rental platform B-to-C	Rental platform C-to-C	Scenario
Fashion	<p>The article referred to clothing rentals. Here is some more information on how a clothing rental website works.</p> <p>Clothing rental websites/stores allow you to rent clothes for temporary use from the website. Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the catalogue on the store website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The websites offer you delivery services. • You pay a fee for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). • You send the item back to the store after it has been used. 	<p>The article referred to clothing rentals. Here is some more information on how a clothing rental website works.</p> <p>Clothing rental websites/stores allow you to rent clothes for temporary use from other people like you. Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the items on the website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The owner of the item offers you delivery services. • You pay a fee to the owner of the item for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). • You send the item back to its owner after it has been used. 	<p>Consumer Situation: Imagine you have been invited to a special event - a party or a gala or a reception. It is expected that you look sophisticated for the event. You realize you don't have the right outfit, so you will have to go shopping for brand new clothes. You know that you are likely to use these new clothes only occasionally. You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p>
Tools	<p>The article referred to tool rentals. Here is some more information on how a tool rental website works.</p> <p>Tool rental websites/stores allow you to rent tools for temporary use from the website. Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the catalogue on the store website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The websites offer you delivery services. • You pay a fee for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). <p>You send the item back to the store after it has been used</p>	<p>The article referred to clothing rentals. Here is some more information on how a clothing rental website works.</p> <p>Tool rental websites/stores allow you to rent tools for temporary use from other people like you. Here is how this works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You browse through the items on the website, and choose the item you wish to rent. • The owner of the item offers you delivery services. • You pay a fee to the owner of the item for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks). • You send the item back to its owner after it has been used. 	<p>Consumer situation: Imagine you are working on some household repair work using DIY (Do-it-yourself) tools. You realize you really need an electric drill to get your work done and you don't have one at home. So, you will have to go shopping for a brand-new electric drill. You know that you are likely to use this tool only occasionally. You are reminded of the article you read in the news!</p>

3.4 MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

The intention to try the rental platform was measured using a 7-point established scale (Argo et al., 2006; Bezañon et al., 2019). The intention to share on the rental platform (for others to borrow) was also measured using a similar 7-point established scale (Argo et al., 2006; Bezañon et al., 2019). Following the main dependent variables on trial intent to borrow from a rental site, and trial intent to put your own items on a rental site, the respondents went through a set of additional questions. Environmental sensitivity was collected as a moderating variable with a 3-item scale (Lindeman & Väänänen, 2000). In addition, hygiene perception and social perception of people who rent were also collected as additional dependent variables. Demographics (age, income, level of education), level of awareness and engagement in rental platforms, believability of the news article, and price sensitivity of the respondents were collected as control variables. All constructs were measured using multi-item 7-point established scales: (Baek & Oh, 2021; Göckeritz et al., 2010; Guo & Lamberton, 2021; Kim & Jin, 2020). Table 9 provides the details on all scale items used in the research.

All measurement instruments were identical in both studies. The intention to share on the rental platform (for others to borrow) was not measured in the second study, as the focus was more on understanding consumer trial intent on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms.

Last but not least, respondents completed a set of manipulation checks (like the ones conducted in the Pilot study 1 and 2) adapted from (Argo et al., 2011). They were asked on a scale of 1 to 7 (1=Not at all true, 7=Absolutely true) to what degree the article talked about: something that Americans approve of (injunctive positive norm), something that Americans disapprove of (injunctive negative norm), something that more and more Americans do (descriptive positive norm), something that more and more do not do (descriptive negative norm).

Table 9. Measurement instruments

Variable	Reference	Assertions	Format	Study 1		Study 2	
				Fashion	Tools	Fashion	Tools
Trial Intent	Argo et al. (2006); Bezañon et al. (2019)	Assuming you find the outfit (tool) you need, how likely are you to rent the outfit from the clothing (tool) rental website?	Very unlikely – Very likely (1– 7)	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hygiene Perception	Kim & Jin (2020); Baek & Oh (2020)	The clothes (tools) available for rent on a rental website /store are likely to be-	bipolar scale (1-7)	$\alpha = 0.95$	$\alpha = 0.92$	$\alpha = 0.96$	$\alpha = 0.891$
			dirty: not dirty				
			unpleasant: pleasant				
			unsanitary: sanitary				
			contaminated: not contaminated				
			disturbing: delightful				
unsettling: comforting							
Social Perception	Guo & Lamberton, (2021)	A person who rents clothes (tools) from a clothing (tools) rental website/store is likely to be –	bipolar scale (1-7)	$\alpha = 0.86$	$\alpha = 0.88$	$\alpha = 0.85$	$\alpha = 0.82$
			unreliable: reliable				
			irresponsible: responsible				
			poor: wealthy				
			incompetent: competent				
lazy: hardworking							
Environmental Sensitivity	Lindeman & Väänänen (2000)	<p>It is important to me that the clothes and fashion items I buy are...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... made with respect for the environment • ... produced without disturbing the balance of nature • ... manufactured with respecting the Earth and harmony with other species 	Likert 1–7	$\alpha = 0.97$	$\alpha = 0.97$	$\alpha = 0.96$	$\alpha = 0.97$

Variable	Reference	Assertions	Format	Study 1		Study 2	
				Fashion	Tools	Fashion	Tools
Price Sensitivity	Lichtenstein et al. (1993)	<p>When I shop for clothes and fashion items...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... I spend time looking for the lowest price deals • ... I make an effort to find the lowest priced products • ...I always try to find the cheapest products 	Likert 1-7	$\alpha = 0.92$	$\alpha = 0.92$	$\alpha = 0.89$	$\alpha = 0.89$
Benefit Awareness	Göckeritz et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I need a fashion item (tool) that I am likely to use only occasionally, I always think of borrowing it instead of buying new • I am very aware of the benefits of borrowing from a rental website over buying new • I am very aware of the benefits of putting my own clothes & accessories (tools) for rent on a rental website 	Likert 1-7	$\alpha = 0.77$	$\alpha = 0.79$	$\alpha = 0.74$	$\alpha = 0.74$
Stimulus Credibility	Ryoo et al. (2017)	Thinking about the news article you read earlier select a value from each of the scales below – The news article is:	bipolar scale (1-7) incredible:credible unacceptable:acceptable unbelievable:believable untruthful:truthful	$\alpha = 0.89$	$\alpha = 0.91$	$\alpha = 0.92$	$\alpha = 0.93$

*

This chapter discussed the research design and set-up of the two studies that were conducted. We reviewed the stimulus used, the manipulation checks, the experimental procedure and the measurement instruments applied in both studies. In the following two chapters, we discuss the detailed results from these experiments. Chapter 4 reviews the findings from the first study. We discuss the impact of social norms on trial for access-based consumption, and the triple interaction effect of norm type, message frame and product category. We test the hypotheses 1 to 4 and summarize the overall learnings from the study. We then continue into chapter 5 to review the results of the follow-up study 2. Here we discuss the implications of platform type: B-to-C vs. C-to-C, on the impact that social normative messages (injunctive norms in particular) have on driving trial intent. We test the hypotheses 5 to 7, and summarize the overall learnings from study 2.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY 1

This chapter discusses the first study, where we explore the impact of norm type, message frame and product category on driving trial intent for access-based consumption. We briefly review the sample used for the study, and then discuss all the results in detail. The results are ordered by the developed hypotheses (H 1 to 4), following which we present a set of additional ancillary findings from Study 1.

4.1 SAMPLE

A representative sample of 469 Americans (49% female, average age = 43.8 years) was recruited through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. The sample was representative of the general population. The participants were compensated 1 GBP in exchange for their participation. The Prolific platform provides a reliable source of data that is representative of the general population and is well-recognized in the academic world. It offers data quality that is comparable to the popularly used Amazon Turk (Peer et al., 2017).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental treatments. Of all participants, 246 were exposed to the fashion category stimulus and survey, and 223 were exposed to the tools category stimulus and survey. Table 10 provides the sub-sizes across each experimental condition.

Table 10. Sample

Condition	Fashion	Tools
Control	43	39
Positive Descriptive	50	43
Positive Injunctive	55	49
Negative Descriptive	52	49
Negative Injunctive	46	43

4.2 RESULTS FROM STUDY 1

The independent variable in the first study was the experimental condition that the respondent was assigned to: positive descriptive, positive injunctive, negative descriptive, negative injunctive or control. The experiment was between-subjects, so each respondent only saw one of the conditions, for one of the product categories. The dependent variable was trial intent to borrow from a rental platform. We controlled for price sensitivity, category engagement, and demographics (age, income, gender, and level of education). Environmental consciousness was gathered as a moderating variable.

We also collected two additional variables: hygiene perceptions and social perceptions of people who use rented products. Although no hypotheses were developed about these two variables in Study 1, they were collected to develop an exploratory understanding of the mechanisms by which norms may affect trial intent among consumers. The learnings are discussed in the ancillary findings section of this chapter. In addition, we also gathered prosumers' intention to share on a rental platform as an additional dependent variable. The learnings on the prosumer are also shared in the ancillary findings section of this chapter.

All descriptive statistics across the two categories may be viewed in the Appendix B.

To test our hypotheses concretely, we first conducted a one-way ANOVA to test the experimental conditions vs. control (H1). We ran the PROCESS Macro Model 1 to test for the moderating impact of environmental consciousness (H2). To understand how the norm types, frames, and product categories interact, a 2 (norm type: descriptive vs. injunctive) by 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (category: fashion vs. tools) ANOVA test was then conducted. We also ran 2x2 ANOVAs for each product category (fashion and tools) separately, followed by a series of contrasts to understand how the different experimental treatments compare against each other (H3 and H4). All results are tested at a 95% significance with unilateral (one-tailed) tests.

4.2.1 Effect of social norms

As a first step, to test whether social norms have a stronger impact on trial intent vs. the control condition (H1), we ran a one-way ANOVA test with consumer trial intent as the dependent variable and the condition (positive descriptive, positive injunctive, negative descriptive, negative injunctive and control) as the independent variable. The results of the test showed a direct effect of the condition ($F_{(1, 457)}=5.3$, $p<0.01$) on trial intent. We controlled for price-sensitivity, category engagement, demographics, and stimulus credibility.

This was followed by a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell. These tests showed that injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.71$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.99$; $F_{(1, 457)}=7.45$, $p<0.01$; $M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.82$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.99$; $F_{(1, 457)}=5.3$, $p<0.01$). Descriptive norms had no significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.09$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.99$; $F_{(1, 457)}=0.61$, $p=0.22$; $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5.11$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.99$; $F_{(1, 457)}=0.04$, $p=0.42$). The results thus corroborate the hypothesis H1 for injunctive norms, but not for descriptive norms.

We further ran the same tests as above for the two categories separately. The result of the one-way ANOVA showed a direct effect of the condition (positive descriptive, positive injunctive, negative descriptive, negative injunctive, and control) on trial intent for both categories (fashion: $F_{(1, 234)}=3.36$, $p<0.05$; tools: $F_{(1, 211)}=4.46$, $p<0.01$). This was followed by a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category separately. For fashion, these tests showed that the negative injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.8$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.88$; $F_{(1, 234)}=6.27$, $p<0.01$). However, positive injunctive norms had no significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.88$; $F_{(1, 234)}=1.02$, $p=0.15$). For tools, positive injunctive norms had a significant impact on driving trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.2$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=5.1$; $F_{(1, 211)}=11.22$, $p<0.01$). When framed negatively, their impact was slightly dampened, but remained significant ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.84$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=5.1$; $F_{(1, 211)}=4.01$, $p=0.03$).

When considered at a category level, Hypothesis 1 was corroborated only for the negatively framed injunctive norm for the fashion category. For the tools category, both positive and negative injunctive norms had a stronger impact on trial intent compared to the control condition. As such, we see that the only condition where social norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control for the fashion category, was when they were framed

negatively in the form of social disapproval or social sanctions against buying and accumulating brand-new clothes.

Figures 11 & 12 show the impact of the different experimental stimuli on trial intent across the two categories.

Fig. 11. Fashion rental, trial intent

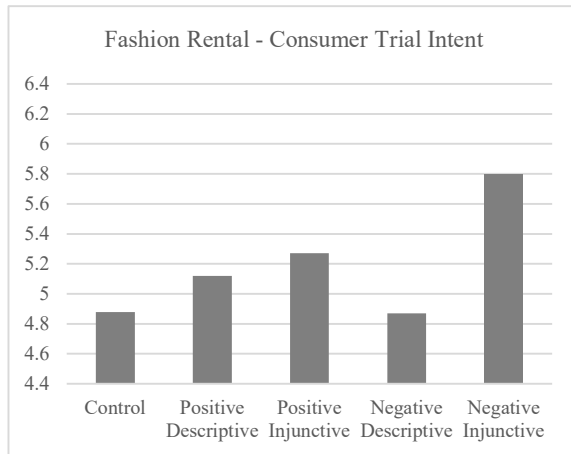
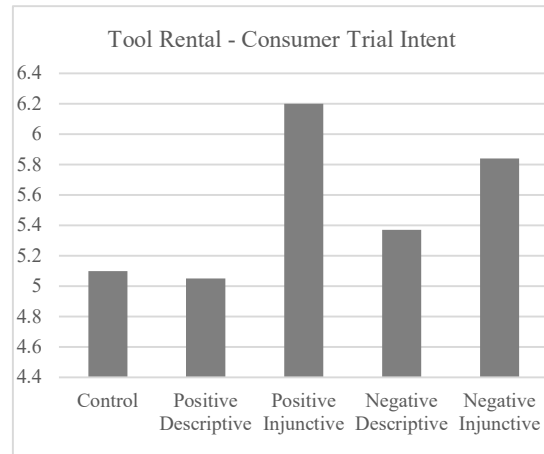


Fig. 12. Tools rental, trial intent



4.2.2 Moderating impact of environmental consciousness

It was found that injunctive norms have a significantly stronger impact on driving trial intent compared to the control cell for both fashion and tools categories: negatively framed injunctive norms for fashion, and both positively and negatively framed injunctive norms for tools. We also tested for the moderating impact of environmental consciousness on this relationship using PROCESS Macro Model 1.

Moderating role of environmental consciousness on the impact of negative injunctive norms

In the context of the fashion category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (negative injunctive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows a significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.16$, $t=-2.84$, $p<.01$).

A conditional analysis utilizing the Johnson-Neyman (Hayes 2013, PROCESS Model 1) allowed us to identify the level of environmental consciousness for which there is a significant difference between the injunctive message and the control message at driving trial intent for access-based service platforms. For individuals showing environmental consciousness inferior to 5.42 ($\beta=0.14$, $t=1.99$, $p=.05$), the negatively framed injunctive message is significantly stronger at driving trial intent than a control message. This effect is not significant among individuals who have higher environmental consciousness (superior to 5.42). Figure 13 demonstrates this moderating impact graphically.

In the context of the tools category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (negative injunctive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.05$, $t=-1.07$, $p=.29$). Figure 14 shows the lack of a moderating impact.

Thus, the moderating effect of the environmental consciousness is observed in the impact of negatively framed injunctive norms on trial intent for the fashion category, but not so for tools.

Fig. 13. Moderating role of environmental consciousness (injunctive negative): Fashion

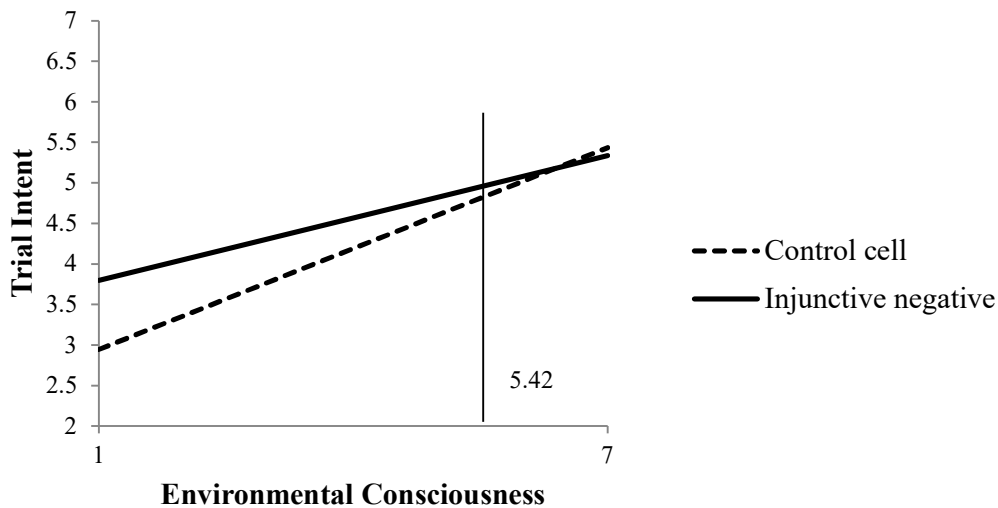
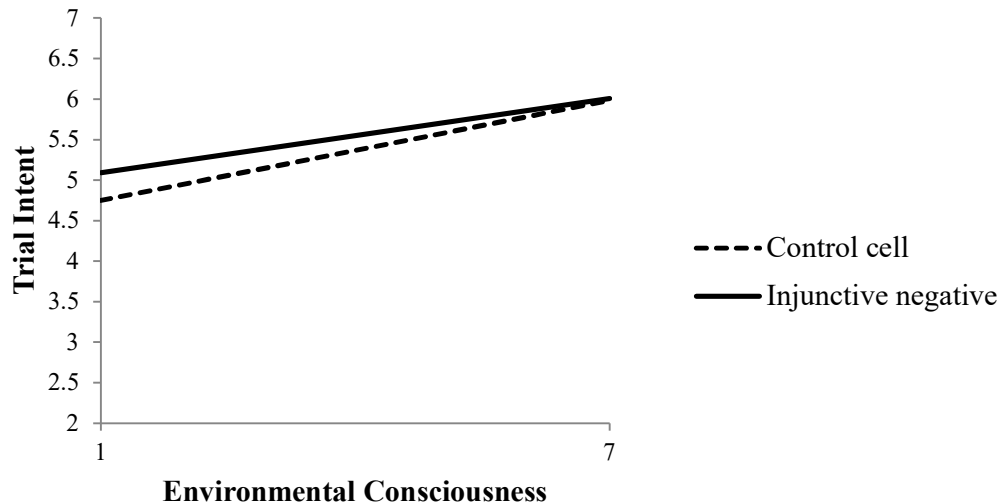


Fig. 14. Moderating role of eco-consciousness (injunctive negative): Tools



Hypothesis 2 is thus corroborated in the context of fashion for the impact of negatively framed injunctive norms. Environmental consciousness moderates the relationship between social sanctions and trial for access-based consumption, such that the trial intent is higher at lower levels of environmental consciousness for the fashion category. This means that people who have lower environmental consciousness are more likely to be impacted by the risk of a social sanction.

Moderating role of environmental consciousness on the impact of positive injunctive norms

In the context of the fashion category, while positive injunctive norms do not have a significant impact vs. current at an overall level, we do observe that for individuals showing lower environmental consciousness, there is an impact of positive injunctive norms on driving trial intent. A regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (positively framed injunctive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows a significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.20$, $t=-1.95$, $p=.05$).

A conditional analysis utilizing the Johnson-Neyman (Hayes 2013, PROCESS Model 1) allowed us to identify the level of environmental consciousness for which there is a

significant difference between the injunctive message and the control message at driving trial intent for access-based service platforms. For individuals showing environmental consciousness inferior to 3.86 ($\beta=0.38$, $t=1.98$, $p=.05$), the positively framed injunctive message is significantly stronger at driving trial intent than a control message. Figure 15 shows the moderating impact graphically.

In the context of the tools category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (negative injunctive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.08$, $t=-0.95$, $p=.34$). Figure 16 describes a lack of the moderating impact for the tools category.

Thus, the moderating effect of the environmental consciousness is observed in the impact of positively framed injunctive norms on trial intent for the fashion category, but not so for tools. Hypothesis 2 is thus corroborated in the context of fashion for the impact of positively framed injunctive norms. Environmental consciousness moderates the relationship between social approval and trial for access-based consumption, such that the impact of the norm on trial intent is higher at lower levels of environmental consciousness for the fashion category. This means that people who have lower environmental consciousness are more likely to be impacted by the perceived benefit of social approval.

Fig. 15. Moderating role of env-consciousness (injunctive positive): Fashion

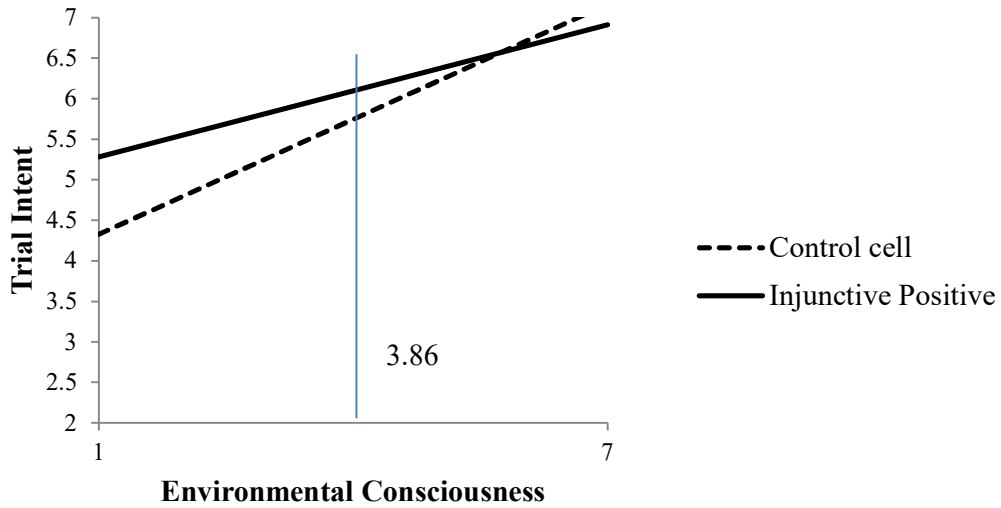
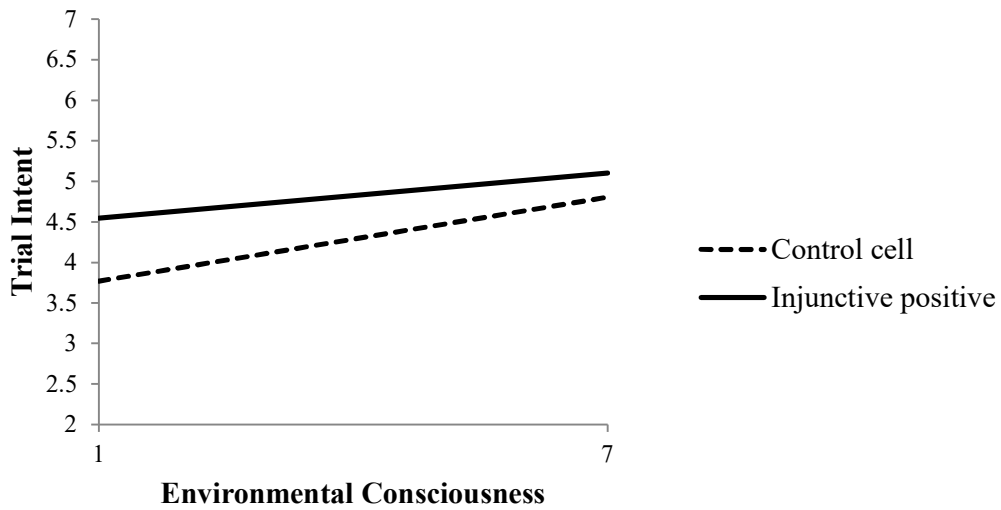


Fig. 16. Moderating role of env-consciousness (injunctive positive): Tools



Moderating role of environmental consciousness on the impact of descriptive norms

Positively framed descriptive norms have no significant impact on driving trial intent vs. the control cell. Irrespective of environmental consciousness, a positive descriptive norm fails to influence people towards trying an access-based platform, as compared to the baseline control message, across both categories.

In the context of the fashion category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (positively framed descriptive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.17$, $t=-0.88$, $p=.38$). Similarly, for the tools category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (positively framed descriptive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.005$, $t=-0.02$, $p=.97$).

Negatively framed descriptive norms also have no significant impact on driving trial intent vs. the control cell. Irrespective of environmental consciousness, a negatively framed descriptive norm fails to influence people towards trying an access-based platform, as compared to the baseline control message, across both categories.

In the context of the fashion category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (negatively framed descriptive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.12$, $t=-1.55$, $p=.13$). Similarly, for the tools category, a regression of trial intent by environmental consciousness, experimental condition (negatively framed descriptive norm vs. control) and their interaction term shows no significant interaction effect between the environmental consciousness and the experimental condition ($\beta=-0.09$, $t=-1.86$, $p=.07$).

4.2.3 Comparison of injunctive and descriptive norms

Following the one-way ANOVA, we also conducted a series of planned contrasts to compare the injunctive and descriptive conditions to test Hypothesis 3. This showed that at an overall

level, positively framed injunctive norms are significantly stronger than positively framed descriptive norms ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=4.88$; $F_{(1,457)}= 3.92$, $p<0.05$) and negatively framed injunctive norms are significantly stronger than negatively framed descriptive norms at driving trial intent. ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=4.88$; $F_{(1,457)}= 12.97$, $p<0.01$).

To test H3 at a category level, we conducted a 2 (norm type: injunctive vs. descriptive) by 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) ANOVA for each category separately.

For fashion, the 2x2 ANOVA showed an interaction effect of norm type and framing ($F_{(1,192)}=5.64$, $p<0.05$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,192)}=5.66$, $p<0.05$). In a series of planned contrasts, we observed that when framed positively, there was no significant difference between injunctive and descriptive norms ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.12$, $F_{(1,192)}=.001$, $p=0.48$). However, when framed negatively, injunctive norms were significantly more effective than descriptive norms at driving trial intent ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.8$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=4.87$, $F_{(1,192)}=10.96$, $p<.01$).

For tools, the 2x2 ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect of norm type and framing ($F_{(1,173)}=2.64$, $p=0.05$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,173)}=12.19$, $p<0.01$). In a series of planned contrasts, we observed that when framed positively, injunctive norms were significantly more effective than descriptive norms at driving trial intent ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.2$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.05$, $F_{(1,173)}=12.99$, $p<0.01$). However, when framed negatively, no significant difference between injunctive and descriptive norms was observed ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.84$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5.37$, $F_{(1,173)}=1.7$, $p>0.05$).

As such, Hypothesis 3 is corroborated for negatively framed norms for the fashion category, and positively framed norms for the tools category.

4.2.4 Effect of negative frames

To understand the interaction effects of norm type, frames, and product category, a 2 (norm type: descriptive vs. injunctive) by 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (category: fashion vs. tools) ANOVA was conducted. The results of the test showed a triple interaction effect of norm type, framing, and product category ($F_{(1,372)}=7.69$, $p<0.01$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,372)}=16.73$, $p<0.01$) on trial intent.

To test whether negatively framed injunctive norms have a stronger impact than positively framed injunctive norms, a set of planned contrasts was conducted to compare negative and positive injunctive norms in the two categories separately. For fashion, a negatively framed injunctive norm conveying social sanctions was stronger at driving trial intent than a positively framed injunctive norm conveying social approval ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.8$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.27$, $F_{(1,234)}=2.64$, $p=0.05$). Adding the negative frame on the injunctive norm and framing it as a social sanction had a positive significant effect on the fashion category.

Such an effect was not observed for the tools category where, a positively framed injunctive norm conveying social approval was directionally stronger at driving trial intent than a negatively framed injunctive norm conveying social sanctions ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=6.2$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.8$, $F_{(1,211)}=1.8$, $p=0.09$). As such, adding a negative frame to the formulation of an injunctive message does not benefit trial intent for access-based service platforms in the tools category.

To test whether positively framed descriptive norms have a stronger impact than negatively framed descriptive norms, a set of planned contrasts was conducted to compare negative and positive descriptive norms in the two categories separately. For fashion, a positively framed descriptive norm (dynamic) conveying how more and more people are using rental platforms, was directionally stronger at driving trial intent than a negatively framed descriptive norm conveying the undesired behavior of buying and accumulating brand-new products ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.12$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=4.87$, $F_{(1,234)}=4.04$, $p=.02$). Adding the negative frame on the descriptive norm and highlighting the undesired behavior led to a negative effect on trial for the fashion category. Such an effect was not observed for the tools category where, there was no significant difference between positive and negative descriptive norms at driving trial ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.37$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=5.05$, $F_{(1, 211)}=0.94$, $p=0.15$).

Figures 17 & 18 demonstrate the triple interaction effect of norm-type, message-frame, and product category.

Fig. 17. Frames and norm types: Fashion

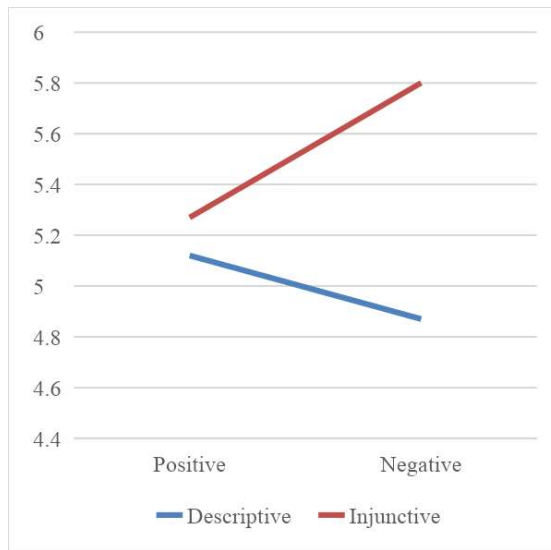
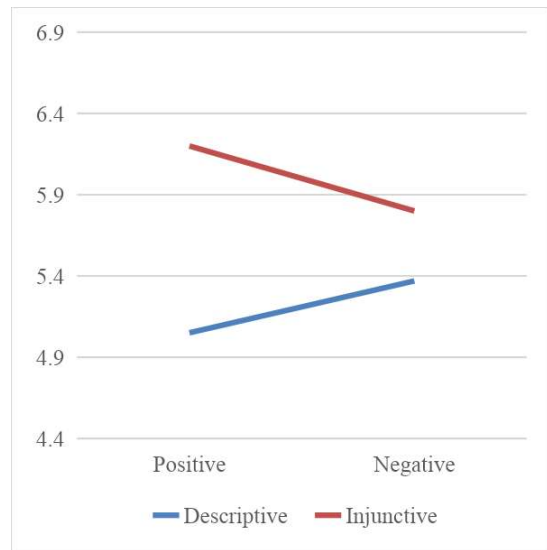


Fig. 18. Frames and norm types: Tools



H4a is thus corroborated: negative frames seem to benefit injunctive norms for the publicly consumed fashion category.

H4b is directionally corroborated: negative frames do not benefit injunctive norms for the privately consumed tools category. On the contrary, positively framed injunctive norms have a stronger impact (directionally) than negatively framed injunctive norms.

H4c is partially corroborated: positively framed descriptive norms (dynamic) that describe changing behaviors towards access-based consumption, thereby putting a positive spin on the descriptive norm have a stronger impact on driving trial intent than the negative descriptive norms that bring the undesirable behavior top-of-mind for consumers for the fashion category. This effect is not observed in the case of the tools category.

4.3 ANCILLARY FINDINGS FROM STUDY 1

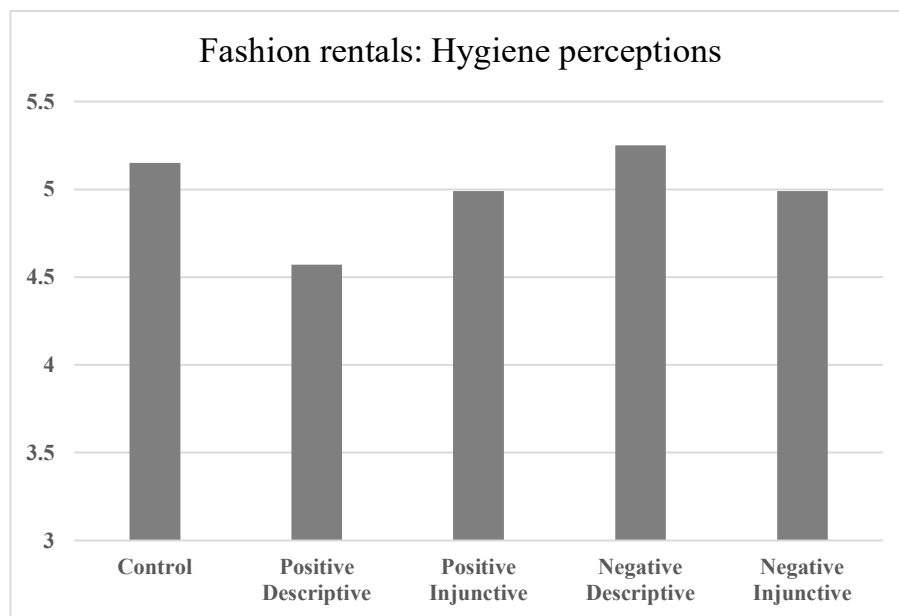
4.3.1 Impact of descriptive norms on hygiene perceptions

We tested hygiene perception as an additional dependent variable and conducted a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category to test whether social norms improve

hygiene perceptions of rented clothes and tools. For tools, we did not see a significant impact of norms on hygiene perceptions vs. the control cell ($M_{\text{control}} = 4.89$, $M_{\text{pos-desc}} = 4.55$, $F_{(1,211)} = 0.7$, $p = 0.4$). However, for the fashion category, the result was surprising: a positively framed descriptive message had a significant negative impact on hygiene perceptions compared to the control cell ($M_{\text{control}} = 5.15$, $M_{\text{pos-desc}} = 4.57$, $F_{(1,234)} = 4.2$, $p = .04$) (2-tailed test).

Figure 19 shows the drop in hygiene perceptions for the positively framed descriptive norm condition vs. control.

Fig. 19. Fashion rentals, hygiene perceptions

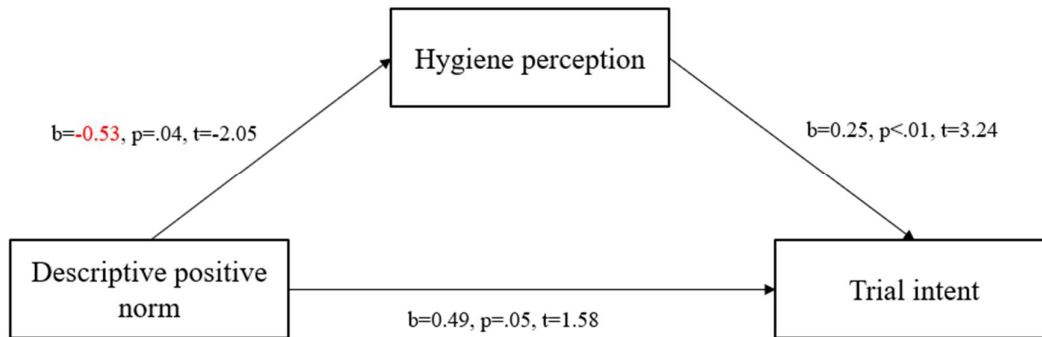


This surprising result obtained from the test could mean that for a physically proximal category, a descriptive norm that tells how more and more people are using rental products could raise more concerns about the hygiene of these products. This could be one of the factors that dampens the impact of descriptive norms in the context of fashion. This is an area that needs further investigation and research.

We also tested for the mediating impact of hygiene perception on driving trial intent for fashion rentals using PROCESS Macro Model 4. The results show that although the total effect of positive descriptive norms on trial intent is insignificant, there is an indirect effect mediated by hygiene perceptions that is significant. Positive descriptive norms have a significant negative impact on hygiene perceptions ($b = -0.53$, $p = .04$, $t = -2.05$) and hygiene

perceptions have a significant positive impact on trial intent ($b=0.25$, $p<.01$, $t=3.24$). The direct effect of positive descriptive norms on trial intent is marginally significant ($b=0.49$, $p=.05$, $t=1.58$). Figure 20 shows how hygiene perception mediate the relationship between descriptive norms and trial intent.

Fig. 20. Mediation impact of hygiene perceptions



Thus, although at an overall level, positive descriptive norms did not have a significant impact on trial intent (vs. control cell), we observe that in the presence of hygiene perceptions as a mediator, the indirect effect of positive descriptive norms is significant and negative. As the direct effect is positive, but the indirect effect is negative, we can anticipate the presence of competitive mediation.

What this means is that while descriptive positive norms lead to a drop in trial intent mediated by hygiene perception (there is a significant indirect effect of positive descriptive norms on trial), there may be other factors, for example, perceived behavioral control/self-efficacy that could lead to a more positive (competing) impact. Knowing that a growing number of people are choosing to rent, can lead to an increase in self-efficacy (if a growing number of people can rent, then it must be easy to do so, and I should be able to do it too). This may be causing a net non-significant impact of descriptive norms on trial intent.

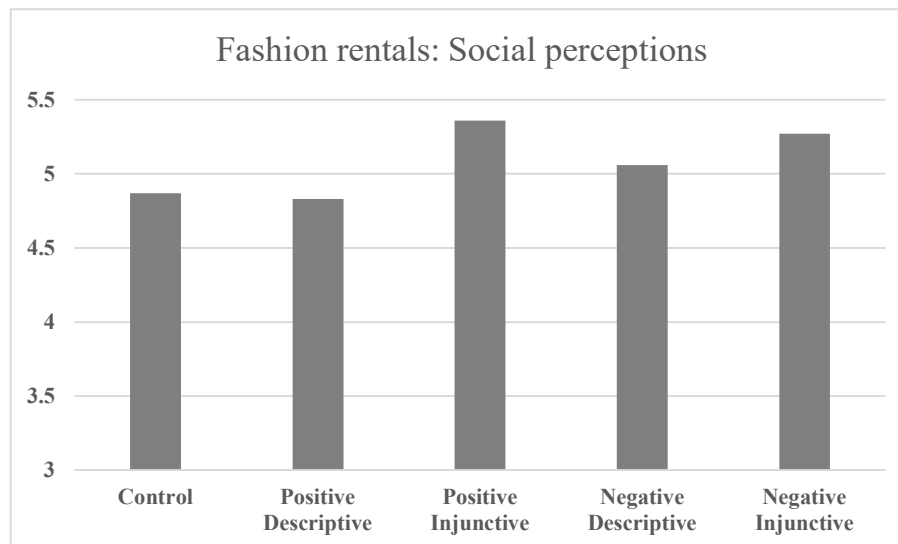
These results show that platform marketers would need to exercise caution when using positive descriptive norms in their communication: conveying the message that many people are using a rental platform could lead to negative hygiene perceptions. However, at the same time, conveying the popularity of the platform can have a positive impact on other factors that can be advantageous. It is important therefore to carefully manage your communication to address these competing mediators.

4.3.2 Impact of injunctive norms on social perceptions

We tested the social perception of others who rent clothes (or tools) as another dependent variable and conducted a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category to test whether positively framed injunctive norms improve social perceptions. For tools, we did not see a significant impact of the injunctive normative message on social perceptions ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.25$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}= 5.31$; $F_{(1,211)}=0.49$, $p=0.48$).

However, for the fashion category we found that a positively framed injunctive message had a significant impact on improving social perceptions of those who rent clothes compared to the control cell ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.35$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}= 4.87$; $F_{(1,234)} =8.15$, $p<.01$). In addition, a negatively framed injunctive message also had a significant impact on improving social perceptions of those who rent clothes compared to the control cell ($M_{\text{neg-inj}}=5.27$, $M_{\text{control}}=4.87$, $F=4.14$, $p=.04$). Figure 21 shows the uplift in social perceptions for the positively framed injunctive norm condition vs. control.

Fig. 21. Fashion rentals, social perceptions



It is interesting to note that while a positively framed injunctive norm conveying social approval for clothing rentals improves social perceptions of people who rent clothes, this does not translate into significantly higher trial interest for self.

One possible explanation is the desire for exclusivity: while social approval may help address the stigmatization of rental platforms that may not be sufficient to drive higher trial of publicly consumed categories such as fashion. This is another area where additional research and investigation is required.

4.3.3 Effect of social norms on prosumers' intention to share

We know that access-based consumption platforms are often 2-sided: consumers who borrow from the platform and prosumers who put their own belongings for rent on the platform. While the key research questions this thesis aims to answer are all in the context of consumers, we also collected some data on prosumers' intention to share, to understand if social norms may have a role to play in driving prosumers to share their belongings on platforms for others to borrow.

We also ran 2x2 ANOVAs for each product category (fashion and tools) separately and a series of contrasts to understand how the different experimental treatments compare against each other at driving prosumers' intention to share.

To test whether positive injunctive norms have a stronger impact on prosumers' intention to share vs. the control condition, we ran a one-way ANOVA test with sharing intent as the dependent variable and the condition (positive descriptive, positive injunctive, negative descriptive, negative injunctive and control) as the independent variable. The results of the test showed no direct effect of the condition ($F_{(1, 457)}=0.65$, $p=0.63$) on sharing intent. At an overall level social norms did not seem to influence sharing intent.

We further ran the same test for the two categories separately. The result of the one-way ANOVA showed no effect of the condition (positive descriptive, positive injunctive, negative descriptive, negative injunctive, and control) on sharing intent for the fashion category ($F_{(1, 234)}=0.74$, $p=0.28$). A direct effect of condition was observed for the tools category ($F_{(1,211)} =1.97$, $p=0.05$). This was followed by a series of planned contrasts vs. the

control cell for the tools category, to further understand the effect observed. It was found that positive injunctive norms had an impact on driving sharing intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.61$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.77$; $F_{(1,211)}=2.5$, $p=0.05$). No other tested condition showed a stronger impact than the control cell at driving sharing intent ($M_{\text{pos-desc}}=5.09$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.77$; $F_{(1,211)}=0.2$, $p=0.33$; $M_{\text{neg-desc}}=4.88$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.77$; $F_{(1,211)}=0.03$, $p=0.44$; $M_{\text{neg-inj}}=4.72$ vs. $M_{\text{control}}=4.77$; $F_{(1,211)}=1.18$, $p=0.14$). We thus show that positively framed injunctive norms may have a role in driving prosumers' intention to share their belongings on platforms for others to borrow.

In the planned contrasts for the tools category, we observed that injunctive norms when framed positively are significantly stronger at driving intent to share than when framed negatively ($M_{\text{pos-inj}}=5.61$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-inj}}=4.72$, $F_{(1,173)}=7.33$, $p<.01$). Negatively framed injunctive norms describing disapproval of buying and hoarding new tools is not relevant to prosumers' intention of sharing their belongings.

The academic research on motivations for using access-based platforms from a prosumer perspective is scarce. The studies (qualitative and quantitative) that have been conducted in the last few years have shown that motivations to use access-based services are different for prosumers and consumers (Bellotti et al., 2015; Böcker & Meelen, 2017; B. Lang et al., 2020).

It has been shown in this work that consumers are most motivated by the economic benefits of platforms: platforms allow consumers to obtain access to goods and services without having to buy them, thereby providing a clear economic advantage. Prosumers on the other hand are largely motivated by environmental and sustainability factors: people who engage in sharing their goods do so primarily with environmental objectives or social community-building goals. This is particularly true with sharing goods such as tools or rides. Therefore, the findings from our research which show that while social normative messages may help address adoption concerns from a consumer perspective (i.e., perceived contamination risks and social stigmatization towards using rented products), they may have less to offer from a prosumer perspective where intentions to share are often altruistic, are not entirely surprising.

That being said, some research has also indicated that to drive one-sided users who are consumers towards becoming prosumers (i.e., motivating them to share their own belongings on the platform), trust in the platform plays an important role (Lang et al., 2020). As our research shows, a positively framed injunctive norm that talks about the approval of

platforms by most people, is likely to provide the trust and the needed reassurance to potential users to proceed with sharing their belongings on the platforms. Positively framed descriptive norms that talk about a growing number of people choosing to rent do not have a significant impact, as the goal for sharing is more environmental than economical.

Results from the study 1 are all summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Study 1 Results Summary

No	Hypothesis	Test	Fashion	Tools
H1	A message displaying a social norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service than a control message.	ANOVA	Corroborated for negatively framed injunctive norms	Corroborated for positively & negatively framed injunctive norms
H2	Environmental consciousness moderates the influence of social norms on trial intent for access-based service such that, the influence is stronger when consumers score low on environmental consciousness.	PROCESS Macro Model 1	Corroborated for positively & negatively framed injunctive norms	Not corroborated
H3	A message displaying an injunctive norm will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service than a message displaying a descriptive norm.	ANOVA	Corroborated for negatively framed injunctive norms	Corroborated for positively framed injunctive norms
H4a	A message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm (social sanction) will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service than a message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm (social approval), when the category is publicly consumed (fashion).	ANOVA	Corroborated	
H4b	A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm (social approval) will have stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service than a message displaying a negatively framed injunctive norm (social sanction), when the category is privately consumed.	ANOVA		Directionally corroborated
H4c	A message displaying a positively framed (dynamic: conveying changing behavior) descriptive norm describing desirable behaviors will have a stronger impact on trial intent for access-based service than a message displaying a negatively framed descriptive norm describing undesirable behaviors.	ANOVA	Corroborated	Not corroborated

*

In conclusion, the results from Study 1 showed the role that social norms can play in driving trial for access-based consumption platforms. The results bring to life the implication of the focus theory of normative conduct that describes the power of injunctive norms (vs. descriptive norms) at driving behaviors which are uncommon in the society. Our results show that injunctive norms have the potential to drive trial intent for access-based services, and the impact is moderated by environmental consciousness.

Particularly, the results highlight the interaction effect of norm type (descriptive vs. injunctive), message framing (positive vs. negative) and product category (fashion vs. household tools) on the trial intent for rental platforms. We observe that a negatively framed injunctive norm has the strongest impact on driving trial intent in the context of the fashion category which is publicly consumed. The negative frame does not benefit the injunctive norm in the context of the privately consumed household tools category.

We take these findings one step further to study the impact that injunctive norms would have on a B-to-C vs. a C-to-C platform. We know that the contamination concerns that consumers would have for B-to-C rentals would be lower than those for C-to-C rentals. On C-to-C platforms, the renter is not a brand, but is another individual unknown to the borrower. This can elevate concerns related to hygiene. In this case, the findings from Study 1 may not apply directly, and would need to be validated separately for B-to-C and C-to-C platforms.

We therefore take the findings into Study 2 and test the performance of positively and negatively framed injunctive norms on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms for the two categories: fashion which is publicly consumed and is physically proximal (used closer to the skin) and tools which is privately consumed and is physically distal (used away from the skin). The next chapter unpacks the results from Study 2.

CHAPTER 5: STUDY 2

This chapter discusses the second study, where we explore the impact of the type of platform (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) on driving trial intent for access-based consumption. We consider how an injunctive norm would affect trial intent differently on platforms that are B-to-C vs. C-to-C for the two product categories. We briefly review the sample used for the study, and then discuss all the results in detail. The results are ordered by the developed hypotheses (H5 to 7).

5.1 SAMPLE

A representative sample of 483 Americans (59% female, average age = 43.1 years) was recruited through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. The sample was representative of general population. The participants were compensated 1 GBP in exchange for their participation. The test included manipulation checks and comprehension checks (open and close-ended) to make sure the content of the article was read and understood by respondents.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental treatments. Of all participants, 237 were exposed to the fashion category stimulus and survey, and 246 were exposed to the tools category stimulus and survey. Sub-sizes per cell were as per Table 12.

Table 12. Sample

Condition	Fashion	Tools
Control – B-to-C	38	39
Positive Injunctive – B-to-C	36	41
Negative Injunctive – B-to-C	36	43
Control – C-to-C	44	39
Positive Injunctive – C-to-C	44	41
Negative Injunctive – C-to-C	39	43

5.2 RESULTS FROM STUDY 2

The independent variable was the experimental condition that the respondent was assigned to: positive injunctive B-to-C, positive injunctive C-to-C, negative injunctive B-to-C, negative injunctive C-to-C, control B-to-C and control C-to-C. The experiment was between-subjects, so each respondent only saw one of the conditions, for one of the product categories. The dependent variable was trial intent to borrow from a rental platform. Unlike Study 1, we did not collect the prosumers' intent to share in the Study 2. We controlled for price sensitivity, category engagement, and demographics (age, income, gender, and level of education).

We also collected two additional variables: hygiene perceptions and social perceptions of people who use rented products. Although no hypotheses were developed about these two variables in Study 1, we developed additional hypotheses on the impact of injunctive norms on hygiene perceptions in the B-to-C and C-to-C contexts in the Study 2.

All descriptive statistics across the two categories may be viewed in the Appendix B.

Like in Study 1, we first conducted a one-way ANOVA to test the experimental conditions vs. control (H5) for B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. To understand how message frames, type of platform (B-to-C vs. C-to-C), and product category interact, a 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (type of platform: B-to-C vs. C-to-C) by 2 (category: fashion vs. tools) ANOVA test was then conducted. We also ran 2x2 ANOVAs for each product category (fashion and tools) separately, followed by a series of contrasts to understand how the different experimental treatments compare against each other (H6). We also conducted one-way ANOVA to test the impact of the experimental conditions on hygiene perceptions for both categories and platform types (H7). All results are tested at a 95% significance with unilateral (one-tailed) tests.

5.2.1 Effect of social norms

As a first step, to test whether injunctive norms have a stronger impact on trial intent vs. the control condition (H5), we ran a one-way ANOVA test with consumer trial intent as the

dependent variable and the condition (positive injunctive for B-to-C, negative injunctive for B-to-C, control for B-to-C, positive injunctive for C-to-C, negative injunctive for C-to-C, control for C-to-C) as the independent variable. The results of the test showed a slight effect of the condition ($F_{(1, 483)}=2.0$, $p=0.08$) on trial intent.

This was followed by a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell. These tests showed that at an overall level (across the two categories) positive injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj-BtoC}}=5.74$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=5.05$; $F_{(1, 483)}=6.38$, $p<0.01$; $M_{\text{pos-inj-CtoC}}=5.44$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=4.92$; $F_{(1, 483)}=3.4$, $p=0.03$). Negative injunctive norms had a marginal impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{neg-inj-BtoC}}=5.32$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=5.05$; $F_{(1, 483)}=2.4$, $p=0.06$; $M_{\text{neg-inj-CtoC}}=4.99$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=4.92$; $F_{(1, 483)}=1.77$, $p=0.09$).

We further ran the same tests as above for the two categories separately. The result of the one-way ANOVA showed a direct effect of the condition (positive injunctive for B-to-C, negative injunctive for B-to-C, control for B-to-C, positive injunctive for C-to-C, negative injunctive for C-to-C, control for C-to-C) on trial intent for fashion category, but only a marginal impact for the tools category (fashion: $F_{(1, 237)}=2.39$, $p<0.05$; tools: $F_{(1, 211)}=1.99$, $p=0.08$).

This was followed by a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category separately. For fashion, these tests showed that the negative injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control in the context of B-to-C platforms only ($M_{\text{neg-inj-BtoC}}=5.39$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=4.66$; $F_{(1, 237)}=7.4$, $p<0.01$). Positive injunctive norms had no significant impact on trial intent vs. control in the context of B-to-C platforms for the fashion category ($M_{\text{pos-inj-BtoC}}=5.17$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=4.66$; $F_{(1, 237)}=1.54$, $p=0.11$). These results are identical to the ones we achieved in Study 1. Figure 22 shows the trial intent across different conditions for B-to-C fashion rentals.

For C-to-C platforms, positive injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M_{\text{pos-inj-CtoC}}=5.23$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=4.59$; $F_{(1, 237)}=3.1$, $p<0.05$), but negative injunctive norms had only a marginal impact ($M_{\text{neg-inj-CtoC}}=4.93$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=4.59$; $F_{(1, 237)}=2.1$, $p=0.07$). Thus, the results from Study 1 for the fashion category were not replicated for C-to-C platforms. Figure 24 shows the trial intent across different conditions for C-to-C fashion rentals.

For tools, positive injunctive norms had a significant impact on driving trial intent vs. control in the context of B-to-C platforms ($M_{\text{pos-inj-BtoC}}=6.24$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=5.44$; $F_{(1,246)}=4.85$, $p=0.01$). These results are identical to Study 1. When framed negatively, their impact was not significant ($M_{\text{neg-inj-BtoC}}=5.26$ vs. $M_{\text{control-BtoC}}=5.44$; $F_{(1,246)}=0.195$, $p=0.66$). Figure 23 shows the trial intent across different conditions for B-to-C tool rentals.

For C-to-C tool rental platforms, the impact of positive injunctive norms was no longer significant. ($M_{\text{pos-inj-CtoC}}=5.63$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=5.28$; $F_{(1,246)}=0.75$, $p=0.19$). Negative injunctive norms in the context of C-to-C tool platforms had no impact on trial intent ($M_{\text{neg-inj-CtoC}}=5.05$ vs. $M_{\text{control-CtoC}}=5.28$; $F_{(1,246)}=.06$, $p=0.8$). Figure 25 shows the trial intent across different conditions for C-to-C tool rentals.

Thus, when considered at a category level, for the fashion category, negative injunctive norms had a stronger impact on trial intent compared to the control condition, as in Study 1, but on B-to-C platforms only. On C-to-C platforms, a positively framed injunctive norm showed stronger impact vs. control for the fashion category. Negatively framed injunctive norms on C-to-C fashion rental platforms did have an impact, but it remained marginal.

For the tools category, positive injunctive norms had a stronger impact on trial intent compared to the control condition, but only for B-to-C platforms; there was no impact of norms observed for the tools category in the context of C-to-C platforms. As such, we see that the results from Study 1 are replicated in Study 2 in the context of B-to-C platforms, however, not so on C-to-C platforms.

H5 is thus corroborated for positively framed injunctive norms on B-to-C platforms for the tools category and for negatively framed injunctive norms on B-to-C platforms for the fashion category. H5 is also corroborated for positively framed injunctive norms on C-to-C platforms for the fashion category and only directionally corroborated for negatively framed injunctive norms on C-to-C platforms for the fashion category.

Fig. 22. Fashion, trial intent: B-to-C

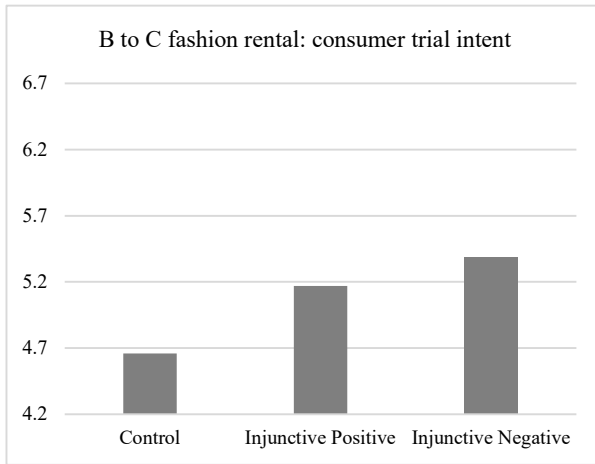


Fig. 23. Tool, trial intent: B-to-C

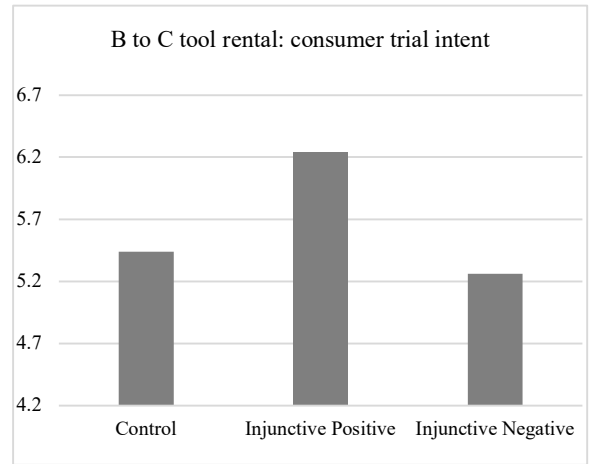


Fig. 24. Fashion, trial intent: C-to-C

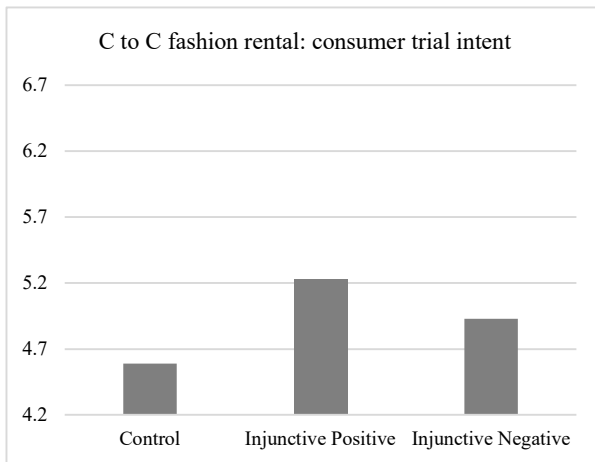
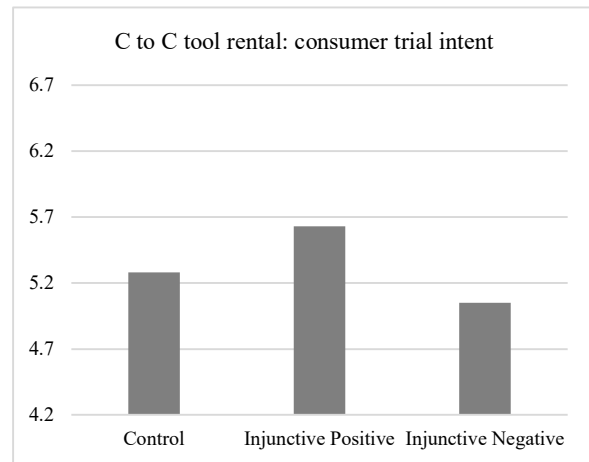


Fig. 25. Tools, trial intent: C-to-C



5.2.2 Effect of negative injunctive norms

To understand the interaction effects of frames, product category, and platform type a 2 (frame: positive vs. negative) by 2 (category: fashion vs. tools) by 2 (platform type: B-to-C vs. C-to-C) ANOVA was conducted. The results of the test showed a marginal triple interaction effect of framing, product category, and platform type ($F_{(1,323)}=3.05$, $p=0.08$) and

a significant double interaction effect of category and frame ($F_{(1,323)}=5.16$, $p<0.05$) on trial intent.

To test whether negatively framed injunctive norms have a stronger impact than positively framed injunctive norms, a set of planned contrasts was conducted to compare negative and positive injunctive norms in the two categories separately for both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. For fashion, a negatively framed injunctive norm conveying social sanctions was directionally stronger at driving trial intent than a positively framed injunctive norm conveying social approval on B-to-C rental platforms ($M_{\text{neg-injBtoC}}=5.39$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-injBtoC}}=5.17$, $F_{(1,237)}=2.18$, $p=0.07$). Adding the negative frame on the injunctive norm and framing it as a social sanction had an effect on the fashion category in the context of a B-to-C platform. On a C-to-C platform, such an effect of negatively framed norms was not observed. There was no significant impact of the negative frame vs. the positive frame in the context of C-to-C platforms ($M_{\text{neg-injCtoC}}=4.93$ vs. $M_{\text{pos-injCtoC}}=5.23$, $F_{(1,237)}=0.106$, $p=0.75$).

For the tools category a positively framed injunctive norm conveying social approval was significantly stronger at driving trial intent than a negatively framed injunctive norm conveying social sanctions on B-to-C platforms ($M_{\text{pos-injBtoC}}=6.24$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-injBtoC}}=5.26$, $F_{(1,246)}=7.28$, $p<0.01$). On C-to-C platforms there was no significant difference between a positive vs. negative injunctive norm ($M_{\text{pos-injCtoC}}=5.63$ vs. $M_{\text{neg-injCtoC}}=5.05$, $F_{(1,246)}=0.38$, $p=0.27$). As such, adding a negative frame to the formulation of an injunctive message does not benefit trial intent for access-based service platforms in the tools category. On the contrary, on a B-to-C platform, a positively framed injunctive norm is more effective at driving trial intent than a negatively framed injunctive norm.

Figures 26 & 27 demonstrate the interaction effect of platform-type, message-frame and product category

Fig. 26. Frames and platform-types: Fashion

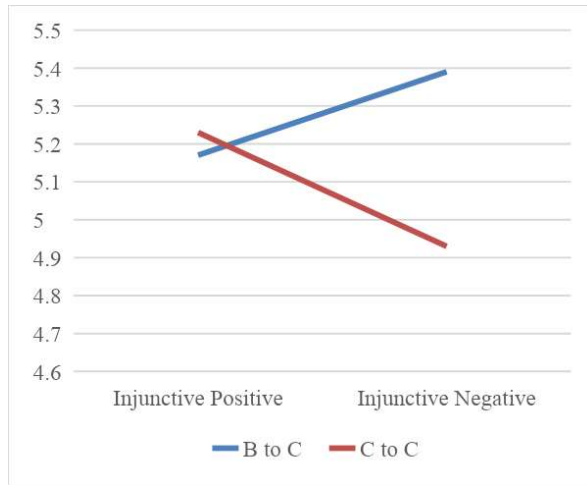
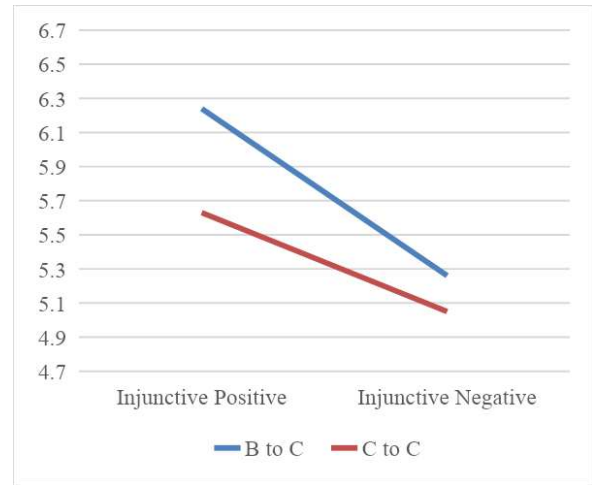


Fig. 27. Frames and platform-types: Tools



H6a is thus corroborated directionally: negative frames seem to benefit injunctive norms for the publicly consumed fashion category on a B-to-C rental platform.

H6b is not corroborated: there is no significant difference between positive and negative injunctive norms for the fashion category on a C-to-C rental platform

H6c is partially corroborated: negative frames do not benefit injunctive norms for the privately consumed tools category. On the contrary, positively framed injunctive norms have a stronger impact (directionally) than negatively framed injunctive norms on a B-to-C platform. However, there is no significant difference between the positive and negative injunctive norms for the tools category on a C-to-C rental platform

5.2.3 Hygiene perceptions of B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms

We tested hygiene perception as an additional dependent variable and conducted a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category and each platform type to test whether injunctive norms improve hygiene perceptions of rented clothes and tools. For the fashion category, we found that the hygiene perception for the B-to-C control cell was significantly better than that for the C-to-C control cell ($M_{\text{control-BtoC}} = 5.19$, $M_{\text{control-CtoC}} = 4.57$, $F_{(1,237)} = 4.97$, $p < 0.05$). For tools, we did not see a significant difference between hygiene

perceptions for the B-to-C vs. C-to-C control cells ($M_{\text{control-BtoC}} = 4.68$, $M_{\text{control-CtoC}} = 4.64$, $F_{(1,246)} = 0.09$, $p = 0.92$).

In addition, for the fashion category, a positively framed injunctive norm helped improve hygiene perceptions in the context of C-to-C platforms significantly ($M_{\text{control-CtoC}} = 4.57$, $M_{\text{pos-injCtoC}} = 5.34$, $F_{(1,237)} = 9.4$, $p < 0.01$). A positively framed injunctive norm also helped improve hygiene perceptions in the context of B-to-C platforms marginally ($M_{\text{control-BtoC}} = 5.19$, $M_{\text{pos-injBtoC}} = 5.65$, $F_{(1,237)} = 2.46$, $p = 0.06$). For the tools category, this improvement in hygiene perceptions as a result of injunctive norms was not observed for B-to-C platforms ($M_{\text{control-BtoC}} = 4.68$, $M_{\text{pos-injBtoC}} = 5.09$, $F_{(1,246)} = 1.37$, $p = 0.12$) and for C-to-C platforms ($M_{\text{control-CtoC}} = 4.64$, $M_{\text{pos-injCtoC}} = 4.93$, $F_{(1,246)} = 1.19$, $p = 0.14$).

H7a is thus corroborated: Hygiene perceptions are higher for B-to-C platforms than for C-to-C platforms for the fashion category which is physically proximal, but not so for household tools which are physically distal.

H7b is also corroborated: Positively framed injunctive norms help drive up hygiene perceptions vs. control message for the fashion category, but not so for the tools category on C-to-C platforms. We also see a marginal positive effect of the positive injunctive norms on driving up hygiene perceptions on B-to-C platforms for fashion. No such effect is observed for the tools category.

The results from study 2 are all summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Study 2 Results Summary

No	Hypothesis	Test	Fashion	Tools
H5	A message displaying an injunctive norm (positive or negative) will drive stronger trial intent than a control message for both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms for both publicly and privately consumed categories.	ANOVA	Corroborated for negative injunctive norms: B-to-C platforms, positive injunctive norms: C-to-C platforms	Corroborated for positive injunctive norms for B-to-C platforms.
H6a	A message displaying a negative injunctive norm (social sanction) will drive stronger trial intent than a message displaying a positive injunctive norm (social approval) for publicly consumed categories on B-to-C platforms.	ANOVA	Corroborated	
H6b	A message displaying a positive injunctive norm (social approval) will drive stronger trial intent than a message displaying a negative injunctive norm (social sanction) for publicly consumed categories on C-to-C platforms.	ANOVA	Not Corroborated	
H6c	A message displaying a positive injunctive norm (social approval) will drive stronger trial intent than a message displaying a negative injunctive norm (social sanction) for privately consumed categories on both B-to-C & C-to-C platforms	ANOVA		Corroborated for B-to-C platforms
H7a	C-to-C platforms will drive lower hygiene perceptions than B-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories but not so for physically distal categories.	ANOVA	Corroborated	Corroborated
H7b	A message displaying a positively framed injunctive norm (social approval) will drive higher hygiene perceptions than a control message for a physically proximal category, but not so for a physically distal category on a C-to-C platform.	ANOVA	Corroborated	Corroborated

*

In conclusion, the results from Study 2 showed the role that injunctive norms can play in driving trial for access-based consumption on both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. The results of Study 1 (previous chapter) were closely replicated in Study 2, but for B-to-C platforms only. We observe that a negatively framed injunctive norm has the strongest impact on driving trial intent in the context of the fashion category, which is publicly consumed, on B-to-C platforms where the perceived risk of contamination is expected to be lower. The negative frame does not benefit the injunctive norm in the context of the fashion category on C-to-C platforms where the perceived risk of contamination is higher. On C-to-C fashion rentals, a positively framed injunctive norm that communicates approval of the platform by other consumers, is more impactful at driving trial intent.

The results from Study 1 were also replicated for the tools category for B-to-C platforms. We see that positively framed injunctive norms drive trial for tool rentals in the B-to-C context. However, these results were not observed for C-to-C platforms.

In addition, Study 2 brings to life the differences in hygiene perceptions consumers have on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms. It confirms the hypothesis that hygiene perceptions are more positive on B-to-C platforms than on C-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories such as fashion. The results also show that positively framed injunctive norms can play a role in addressing hygiene/contamination concerns about using rented fashion. As expected, these findings are relevant to the fashion category that is used closer to the skin, but not to the tools category that is physically distal.

CHAPTER 6: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Access-based service platforms provide a promising solution to the global overconsumption challenge the world faces today. This research provides a fresh perspective on how scholars could think of marketing and advertising of access-based consumption in the sharing economy. It has been discussed in the extant literature that core marketing principles focusing on the transfer of ownership may not apply directly to sharing platforms where no such transfer happens. This research provides several thought starters for marketing scholars studying consumer marketing in the context of the sharing and access-based consumption.

This is the first research project that studies the influence of social normative approaches to drive access-based consumption, and the triple interaction effect of norm type, frame, and product category on access-based services. It further examines the learnings in the context of both B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. This research thus contributes to the relatively new, but growing literature on access-based consumption and the sharing economy.

In this chapter, we shall analyse and summarize the results from the previous chapters for both the studies, and present our academic contributions to the extant literature. We start with results obtained in Study 1, analyze the findings, and discuss the theoretical/academic contribution of each result. We will then analyze the results and present the additional contributions from the follow-up Study 2. The two studies show that social norms have a role to play in driving the trial of access-based consumption platforms. Injunctive norms can play an important role by providing the needed reassurance through social approval, or by communicating a social risk through social sanctions. The type of injunctive norm (positively vs. negatively framed) that is most impactful will largely depend upon the product category and whether the platform is B-to-C or C-to-C.

Next, we shall discuss the managerial implications of this research. We see a significant potential for platform owners and marketers in leveraging the power of social normative messages to drive the desired behavior of access-based consumption. However, when applying these messaging techniques, it will be important to consider the influence of the product category, the framing of the marketing/advertising message (positive or negative) and the type of platform where the product is being rented (B-to-C or C-to-C). Finally, we

will conclude with the limitations of the research and potential avenues for future work in this field.

6.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

We first summarize our results and present the contributions of each finding to the extant academic literature. This section is organized by the different research questions that the study addresses, and the contribution from each one to the academic literature.

6.1.1 Can social-normative messages drive access-based consumption?

The first result from Study 1 shows that social norms have a role to play in driving the trial of access-based service platforms. The confirmation of Hypothesis 1 demonstrates that injunctive norms have the potential to drive the desired behavior of access-based consumption, however, this may be product category driven. For publicly consumed categories such as fashion, the relevance and impact of an injunctive norm vs. a control message is strengthened when it is combined with a negative frame. Negatively framed injunctive norms conveying social disapproval or social sanctions showed the strongest impact at driving trial intent for rentals in the publicly consumed fashion category. Positively framed injunctive norms showed most promise in the context of the household tools category. This finding reveals for the first time the effectiveness of framed social norms in the context of access-based consumption and brings to light the moderating role played by the product category in the relationship.

This result contributes to the growing literature on access-based consumption, which so far has primarily focused on understanding barriers and drivers of alternative consumption models. Several researchers have studied the barriers to the adoption of access-based service platforms: contamination concerns and social risks (Argo et al., 2006; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019; Borusiak et al., 2020), but not a lot of work has been done to understand how consumers could be driven towards these alternative modes of consumption. It has been widely suggested that the core marketing

principles need to be adapted to the sharing economy, to drive penetration of alternative consumption models such as access-based consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Some researchers have gone a step further to test different messages that can increase trial for access-based consumption, such as communicating price benefits vs. variety, including (vs. excluding) physical contact in the communication. etc. (Guo & Lamberton, 2021; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). So far, to our knowledge, no other research paper has studied the impact of social norms on driving access-based consumption. Thus, this thesis fills an important gap and addresses a timely and globally relevant topic.

6.1.2 Does environmental consciousness moderate the impact of social norms?

Another interesting finding from this research is the moderating role of environmental consciousness in the impact of norms on trial for access-based services. The confirmation of Hypothesis 2 for injunctive norms reveals that the eco-consciousness of consumers can influence the impact of social sanctions/approval in the context of the publicly consumed fashion category. Being eco-conscious is a socially desirable trait, and a lack of this trait is not socially approved. People who are already eco-conscious are less affected by a social sanction against overconsumption or social approval for renting, unlike those who lack eco-consciousness. This moderating impact is observed in the publicly consumed fashion category, but not so in the privately consumed household tools category.

The moderating impact of environmental consciousness on the impact of message appeals has been explored in the extant literature. Some research has shown that environmental concern or involvement with the issue at hand moderates how a framed message influences consumer response such that, higher concern or higher involvement is associated with a stronger influence (Amatulli et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2015; Jung & Jorge, 2011; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). On the other hand, in some cases, lower environmental concern may cause a stronger impact on message appeals (Göckeritz et al., 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that the influence of a message that conveys a threat will be stronger if the threat is relevant to the individual. If the threat is deemed irrelevant, individuals are not influenced by the threat (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Nash et al., 2011). Our research corroborates these general learnings from the past, and contributes to the growing literature on the influence of

eco-consciousness on how ads and messages impact attitudes and intentions. We show that the threat of a social sanction for a publicly consumed category is more impactful among individuals who score lower on eco-consciousness. This threat is likely to be less relevant to those who are already eco-conscious.

6.1.3 Are injunctive norms more impactful than descriptive norms?

Comparing the impact of injunctive and descriptive norms as per Hypothesis 3, we see that when framed positively, injunctive norms are significantly stronger than descriptive norms at driving trial intent for tool rentals. This finding confirms that when the desired behavior is less common, i.e., when injunctive and descriptive norms are not aligned (desired behavior is not salient), as is the case with renting tools, injunctive norms have stronger potential than descriptive norms at driving desired results.

The second postulate of the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000) describes the importance of norm salience, for the normative message to be impactful. This implies that when observed behavior is not the desired one, people are likely to be influenced more by injunctive norms than by descriptive norms

Literature on social norms has shown that when desired behaviors are less common in the society, injunctive norms are more influential than descriptive norms at driving them (Cialdini et al., 1990; Gonçalves et al., 2021; Kallgren et al., 2000; Schultz et al., 2007). Our research validates this implication of the focus theory of normative conduct in the context of access-based consumption for the privately consumed tools category. The above results thus contribute and append to the large body of literature on social norms and the application of the focus theory.

The potential of positively framed injunctive norms compared to positively framed descriptive norms at driving trial was however not significantly different for the fashion category. The insignificant impact of social approval in the context of fashion rentals, may be explained by the role played by the need for exclusivity in conspicuous categories. It has been shown that exclusivity and uniqueness can play a role in establishing status in the minds

of others. The need for uniqueness and the desire to be different from others is often achieved through the acquisition and use of consumer goods to develop and enhance one's self-image and social image (Tian et al., 2001). Literature on this topic holds evidence that people engage in conspicuous/status consumption to establish their uniqueness (Griskevicius et al., 2006). Researchers have shown that consumers seek uniqueness in their choices when the domain or category is symbolic (like hairstyles or music), but not so when the category is non-symbolic (Berger & Heath, 2007). Participants avoid following norms in those categories that are identity domains. In the consumption of conspicuous categories, not following the norm may symbolize social status. This phenomenon may be dampening the effect of positive injunctive norms conveying social approval for fashion rentals on driving trial intent; the same is not true for privately consumed household tools.

6.1.4 What is the impact of message frame and product category?

Our results show that publicly and privately consumed categories differ in how trial for rentals is impacted by framed social norms (Hypotheses 4a, 4b, 4c). Given the conspicuous nature of publicly consumed categories, these benefit most from negatively framed injunctive messages conveying a social sanction. We see in our results from Study 1 that negatively framed injunctive norms do better than all the other tested conditions, including the baseline control at driving trial intent for fashion rentals. On the other hand, positively framed injunctive norms that convey social approval show the most promise at driving trial for rentals in categories such as tools: we see that positive injunctive norms do better than all the other tested conditions, including the baseline control at driving trial intent for tool rentals. Thus, negative frames are shown to benefit injunctive norms in the context of fashion, but not so in the context of tools.

In line with the focus theory of normative conduct, the results of Study 1 also provided evidence that bringing the desired behavior in focus through a positively framed descriptive norm drives stronger trial intent than bringing the undesired behavior through the negatively framed descriptive norm (Hypothesis 4c). However, this was true only for the fashion category. Fashion and tools categories differ not only in their public vs. private natures but also in how often they are consumed and how long they last: fashion products are bought

more frequently and last for a lesser time than household tools. Household tools are used less frequently but are typically long-lasting. The negatively framed descriptive norm of “buying and accumulating” is therefore not very relevant to the tools category, but is highly relevant to and observed in the fashion category. This explains why Hypothesis 4c is corroborated for the fashion category, but not for tools.

These results from Study 1 demonstrate the triple interaction effect between type of norm, message frame and product category in the context of access-based consumption. With this, we make a unique contribution to the literature on message framing and social norms, and their application to the sharing economy. Literature on message framing has discussed the negativity bias and loss aversion that influences consumer decisions (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Research has also shown how combining frames with social norms can impact behaviors. Particularly, it has been demonstrated that negative frames can benefit injunctive norms (Cialdini et al., 2006; Mollen et al., 2021) as negatively framed injunctive norms require more attention processing and are more effective than positively framed injunctive norms (Baumeister et al., 2001; Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003; Crawford & Cacioppo, 2002).

While this may apply in most cases, our research shows that in the context of access-based consumption the impact of the negative frame will depend upon the product category in question. In the current research, it is demonstrated that framed social norms (positively and negatively framed) have a role to play in driving the trial of access-based services and that this is product category dependent: negatively framed injunctive messages are the most effective for publicly consumed categories, while positively framed injunctive messages are the most effective for privately consumed categories. This research thus contributes to the literature on message framing, by exploring the idea in combination with norms and product categories.

Further, our findings on how social sanctions impact public vs. private categories differently is a relevant addition to the literature on conspicuous consumption. Literature in status/conspicuous consumption has shown how people change behaviors or make choices when faced with threat to social status (Berger & Heath, 2008; Ivanic et al., 2011; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009), and how this is moderated by public vs. private nature of the consumption (White & Dahl, 2006). To our knowledge, no work has been done so far at the cross-section of status consumption and the sharing economy. The findings we have on how social

sanctions can impact publicly consumed symbolic categories differently from privately consumed non-symbolic categories is a great addition to the extant literature on status consumption, studied in the context of the sharing economy.

6.1.5 What is the impact of B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms?

At an overall level, the findings from Study 1 were replicated in Study 2 in the context of B-to-C platforms. With the partial corroboration of Hypothesis 5, we see that the impact of social sanctions communicated with negative injunctive norms for publicly consumed categories such as fashion that was observed in Study 1, applies mostly to B-to-C platforms. However, there were several nuances observed when the platforms were declared as C-to-C. For C-to-C fashion platforms, positively framed injunctive norms communicating social approval were the most impactful (vs. control) at driving trial intent.

As discussed earlier, for a physically proximal category such as fashion/clothing, concerns about contamination are likely to be higher, particularly when the service provider is less known to consumers (Hazée et al., 2019). For C-to-C platforms, where the product is being borrowed from another consumer, the likelihood of contamination concern can be higher than for a B-to-C platform, where the product being borrowed is from a recognized service provider. Therefore, social approval of the platform may play a larger role in providing reassurance to consumers, than a social sanction against hoarding new clothes when the platform is C-to-C.

As in Study 1, the corroboration of Hypothesis 6a means that adding a negative frame benefits injunctive norms for publicly consumed categories on B-to-C platforms, showing how the risk of a social sanction can drive people towards the desired behavior. This impact is not noticed on C-to-C platforms where social approval communicated via positive injunctive norms remains most beneficial.

The results from Study 1 for the privately consumed tools category were replicated in Study 2, for B-to-C platforms. We found that positively framed injunctive norms describing approval of tool rentals were most impactful at driving trial intent. A positively framed

injunctive norm was more likely to drive trial for tool rentals than a negatively framed injunctive norm on B-to-C platforms.

However, these results were not replicated in the context of a C-to-C platform. Injunctive norms (both positive: social approval and negative: social sanctions) did not seem to have an impact on the trial for C-to-C tool rentals. This could mean that there are other factors influencing the decision to borrow a tool from another consumer, and social norms may not be sufficient to address them. Examples could include ease of procuring the product or ease of returning it to its owner. Additional research on the impact of social norms on C-to-C rental platforms for privately consumed, physically distal objects such as household tools should be considered by future studies in the field of access-based consumption.

These results contribute to the growing literature on marketing in the sharing economy. As was discussed, most work on the sharing economy and access-based consumption has so far focused on understanding consumer adoption barriers and drivers (Argo et al., 2006; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Hur, 2020; Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019, 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019; Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019). Some work has also explored the impact of different message appeals on driving trial for rental platforms (Guo & Lamberton, 2021; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). This study takes the understanding a step further by applying social normative messages to the context of access-based consumption in the context of B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. It provides evidence that social normative approaches could be a viable solution to drive adoption of access-based platforms, and the framing of the normative messages to drive desired results will differ for a B-to-C vs. C-to-C platform.

6.1.6 What is the impact of social norms on hygiene perceptions?

Building upon these learnings, we further uncover additional insights on how social norms impact hygiene perceptions of products being rented on B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms. As anticipated, hygiene perceptions are more positive for products on B-to-C platforms than those on C-to-C platforms for physically proximal categories (such as fashion), but not so for physically distal categories (such as tools) as corroborated by H7a. Further, as expected,

positively framed injunctive norms can play a role in addressing these hygiene concerns, particularly on C-to-C platforms, further reinforcing the important role that social approval can play for C-to-C rentals.

The results observed above contribute to the growing literature on barriers to access-based consumption (and collaborative consumption: used/refurbished product usage in general). It demonstrates for the first time, with an experimental study, how B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms differ in driving hygiene perceptions, and the role of social normative approaches in addressing hygiene barriers. Research on contamination concerns associated with using rental products has discussed the critical role played by other users in driving positive experiences with access-based platforms (Hazée et al., 2017). It has been shown that this is highly applicable to product categories that are used closer to the skin (physically proximal) (Hazée et al., 2019). In addition, hygiene concerns that consumers have about using rented products close to the skin are shown to be higher when the service provider is less known and has lower brand equity (Hazée et al., 2019).

Results from Study 2 take this understanding a few steps further, and demonstrate for the first time how hygiene concerns for different product categories differ for B-to-C vs. C-to-C platforms. We also show the role that injunctive norms can play in addressing these concerns, and thereby driving trial for platforms. These insights provide food for thought to marketers studying the sharing economy and make an important contribution to the literature on barriers to consumer adoption of collaborative consumption behaviors.

6.1.7 Ancillary learnings and additional contributions

The results from Study 1 also revealed some additional learnings, that were originally not hypothesized. One was an interesting finding that describes the potential effect of descriptive norms on hygiene perceptions. Hygiene concerns are one of the key barriers to access-based consumption. While positively framed descriptive (dynamic) norms did not show an impact at driving trial intent vs. the control message, our results showed a negative impact of positively framed descriptive norms on hygiene perceptions of rented clothes. Telling consumers that more and more people are now choosing to rent clothes, brought down their perceptions of hygiene of the clothes on rental platforms and thereby their intention to try a

clothing rental platform. We found that hygiene perceptions thus mediate the relationship between the positively framed descriptive norm and trial intent. This finding only applied to the physically proximal fashion category, but not the tools category where contact to skin is distal. This interesting result opens an avenue of research and deserves further investigation.

Extant literature on collaborative consumption and rentals has discussed hygiene and contamination concerns at length (Argo et al., 2008; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019; Lang & Zhang, 2019). It has been shown that these concerns are a lot higher when the product is used closer to the skin (Hazée et al., 2019; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Our learning on how hygiene perceptions can mediate the impact of descriptive norms on trial for rental platforms for a physically proximal category contributes to the extant literature on barriers to adopting access-based consumption behaviors.

Another ancillary finding we have is with respect to prosumers' intention to share on platforms. While our main research question was primarily focused on consumers, we have some learnings from a prosumer perspective. The impact of social norms among prosumers is in general lower as compared to consumers. This was expected as motivations to engage in access-based consumption for a prosumer are different from that for a consumer: while consumers primarily engage in access-based consumption for economic reasons, prosumers do so for ecological reasons, particularly with categories such as household tools (Böcker & Meelen, 2017). We found in our research that social norms played a positive role in driving the intention to share only when they were framed as positive injunctive norms. Social approval for rental platforms provided prosumers with the needed reassurance to put their own products out for rent. Unlike for consumers, the impact of the negative frame on the injunctive norm was not relevant to prosumers. Approval for tool rentals communicated via a positively framed injunctive norm was more impactful than a sanction against gathering tools (which seems less relevant to prosumers).

Interestingly, none of the tested conditions showed a significant impact on prosumers' sharing intention in the context of fashion rentals. This could mean that social approval alone may not be sufficient to reassure prosumers to put their clothes out for rent for others to borrow. There may be concerns on hygiene, wear and tear and potentially lack of care exercised by strangers when they use clothes. There is little academic research available on the prosumer perspective, and therefore the area of understanding prosumer motivations and barriers is ripe for future research.

These results from Study 1 contribute to the limited literature on prosumers' perspective on access-based consumption. We know that access-based service platforms are two-sided, and their success depends on how many people get on the platform as consumers and as prosumers (i.e., people who want to put their own items out for rent). While this was not the main research question of the thesis, the results from the study show the relevance of social approval in driving sharing intent among prosumers.

Studies in the recent past that have shown that motivations to use access-based services are different for prosumers and consumers (Bellotti et al., 2015; Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Lang et al., 2020). We contribute to this literature by showing how social normative approaches differ in their impact on prosumers' intent to share vs. consumers' intent to rent. The interesting differences we observe between prosumers and consumers should also provide food for thought to scholars studying the sharing economy and the role and motivations of prosumers.

6.2 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

As was stated earlier, access-based consumption provides a promising solution to the global ecological crisis related to overconsumption of resources. But this is likely to become successful when a larger number of people use it because of network effects. However, we know that these are relatively new behaviors and there are several barriers to consumer adoption as they are associated with uncertainty. People need to be reassured psychologically (for perceived quality, contamination, and social risk concerns) that it is safe (both in terms of performance and social acceptance) and beneficial to take on these behaviors. To get more consumers to try the platforms, it is necessary that the platform builds trust and reassures potential consumers of a positive experience.

This research has direct and actionable implications for platform owners and marketers on how they can drive more consumers towards their platform and increase their adoption. The implications are also relevant to retailers and brands who may want to encourage consumers to re-use and rent, instead of buy new. The learnings here are highly relevant to all players in the subscription/sharing economy. We have organized the key managerial implications and take-aways into four areas:

- Advertising/communication messages to drive access-based services
- Importance/relevance of product category in access-based consumption
- Role of platform type and branding in driving trust for the platform
- Understanding environmental consciousness and role of environmental messaging for platforms

6.2.1 How to communicate to drive demand for access-based services?

The key implication/take-away from this research for a platform owner / marketer is broadening their toolkit of advertising and communication with social normative messages. We have reviewed several US and EU-based access-based platforms across categories to understand how these platforms have been marketed today. We observe that most access-based service platforms today focus on advertising and communicating key benefits (variety, cost, convenience, sustainability), without providing consumers with the reassurance they need to try the access-based service.

They talk about providing access to an infinite wardrobe, or about saving money, or about the convenience of not owning an object but getting access to its benefits, or about how renting (and not buying) can help us protect the world from growing waste. None of the platforms we reviewed has used a social normative message on its website. Table 14 provides a few examples.

Table 14. Platform marketing message examples

Platform	Category	Marketing message
Blablacar	Car ride	Price
Bolt	Car ride	Economic benefits and convenience
Turo	Car ride	Convenience
Uber	Car ride	Economic benefits and convenience
Zipcar	Car ride	Economic benefits and convenience
Bundlee	Children/Baby clothing	Convenience and sustainability
Rent a romper	Children/Baby clothing	Variety
Upchoose	Children/Baby clothing	Convenience and sustainability
Armoire	Fashion	Variety and convenience
By Rotation	Fashion	Sustainability and community
Dresscoded	Fashion	Variety
Endless Wardrobe	Fashion	Variety and sustainability
FashionPass	Fashion	Flexibility
Girl meets dress	Fashion	Variety and sustainability
Gwynnie Bee	Fashion	Variety
HURR	Fashion	Sustainability
Le Tote	Fashion	Variety
My Wardrobe HQ	Fashion	Variety
Myonbelle	Fashion	Variety
Nova Octo	Fashion	Variety and sustainability
Nuuly	Fashion	Variety
Poshmark	Fashion	Variety
Raineys Closet	Fashion	Variety
Rent the Runway	Fashion	Variety
Rotaro	Fashion	Variety
The Devout	Fashion	Variety and convenience
The nu wardrobe	Fashion	Sustainability and economic benefits
Tuletie	Fashion	Variety and sustainability
Vestiaire Collective	Fashion	Economic benefits
Vince Unfold	Fashion	Variety
Vivrelle	Fashion	Variety and economic benefits
Courthouse tool rental	Tools	Convenience
Peerby	Tools	Economic benefits and convenience
RentalHQ	Tools	Convenience
Rentmyequipment	Tools	Economic benefits
Sparetoolz	Tools	Economic benefits and convenience

In the current research, we have explored a different way of crafting a message that is likely to address some of the concerns consumers have, towards adopting an alternative consumption model. Social normative messages, injunctive norms in particular, which highlight the approval of rental platforms can be a powerful way to drive increased trial of access-based consumption. Injunctive norms can help build trust in the platform, and using them in advertising and communication messages can provide reassurance to consumers that the platform is safe to use, physically and socially. It is demonstrated in our research that social norms have a role to play in driving the trial of access-based services. This learning can be directly applicable to platform owners and managers, as they build communication/advertising campaigns for their platforms.

6.2.2 Importance/relevance of product category in access-based consumption

The research provides evidence of how different product categories are influenced differently by marketing/communication messages. In a publicly consumed, symbolic category like fashion, negatively framed injunctive norms or social sanctions showed the highest potential to drive trial, while for a privately consumed, non-symbolic category like tools, positively framed injunctive norms conveying social approval showed the highest potential to drive trial. We observe a steady increase in the number of fashion/clothing platforms that offer rentals today, and most of them communicate (as indicated earlier) on variety, price, and sustainability. The idea of leveraging social sanctions has never been explored by platform owners and marketers. This is an important learning for platform owners as they develop their marketing and communication strategy to drive business. Platforms that provide symbolic categories (e.g., Rent the Runway, Poshmark etc.) for rent can try using negatively framed injunctive norms in their communication.

However, platform owners must learn from our research that what works for one category, need not apply to another. It is very important to consider the context of the category, how it is consumed, the frame of reference consumers have as they consume the category when developing the messages to market the platform. Different product categories have varying profiles along several dimensions: frequency of purchase, frequency of use, proximity to the skin, public vs. private consumption etc. While we do not address every single attribute in

this research, we provide platform owners and marketers with guidance on how to position their platform in the context of symbolic vs. non-symbolic categories. Messages that communicate social risk of a sanction can be powerful in driving consumers towards the platform in symbolic categories, while messages that communicate social approval may be more relevant to privately consumed categories.

In addition, the results from the research also provide platform owners / marketers with certain watch-outs, particularly in the context of product categories that are physically proximal and are used closer to the skin. While popularity of a platform communicated via a descriptive normative message may appear to be an attractive messaging strategy, we have seen that this can lead to increased hygiene concerns in categories such as fashion/clothing. Such a communication strategy should therefore be applied with caution.

The category specific learning that the research provides can be applied by fashion and/or household tools platforms in their communication. In addition, other categories with similar profiles may also be able to benefit from the learning on category interaction and impact of injunctive norms.

6.2.3 Importance/relevance of platform type and brand

The research further drills down to develop an understanding of B-to-C vs. C-to-C rental platforms and highlights the different nuances between the two, that platform owners and marketers need to be mindful of when they develop their communication strategy. This is most relevant to categories that are consumed closer to the skin. B-to-C platforms where the renter is a well-known brand/retailer are associated with lower risk of contamination, particularly for physically proximal categories such as fashion/clothing, as compared to C-to-C platforms where the renter is another consumer (prosumer).

In the context of a B-to-C platform, negatively framed injunctive normative messages that would communicate the social threat of a sanction against buying and accumulating new clothes can be a powerful messaging strategy to drive trial for the rental platform. The social threat of a sanction in the publicly consumed category can drive people toward the desired

behavior. This is an actionable learning for fashion retailers, brands and other B-to-C platforms that offer their products for rent.

However, for a C-to-C platform, where the renter can be another consumer, the perceived risk of hygiene is higher for the physically proximal categories such as fashion. In this context, it would be necessary to first address these hygiene concerns: positively framed injunctive norms that communicate social approval for the platform can play a role in achieving this. While social sanctions are highly relevant to publicly consumed categories in a B-to-C context, social approval in the form of positively framed injunctive norms is more impactful at addressing hygiene concerns that people have for physically proximal categories on C-to-C platforms, thereby making them a relevant and suitable way to drive stronger trial. A C-to-C clothing rental platform or a platform offering other physically proximal products for rent could use this learning in developing their category and platform specific message.

6.2.4 Environmental consciousness and role of environmental messaging

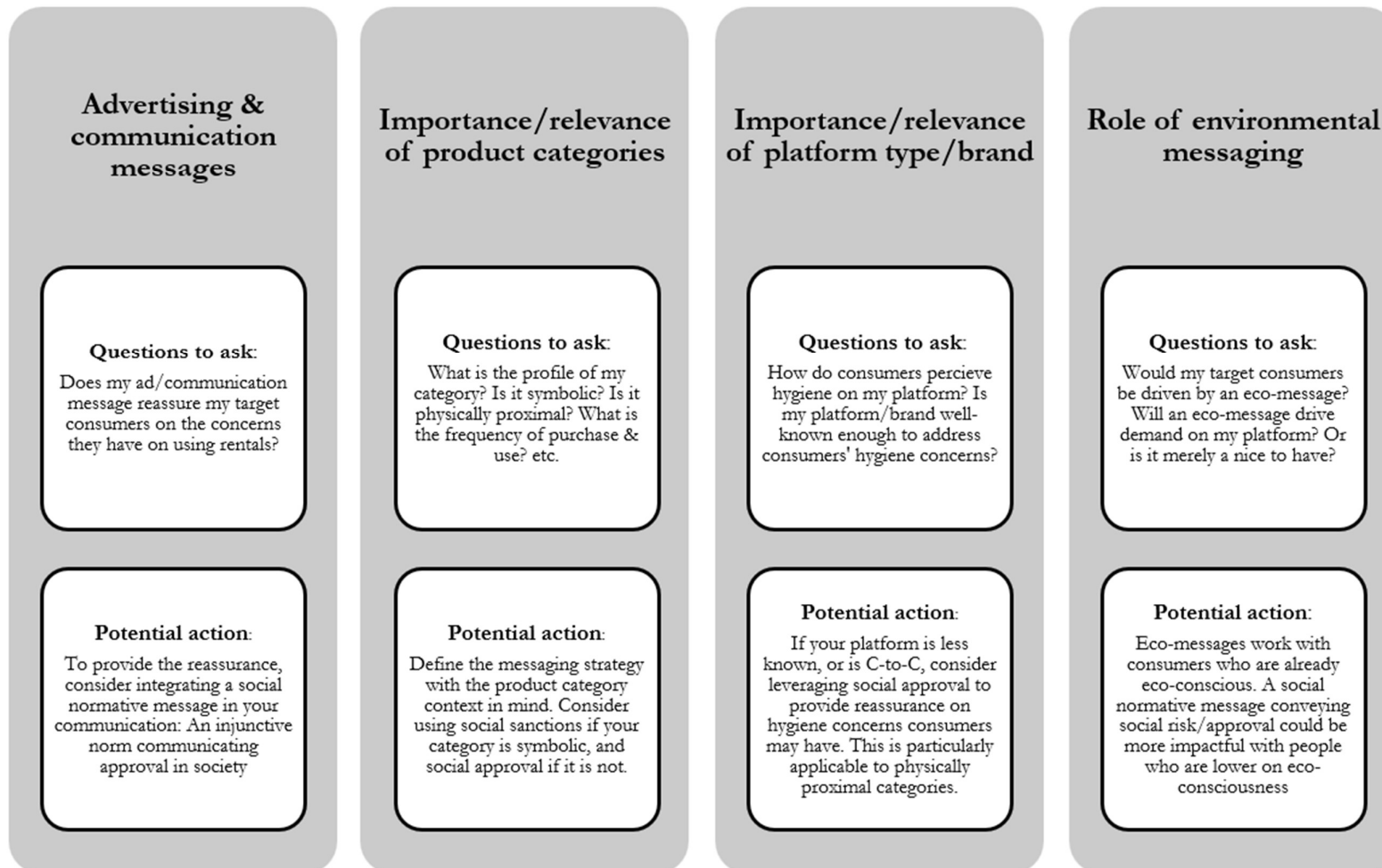
Many platforms talk about the sustainability benefits and environmental impact of renting instead of buying new. They describe how renting your clothes, tools or other items can save the Earth from waste. An environmental message that talks about the impact of using rental platforms on the planet is most effective with consumers who are eco-conscious. This has been shown in other research as highlighted in extant literature and discussed earlier in this document. Environmental messages are likely to have a lower impact on people who are not eco-conscious. Social normative messaging can play a role in driving these consumers towards the desired mode of access-based consumption.

Our findings show that the effectiveness of injunctive normative messages is stronger among less ecologically sensitive consumers in the context of publicly consumed categories. Consumers who are eco-conscious may already be involved in collaborative consumption and conservation behaviors. So, the impact of social sanctions and approvals may be more relevant in driving those who are not eco-conscious towards trying the rental platforms.

This is an important implication that marketing managers of access-based service platforms can use to develop consumer segmentation based on environmental consciousness, and target consumers with low levels of consciousness with social normative messages. For example, platform marketers may consider developing environmental messages to target consumers who are highly eco-conscious, and social normative approaches to drive consumers who are less conscious.

Figure 28 summarizes the key questions that platform owners and managers should ask, and the key take-aways they can have from this research.

Fig. 28. Managerial implications summary



6.3 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The key limitation of the research is that we measured trial intention for rental platforms and not actual behaviors. We acknowledge the intention-behavior gap that several researchers have discussed in the recent past, particularly in the context of environmentally friendly behaviors (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Carrington et al., 2010, 2014; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). It has been discussed that intentions are often longer term, while actions (actual behaviors) may be driven by immediate needs or desires (Arbuthnott, 2010). One way to take this into consideration while evaluating the impact of a marketing message, is to measure the impact of the message on behaviors directly (instead of measuring intentions).

In the context of our research questions, this would require integrating the different normative messages (descriptive and injunctive, framed positively and negatively) in marketing campaigns/ social-media communication and/or websites for the two product categories across B-to-C and C-to-C platforms. The number of interacting variables and the different experimental conditions made it logistically challenging to run this directly as a field experiment in a controlled manner. It was therefore decided that the research would focus on measuring intentions to try, in a controlled experimental set-up with multiple cells.

While we do not measure real behaviors, we feel confident with the results that social normative approaches will have a role in driving trial intent for access-based consumption. We feel that trial intent (irrespective of the gap vs. behaviors as discussed above), will still be a predictor of in-market behavior. Indeed, research in the field of collaborative consumption, applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020) has shown that intentions can predict behaviors (Iran et al., 2019). Research in the field of sustainable fashion/clothing consumption also indicates that intentions predict behaviors (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021), though the impact of intentions on behaviors may be moderated by economic and aesthetic risks.

Evaluating the impact of social normative messages on actual in-market behaviors through a field experiment can be considered by future researchers. It will be valuable to run the field research for the different types of norms and message frames across a couple of product categories, to assess the interaction effects as required.

In addition, the impact of moderators such as culture has not been accounted for in this research. The impact of norms can be different in collectivist vs. individualist cultures (Saracevic et al., 2022). Studying the influence of social norms on access-based consumption in the context of different cultures (individualist such as USA and collectivist such as China) will be a valuable addition to the learnings we have developed in this thesis. Also, the impact of norms in markets that are well-advanced in terms of awareness of access-based consumption (vs. those that are not) is not included in this research. Replicating the study in multiple countries to understand how different social, economic, and cultural factors would affect the findings may be considered for future studies.

The results from this research raise several interesting questions and open additional avenues for future researchers to explore. These are listed below.

Studying actual behaviors

As stated above, this research evaluates the ability of different types of messages to drive trial intent on an established 7-point scale. We have not applied these learnings to an actual platform to test them for their effect on real behaviors. It will be valuable to study real behaviors in the context of access-based consumption, by applying some of these learnings to existing rental platforms. This will require setting up a field experiment to test the impact of the different experimental conditions on renting behaviors. One way to do this could be by leveraging social-media communication on platforms such as Instagram/Facebook. Researchers could consider running ads featuring different normative messages (and control message) on social media platforms to understand which message leads to an increased traffic on the rental website. The Ads would have to be run in a controlled manner for a set of product categories, to be able to understand the moderating impact of product category on the impact of norms. Further, the same message can also be integrated on the platform website, and actual change in sales (impact of volume rented) can be measured.

Impact of culture and country

This research was conducted only with US consumers. However, conducting similar research in multiple countries to understand how social norms affect the desire to rent in different regions will be an interesting avenue to explore. It can be anticipated that collectivist vs. individualist cultures will respond differently to social norms. In addition, factors such as

masculinity and power distance can have a moderating impact on how social norms affect the desire to try a rental platform. Further, openness to rent instead of buy is likely to differ based on factors such as the level of economic growth in each market. For example, in a country like India, where there is a rising gold-class consumer with high levels of disposable income, would there be openness to renting instead of acquiring new products? Would social normative messages be able to influence that behavior? These are questions that are not only academically interesting but also highly relevant to addressing the future challenges of increasing consumerism in developing markets like India (which are likely to become huge consumers and polluters in the world in the coming decades).

Cross-category studies on access-based consumption

Further, the current study highlights the importance of more cross-category studies on access-based consumption services: it is shown that what applies to one category may not apply to another. We have included two categories in this research: fashion which is publicly consumed and is physically proximal, and tools which are privately consumed and are physically distal. We have shown that social norms affect these categories differently. It may be valuable to run similar research to understand other product categories, for example, kitchen equipment that is physically proximal but is privately consumed. Categories such as children's clothing or toys are other interesting categories to explore in the context of access-based services. In general, this research opens the avenue for cross-category studies to further understand the interaction of product categories with the type of advertising/messaging that the platform uses. It would be an interesting avenue to explore different product categories across multiple dimensions (symbolic vs. non-symbolic, proximal vs. non-proximal, frequently used vs. infrequently used, frequently bought vs. infrequently bought, bought for self vs. bought for others etc.) and isolating the impact of these characteristics.

Additional research on the prosumer

This research tries to also understand the prosumer perspective and the possible influence social norms can have on prosumers' desire to put their own items for rent on platforms. Injunctive norms can play a role in encouraging them to put their belongings out for rent. While we provide a thought starter on the under-researched prosumer perspective, we have only scratched the surface so far. There is plenty of opportunity to study prosumer behavior

and understand what type of messaging could help increase the participation of prosumers on access-based service platforms.

Other types of alternative consumption models

This research studies one alternative consumption model: access-based consumption. Conducting similar research in the context of other types of collaborative consumption such as second-hand buying across different product categories and platforms (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) may be valuable to understand whether social norms could have a role to play in driving redistribution/second-hand buying behaviors. The barriers to access-based consumption such as social stigmatization and the drivers of access-based consumption such as economic benefits also apply to second-hand buying behaviors. So, it may be anticipated that social norms, message frames, and product categories interact similarly in the context of second-hand buying platforms. However, this should be tested, as there are fundamental differences between the two types of behaviors: one involves the transfer of ownership (second-hand buying), while the other does not (access-based consumption).

*

In conclusion, this research shows that social nudges and messaging based on social normative approaches have an important role to play in driving collaborative consumption behaviors. With the ecological crisis that we are currently facing, it is undeniable that consumption behaviors need to change, and we, as a society, need to adopt consumption models that are not wasteful. Access-based consumption is a model that provides consumers benefits of a product without having to own it, thereby reducing the burden of ownership and the consequent waste it generates. It lies at the core of the sharing economy that we are currently witnessing.

Marketing scholars have been studying the sharing economy in the past couple of decades, and have realized that core marketing principles need to be adapted to fit the new context. Shifting consumption behaviors towards caution and less ownership, when consumers have been socially conditioned to buy and own more is a challenge that marketers face. Addressing this challenge is going to need more than just consumer education. Behavioral interventions and messages that provide psychological confidence to consumers and address concerns they have on hygiene or social risks of adopting sharing behaviors will play a relevant role in

achieving the desired results. Social normative approaches fit the bill here, and prove to be effective at driving the desired consumption behaviors.

This research also shows how important message frames: positive and negative can be at influencing the desired result. The negativity bias that is discussed at length across multitude of articles and books has a role to play in driving alternative consumption behaviors. However, as we observe, this is very much driven by the product category. Messages highlighting social risks are more effective in symbolic categories, and those highlighting social approval are more relevant to non-symbolic categories. The triple interaction effect of the norm-type, message frame and product category that is observed in our experiment shows that there is no one-size-fits-all in the sharing economy. This understanding is further elevated by the nuances of a B-to-C vs. C-to-C platform that we observe in our work.

Overall, our work provides an interesting perspective to marketing and advertising of rental platforms and alternative consumption models. This area is ripe for research, and our study sets the stage for marketing scholars to explore further. With our work we have scratched the surface of the vast subject of marketing in the sharing economy. We have sown some seeds and developed some ideas for marketers and platform owners to consider and apply, as they continue building the foundations of access-based consumption. Addressing the global overconsumption crisis is going to require exploration of different marketing approaches to drive desired consumer behaviors, and our research successfully takes one small step in that direction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. PAPER SELECTED FOR ANZMAC CONFERENCE

The paper based on the research presented in this thesis was selected for presentation at the ANZMAC conference. Feedback received is as follows on Table 15 on a scale of 1 to 5 on all attributes. The paper was presented in December 2023 to the academic community at ANZMAC, and the presentation received fine feedback.

Table 15. Feedback on a scale of 1 to 5 (ANZMAC Review)

	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2
The quality of the problem formulation is (1 = Very poor, 5 = very high):	4	4
The conceptual clarity in the paper (definitions and descriptions of constructs) is: (1 = Very poor, 5 = very high):	5	4
The methodology discussed in the paper is: (1 = Very poor, 5 = very high):	4	4
The quality of the results and discussion are: * (1= very weak, 5=very strong) Please note 'Not Applicable' if the paper does not contain a conceptual part, method part, or result part.:	4	3
The quality of conclusions and recommendations (implications for theory and practise are: * (1= very weak, 5=very strong) Please note 'Not Applicable' if the paper does not contain a conceptual part, method part, or result part.:	4	4
The quality of the communication (readability, clarity, logical flow) of the paper is: (1 = Very poor, 5 = very high):	5	3
The quality of the problem formulation is (1 = Very poor, 5 = very high):	4	4

Reviewer Comments:

This paper builds on the Focus Theory of Normative Conduct and investigates how the types of social norms interacted with message framing affect ABS consumption intention in two different product categories. The structure is well developed and the research questions are well formulated. Furthermore, this paper conducts experimental studies to answer research questions well by clearly designing scenarios.

The paper addresses a timely and relevant topic of how social norms influence access-based services (ABS) which are alternative consumption models that allow people to access goods without owning them. The findings could provide insights to practitioners –

The paper conducts a 2x2x2 online experiment with different types of normative messages (descriptive vs. injunctive, positive vs. negative) and product categories (fashion vs. tools) and measures their impact on trial intent of ABS. Thus, it collected valuable original data from primary research.

When do Social Norms drive Access-Based-Consumption?

Abstract

Considering the global challenge of overconsumption and the potential benefits of alternative consumption models such as Access-Based-Services (access-based service), this research investigates the influence of social norms on trial intent of access-based service. Precisely, we explore the influence of the type of norm (descriptive vs. injunctive) and the message framing (positive vs. negative) considering two product categories (i.e., fashion, tools) using a 2x2x2 online between-subjects experiment. Overall, we show a triple interaction effect. For fashion, negatively framed injunctive normative messages that convey disapproval for hoarding clothes have the strongest impact on trial intent. For tools, positively framed injunctive normative messages are the most effective. For fashion, the impact of injunctive norms on trial intent is stronger among consumers who are less ecologically sensitive. These results have practical implications for marketers of platforms and provide fruitful research avenues for scholars studying the sharing economy from a marketing perspective.

Keywords: Access-based Consumption, Social Norms, Message Framing

Aim and Theoretical Background

Overconsumption has become a major source of ecological concern raising academic interest for alternative consumption models (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012) such as Access-Based-Services (access-based service). Researchers have studied barriers to access-based service including concern for hygiene, social stigma, and lack of trust (Hazée et al., 2017; C. Lang, 2018; Schaefer et al., 2016) and showed that access-based service platforms need to provide reassurance to address uncertainty. They have also studied different types of appeal (Guo and Lamberton, 2021; Hazée et al., 2019) but have not explored the effectiveness of social normative messages to drive trial of access-based service.

Still, extant literature shows that descriptive norms providing social proof and injunctive norms providing social approval can help drive desired behaviors, particularly when faced with uncertainty (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Griskevicius et al., 2006). In particular, negatively framed injunctive messages that convey social sanctions would be processed with greater attention (Baumeister et al., 2001; Cialdini et al., 2006) and would be more effective (Mollen et al., 2021). Indeed, negatively framed messages are supposed to be more effective at driving desired behaviors (Dijksterhuis and Aarts, 2003; Crawford and Cacioppo, 2002). However, in the context of access-based service, we argue that the effectiveness of negatively framed normative messages may depend on product category. First, effects of social approvals and sanctions may differ for product categories that are consumed publicly (e.g., fashion) vs. privately (e.g., tools). Second, the level of hygiene concerns for access-based service may also differ for physically proximal categories (e.g., fashion) vs. non-proximal ones (e.g., tools) (Hazée et al., 2019). As an addition, messages may be more effective among less ecological consumers who are naturally more distant from access-based service.

To test these hypotheses, this research draws on the Focus Theory of Normative Conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990; Kallgren et al., 2000) and explores 2 research questions: 1/ Does the effectiveness of negatively framed injunctive messages depend on product category, and why? and 2/ Does it depend on consumers' ecological sensitivity?

Methodology & Results

We ran a 2 (descriptive vs. injunctive) by 2 (positive vs. negative) by 2 (fashion vs. tools) between-subjects experiment with 2 control cells (one per product category) using a sample of 469 Americans (50% female, mean age = 43.8) recruited through Prolific. Subjects were first invited to read a news snippet (see Figure 1). Then they were explained how fashion (resp. tool) rentals work, put into a situation where they had to buy clothes (resp. an electric drill) and asked how likely they were to rent them. Ecological sensitivity was collected as a moderating variable. Hygiene perception and social perception of people who rent were collected as additional variables. Demographics and awareness of rentals were collected as control variables. We checked our manipulation, which proved successful. Constructs were measured using 7-point established scales.



Figure 1 – Experimental Stimuli for Fashion Category

An ANOVA showed a triple interaction effect of norm type, framing and product category ($F_{(1,372)}=7.69, p<0.01$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,372)}=16.73, p<0.01$) on trial intent. To go further, we conducted 2x2 ANOVAs for each product category separately.

For fashion, the ANOVA showed an interaction effect of norm type and framing ($F_{(1,192)}=5.64, p<0.05$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,192)}=5.66, p<0.05$). In a series of planned contrasts, we observed that when framed positively, there was no significant difference between injunctive and descriptive norms ($M=5.27$ vs. $M=5.12, F_{(1,192)}=.001, p>.05$). However, when framed negatively, injunctive norms were significantly more effective than descriptive norms at driving trial intent ($M=5.8$ vs. $M=4.87, F_{(1,192)}=10.96, p<.01$). As such, for fashion, negatively framed injunctive norms show the most promise at driving trial for access-based service. For tools, the ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect of norm type and framing ($F_{(1,173)}=2.64, p=0.05$) and a direct effect of norm type ($F_{(1,173)}=12.19, p<0.01$). In a series of planned contrasts, we observed that when framed

positively, injunctive norms were significantly more effective than descriptive norms at driving trial intent ($M=6.2$ vs. $M=5.05$, $F_{(1,173)}=12.99$, $p<0.01$). However, when framed negatively, no significant difference between injunctive and descriptive norms was observed ($M=5.84$ vs. $M=5.37$, $F_{(1,173)}=1.7$, $p>0.05$). As such, for tools, positively framed injunctive norms show the most promise at driving trial for access-based service.

We also conducted a series of planned contrasts vs. the control cell for each category. For fashion, negative injunctive norms had a significant impact on trial intent vs. control ($M=5.8$ vs. $M=4.88$; $F_{(1,234)}=6.27$, $p=0.01$). As fashion is consumed publicly, social opinions influence how people consume fashion. Social sanctions imply a negative influence on social image, explaining the impact of negative injunctive norms. In addition, positive injunctive norms had no impact on trial intent vs. control, but had a positive impact vs. control on social perceptions of others who rent clothes ($M=5.35$ vs. $M=4.87$; $F_{(1,234)}=8.15$, $p<0.01$). With fashion, consumers often choose exclusivity over what is popular – probably explaining why although social perceptions of others who rent are positively impacted by positive injunctive norms, it does not lead to trial for self. For tools, positive injunctive norms had a significant impact on driving trial intent vs. control ($M=6.2$ vs. $M=5.1$; $F_{(1,211)}=11.22$, $p<0.01$). When framed negatively, their impact was slightly dampened, but remained marginally significant ($M=5.84$ vs. $M=5.1$; $F_{(1,211)}=4.01$, $p=0.05$).

We also tested for the moderating impact of ecological sensitivity using PROCESS Macro Model 1. For fashion, negatively framed injunctive messages have a significant impact on trial but only at values of environmental sensitivity inferior to 5.42 ($\beta=0.14$, $t=1.99$, $p=.05$). For tools, we see that the impact of positive injunctive norms on trial is not moderated by environmental sensitivity. It remains high even at high values of environmental sensitivity of 6.03 ($\beta=0.38$, $t=1.99$, $p=.05$).

Implications for Theory and Practice

In this research, we show that social norms have a role to play at driving trial of access-based service, but this is product category dependent – negatively framed injunctive messages are the most effective for publicly consumed categories, while positively framed injunctive messages are the most effective for privately consumed ones. As an addition, their effectiveness is stronger among less ecologically sensitive consumers for publicly consumed categories. access-based service platforms can use our findings to craft category-relevant

advertising messages. We contribute to the growing literature on access-based service and to the literature on framed social norms. This opens several avenues for future research by calling for more cross-category studies on access-based service and for a replication to compare BtoC vs. CtoC platforms. The role of social norms to drive prosumers to rental platforms is also an avenue for research.

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APPENDIX B. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Study 1

Consumer Trial Intent

Consumer Trial Intent - Category Tools			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	5,10	1,651	39
Positive Descriptive	5,05	1,704	43
Positive Injunctive	6,20	,889	49
Negative Descriptive	5,37	1,752	49
Negative Injunctive	5,84	1,194	43
Total	5,53	1,524	223

Consumer Trial Intent - Category Fashion			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	4,88	1,867	43
Positive Descriptive	5,12	1,734	50
Positive Injunctive	5,27	1810	55
Negative Descriptive	4,87	2,039	52
Negative Injunctive	5,80	1,327	46
Total	5,19	1,795	246

Prosumer Sharing Intent

Prosumer Sharing Intent - Category Tools			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	4,77	2,019	39
Positive Descriptive	5,09	1,770	43
Positive Injunctive	5,61	1,187	49
Negative Descriptive	4,88	1,922	49
Negative Injunctive	4,72	2,119	43
Total	5,03	1,832	223

Prosumer Sharing Intent - Category Fashion			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	4,77	2,010	43
Positive Descriptive	4,68	1,942	50
Positive Injunctive	4,35	2,271	55
Negative Descriptive	4,52	2,063	52
Negative Injunctive	4,78	2,075	46
Total	4,61	2,071	246

Hygiene Perceptions

Hygiene Perceptions - Category Tools			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	4,89	1,113	39
Positive Descriptive	4,55	1,172	43
Positive Injunctive	4,66	1,031	49
Negative Descriptive	4,96	1,156	49
Negative Injunctive	4,82	1,413	43
Total	4,776	1,179	223

Hygiene Perceptions - Category Fashion			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	5,15	1,31	43
Positive Descriptive	4,57	1,35	50
Positive Injunctive	4,99	1,38	55
Negative Descriptive	5,25	1,39	52
Negative Injunctive	4,99	1,31	46
Total	4,99	1,36	246

Social Perceptions

Social Perceptions - Category Tools			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	5.32	0.964	39
Positive Descriptive	5.23	0.892	43
Positive Injunctive	5.25	0.871	49
Negative Descriptive	5.22	0.942	49
Negative Injunctive	5.39	1.009	43
Total	5.28	0.929	223

Social Perceptions - Category Fashion			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
Control	4.87	0.903	43
Positive Descriptive	4.83	0.858	50
Positive Injunctive	5.36	0.909	55
Negative Descriptive	5.06	0.915	52
Negative Injunctive	5.27	1.050	46
Total	5.09	0.944	246

Study 2

Consumer Trial Intent

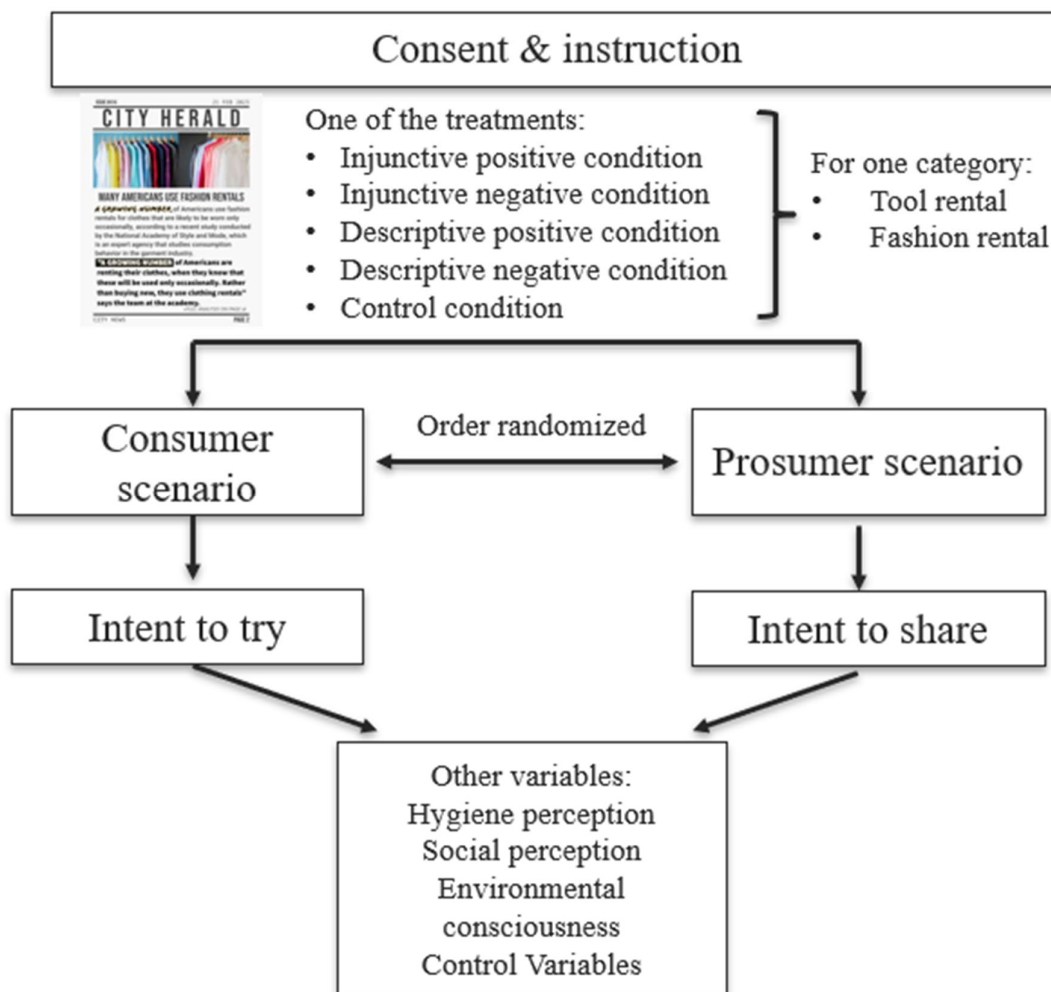
Consumer Trial Intent - Category Tools			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
B-to-C Positive Injunctive	6.24	0.916	41
B-to-C Negative Injunctive	5.26	1.827	43
B-to-C Control	5.44	1.119	39
C-to-C Positive Injunctive	5.63	1.719	43
C-to-C Negative Injunctive	5.05	1.936	41
C-to-C Control	5.28	1.538	39
Total	5.48	1.593	246

Consumer Trial Intent - Category Fashion			
Condition	Moyenne	Ecart type	N
B-to-C Positive Injunctive	5.17	1.665	36
B-to-C Negative Injunctive	5.39	1.498	36
B-to-C Control	4.66	1.878	38
C-to-C Positive Injunctive	5.23	1.842	39
C-to-C Negative Injunctive	4.93	1.561	44
C-to-C Control	4.59	1.933	44
Total	4.98	1.748	237

APPENDIX C. SURVEY (QUALTRICS – FASHION EXAMPLE FROM STUDY 1)

This section includes all the survey questions used in the research for the fashion category in the study 1. The exact same set of questions with category specific edits were used for the tools category. The same questions were also used for the Study 2 (B-to-C vs. C-to-C) with the corresponding edit on the “How a rental platform works” instruction. This section includes the questions from the survey, all marked in blue color to separate them from the rest of the text.

As a reminder, the below figure summarizes the flow of the survey. (Note: for Study 2, respondents only went through the consumer scenario):



The survey started with the participation consent that read as follows:

Participation Consent

I have read the information sheet for this study and all the details of the study are clear to me. I do not have any further questions about this study.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time by leaving the study website.

I agree to provide information to the researchers on the understanding that it is completely confidential. I understand that the information will be stored in manual and electronic files and is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act. I acknowledge that the information provided is being used by the University in accordance with the Act.

I hereby confirm that I would like to take part in this study, under the conditions stated above.

- I Agree (1)
- I Do Not Agree (2)

If the participant did not provide consent, their survey was terminated.

In the next page, we gathered the unique Prolific Id from the respondents with the following question :

Please enter your unique Prolific Id here, to claim your reward later.

Once done, the participants were assigned to one of the experimental conditions, and one version of the new-paper snippet as discussed in Chapter 3 of this document was shown as follows:

Thank you! Let's get started.

In the first part of the survey you will be asked to read a short news snippet. This snippet appeared in the news a couple of months back. **Please read it carefully.**

You will be asked to answer some questions on the snippet at the end of the survey. Click Next to read the news snippet.

Read the News Snippet below carefully. Take as much time as you need. The Next button will appear after a few seconds.

One of the news-paper snippets was displayed here. Example:

ISSUE #414 21 FEB 2023

CITY HERALD



MANY AMERICANS USE FASHION RENTALS

A GROWING NUMBER of Americans use fashion rentals for clothes that are likely to be worn only occasionally, according to a recent study conducted by the National Academy of Style and Mode, which is an expert agency that studies consumption behavior in the garment industry.

"MORE AND MORE Americans are renting their clothes, when they know that these will be used only occasionally. Rather than buying new, they use clothing rentals." says the team at the academy.

>FULL ANALYSIS ON PAGE 16

CITY NEWS PAGE 2

This was followed by a comprehension check. If the respondent failed the comprehension check, then he/she was given a second chance to read the article and do the check again. If the check failed again, then the data was excluded from the results.

Please answer the below question after you have read the text. If you don't know the answer, please read the text again

This article snippet refers to which of the following? Choose one answer:

- A recent fashion show in the city (1)
- A recent study in the garment industry (2)
- A recent movie about fashion (3)
- A recent debate about a fashion magazine (4)

Following the comprehension check, respondents were provided information about how a fashion rental platform works. The exact wording of this section for the two studies is provided in Chapters 4 and 5. Below is the wording used in Study 1.

The article referred to clothing rentals.

Here is some more information on how a clothing rental website works.

Clothing rental websites/stores allow you to rent clothes for temporary use. Here is how this works:

- You browse through the catalogue on the website, and choose the item you wish to rent.
- The websites offer you delivery services.
- You pay a fee for a fixed duration of time (few days or weeks).
- You send the item back after it has been used.

This was followed by another comprehension check. If the respondent failed the comprehension check, then he/she was given a second chance to read the above instruction and do the check again. If the check failed again, then the data was excluded from the results

Based on the instruction above, which of the following two statements is correct? Select one of the two –

- Rental Websites do not offer you delivery services (1)
- Rental Websites offer you delivery services (2)

The survey included several attention checks The first one was inserted here, where respondents were asked to simply select « Strongly Agree » in the question.

Main dependent Variables block

Main dependent variable: Trial intent

The main dependent variable collected and used for analysis was consumers' trial intent. Respondents were asked to imagine a scenario. The scenario for fashion category is presented below. For tools the same text was edited. All details are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

Imagine you have been invited to a special event - a party or a gala or a reception. It is expected that you look sophisticated for the event. You realize you don't have the right outfit, so you will have to go shopping for brand new clothes. You know that you are likely to use these new clothes only occasionally.

You are reminded of the article you read in the news!

This was followed by a comprehension check. If the respondent failed the comprehension check, then he/she was given a second chance to read the above instruction and do the check again. If the check failed again, then the data was excluded from the results

The text above asks you to imagine which of the following?

- You will have to plan the dinner menu for the gala (1)
- You will have to go shopping for new clothes (2)
- You will have to go shopping for a camera (3)

We then collected the main dependent variable: Trial intent.

As a reminder, the news-paper snippet was once again shown to the respondents.

As you are thinking of buying the new outfit, you are reminded of the article you read in the news!

As a reminder, here is the article you read in the news earlier.

The news snippet seen earlier is shown once again – one of the conditions, one of the categories.

You visit a clothing rental website, and you find what you need.

In this situation, assuming you find the outfit you need, how likely are you to rent the outfit from the clothing rental website?

On a scale of 1 to 7, 1 = Not at all likely and 7 = Verly likely

Second variable: Sharing intent (only collected in study 1)

We also collected Prosumers' intention to share their belongings as another variable for exploration. The consumer and prosumer blocks were randomized: some respondents answered the consumer block first, and others answered the prosumers block first.

Respondents were asked to imagine another scenario as follows:

Imagine you start organizing your wardrobe.

You find a couple of great, designer outfits that you have rarely used in the past six months. These are expensive clothes that you would consider wearing only on special occasions.

You love these clothes, but you also know that you'd use them only occasionally.

You are reminded of the article you read in the news!

This was followed by a comprehension check. If the respondent failed the comprehension check, then he/she was given a second chance to read the above instruction and do the check again. If the check failed again, then the data was excluded from the results

The text above asks you to imagine which of the following?

- You find old albums in your closet (1)
- You find expensive, designer clothes in your closet that you rarely use (2)
- You find an expensive antique tea-set rarely used (3)

As you are considering what to do with these expensive clothes, you are reminded of the article you read in the news!

We then collected the additional variable: Sharing intent. As a reminder, the news-paper snippet was once again shown to the respondents.

You visit a clothing rental website, that allows you to put your own clothes for rent.

In this situation, **How likely are you to put these clothes (that you use only occasionally) on the clothing rental website for others to borrow?**

On a scale of 1 to 7, 1 = Not at all likely and 7 = Verly likely

This was followed by an open-ended attention check to ensure that respondents were paying full attention.

Thankyou! You are doing great so far! In the below question, please tell us what you took away from the article you just read.

What did the article you read talk about? Write a sentence about it.

Additional Variables block

Social perceptions

Social perceptions of people who rent clothes was measured using a 7-point scale for poverty stigma as follows:

A person who rents clothes from a clothing rental website/store is likely to be -

- Unreliable – Reliable (1 to 7)
- Irresponsible – Responsible (1 to 7)
- Poor – Wealthy (1 to 7)
- Incompetent – Competent (1 to 7)
- Lazy – Hardworking (1 to 7)

Hygiene perceptions

Concern for contamination or hygiene was measured using a 7-point scale as follows:

The clothes available for rent on a rental website / store are likely to be –

- Dirty – Not Dirty (1 to 7)
- Unpleasant – Pleasant (1 to 7)
- Unsanitary – Sanitary (1 to 7)
- Contaminated – Not Contaminated (1 to 7)
- Disturbing – Delightful (1 to 7)
- Unsettling – Comforting (1 to 7)

Moderator and Control variable block

Finally, we gathered the key moderator: Environmental consciousness and a set of control variables such as price sensitivity and involvement in rentals. These were all asked on established 7-point scales.

Thank you. We have almost reached the end.

In this last section, we would like to gather some more information about you. Please answer truthfully - all your data is anonymous.

Moderator: Environmental Consciousness

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements about how you purchase your clothes and fashion accessories.

It is important to me that the clothes and fashion items I buy are...

- ... made with respect for the environment (1) (1 to 7)
- ... produced without disturbing the balance of nature (2) (1 to 7)
- ... manufactured with respecting the Earth and harmony with other species (3) (1 to 7)

To ensure respondents are paying attention, attention-checks were inserted at different points in the survey.

Fantastic Work. You are doing great.

In the below question, we ask you what your favorite fruit is. Please select Pear.

What is your favorite fruit?

- Apple (1)
- Cherry (2)
- Orange (3)
- Pear (4)

Control variable: Price sensitivity

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements **about how you shop your clothes and fashion accessories.**

When I shop for clothes and fashion items...

- ...I spend time looking for the lowest price deals (1) (1 to 7)
- ... I make an effort to find the lowest priced products (2) (1 to 7)
- ...I always try to find the cheapest products (3) (1 to 7)

Control variable: Category involvement

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements **about how you feel about fashion sharing options.**

- When I need a fashion item (clothes/accessories) that I am likely to use only occasionally, I always think of borrowing it instead of buying new (1) (of 1 to 7)
- I am very aware of the benefits of borrowing from a rental website over buying new (2) (1 to 7)
- I feel comfortable sharing my fashion items (clothes/accessories) if another person needs to borrow them temporarily (3) (1 to 7)
- I am very aware of the benefits of putting my own clothes & accessories for rent on a rental website (4) (1 to 7)

Other variables

Other variables for prosumer scenario: Trust in others

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements **about trusting others with your clothes, if you put them out for rent**

- I would trust others to use my clothes with care

- I would trust others to return my clothes in a good condition
- Putting my own clothes out for rent seems risky to me
- Please select Strongly Agree to show you are paying attention

Other variables for prosumer scenario: Financial risk

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements about financial risks of putting your own clothes out for rent

- I would be worried about NOT getting paid
- I would be worried about making a bad financial decision
- Putting my own clothes out for rent could mean that I will lose money

Other variable collected for reference: Norm Compliance

How much do you agree or disagree on the following statements

- The opinion of others is important to me
- I often wonder what other people might think of me.
- The opinion of other people does not influence my behavior
- I usually adapt my behavior to fit the norm.
- I do not care what other people think of me
- Please select "Strongly Agree" to prove you are paying attention

Demographics block

Gender How do you identify yourself?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (3)

Age How old are you?

- < 18 years (1)
- 18 to 25 years (2)
- 26 to 35 years (3)
- 35 to 45 years (4)
- 46 to 55 years (5)
- 56 to 65 years (6)
- 65 years (7)

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school or less (1)
- High school diploma or GED (2)
- Some college, but no degree (3)
- Associates or technical degree (4)
- Bachelor's degree (5)
- Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc.) (6)
- Prefer not to say (7)

What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Less than \$25,000 (1)
- \$25,000-\$49,999 (2)
- \$50,000-\$74,999 (3)
- \$75,000-\$99,999 (4)
- \$100,000-\$149,999 (5)
- \$150,000 or more (6)
- Prefer not to say (7)

Manipulation check block

Manipulation check

Respondents went through a manipulation check (similar to the check we ran in the pilot studies when validating the stimulus).

Think about the news article you read earlier and answer the following questions. To what degree did the article talk about...

- ... something that most Americans APPROVE of? (1) (on a scale of 1 to 7)
- ... something that most Americans DISAPPROVE of? (2) (on a scale of 1 to 7)
- ... something that MORE & MORE Americans ARE DOING? (3) (on a scale of 1 to 7)
- ... something that MORE & MORE choose NOT to do? (4) (on a scale of 1 to 7)
- ... the GROWTH of fashion industry in America (5) (on a scale of 1 to 7)

Article believability

We also gathered the believability of the article on a scale of 1 to 7

Thinking about the news article you read earlier select a value from each of the scales below –

The news article is:

- Incredible – Credible (1 to 7)
- Unacceptable – Acceptable (1 to 7)
- Untruthful – Truthful (1 to 7)
- Unbelievable – Believable (1 to 7)

Finally, the respondents were asked to enter a completion code to claim their reward. If this was not provided, the data of the respondent was excluded from analysis.

To claim your reward, please enter the completion code in the Prolific Window
- **CK425R9I**