



Collaborative Consumption and eWOM

*The influence of electronic word of mouth on the valuation of online fashion
rental services*

Nina Marie Lierheimer

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Abstract

Title Collaborative Consumption and eWOM
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Author Nina Marie Lierheimer

This dissertation investigates the influence of information quality of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), more specifically online customer reviews on the valuation of fashion rental services, namely on eWOM appeal, the intention to rent clothes on a renting platform, and the willingness to pay. Additionally, the moderating effect of fashion involvement and the mediating influence of perceived trust in eWOM was examined on the aforementioned relationship.

Results indicate that high eWOM information quality in online customer reviews leads to greater valuations of fashion rental services. Additionally, higher fashion involvement positively impacts eWOM appeal of online customer reviews and the intention to rent clothes from a fashion rental platform. Furthermore, individuals with higher fashion involvement are more likely to rent clothes with higher eWOM information quality reviews. Results slightly improved by adding the influence of the frequency of consuming online reviews to this analysis. Moreover, findings suggest that perceived eWOM trust indirectly influences the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations, specifically eWOM appeal and rental intention.

These findings provide relevant theoretical insights into the previously established link between eWOM and rental platforms, particularly by closing a research gap concerning fashion involvement and eWOM trust. Forthwith, brand managers are provided with recommendations for a successful implementation of fashion rental services, particularly regarding the design of review management strategies.

Key Words collaborative consumption | fashion rental services | electronic word of mouth | online customer reviews | fashion involvement | perceived trust in electronic word of mouth | rental service valuations

Resumo

Título Collaborative Consumption and eWOM
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Autor Nina Marie Lierheimer

Esta dissertação investiga a influência da qualidade da informação do *electronic word of mouth* (eWOM), mais concretamente dos comentários de clientes on-line, na valorização dos serviços de aluguer de moda, nomeadamente no apelo do eWOM, na intenção de alugar roupa numa plataforma on-line e na disponibilidade para pagar. Adicionalmente, o efeito moderador do envolvimento com a moda e a influência mediadora da confiança percebida no eWOM foram examinados na relação acima mencionada.

Os resultados indicam que uma elevada qualidade da informação do eWOM revelada pelas opiniões dos clientes on-line, leva a uma maior valorização dos serviços de aluguer de moda. Além disso, um maior envolvimento com a moda tem um impacto positivo no apelo do eWOM e na intenção de alugar. Os resultados revelam que indivíduos com maior envolvimento na moda têm maior probabilidade de alugar roupa com base em avaliações com maior qualidade de informação eWOM, do que indivíduos com menor envolvimento. Além disso, os resultados sugerem que a confiança percebida no eWOM influencia indiretamente a relação entre a qualidade da informação do eWOM e as avaliações do serviço de aluguer de moda, especificamente em relação ao apelo do eWOM e a intenção de alugar.

Estes resultados proporcionam uma visão teórica relevante sobre a ligação previamente estabelecida entre o eWOM e as plataformas de aluguer. Por fim, são fornecidas recomendações aos gestores de marcas para uma implementação bem-sucedida dos serviços de aluguer de moda, em particular no que diz respeito à conceção de estratégias de gestão de avaliações.

Palavras-Chave consumo colaborativo | serviços de aluguer de artigos de moda | palavra eletrónica de boca em boca | comentários online de clientes | envolvimento na moda | confiança perceptionada na palavra eletrónica de boca em boca | avaliações de serviços de aluguer

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

Today's society is in permanent transformation. Our world is becoming increasingly fast-paced, and everything is changing. Buyers' purchasing consumption and sellers' supply are developing similarly: mass production is taking place far beyond market saturation simply because demand continues to rise. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the fashion industry (Gazzola et al., 2020).

The impact on the environment is alarming. The pursuit of profit, market share, and the interest in always being 'up-to-date' in fashion is increasing (Guo et al., 2020). The fashion industry accounts for around eight to ten percent of global CO₂ emissions (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Approximately 400 billion dollars of clothing is thrown away annually (Drew & Reichart, 2019). Therefore, companies, consumers, and the political system are forced to rethink before planetary boundaries cause a collapse in the global economy.

However, where to start and which party should take responsibility for systematic change?

One model that could potentially drive this change is the circular economy. A business model in which waste management plays a significant role (Tisserant et al., 2017). It contrasts with the linear economy, which is the strategy of most companies that sell consumer goods. The main difference is that in a linear economy, all goods eventually become waste after use and thus pollute our ecosystem. The circular economy, however, does not see the product as waste but as a valuable resource, intensifying the temporal quantity of use per good and thus making the circular economy more sustainable (Sariatli, 2017). It focuses on dematerialization on the one hand and slowing down the loop on the other (Kasulaitis et al., 2019). Therefore, the life cycle of a product is extended so that less material and resources are consumed.

Airbnb is a circular economy platform allowing homeowners to rent their houses and apartments temporarily. The power of such platforms is illustrated by Dogru et al. (2019), who reveal that a one percent increase in Airbnb-listed properties in the US reduces hotel revenue by 0.3%. In addition, the supply of the platform has risen by more than 100% annually, illustrating the strong demand. With its massive share of global waste production, the fashion industry could, therefore, significantly impact the environment if an increasing number of companies align their strategy with sustainable business models.

The success of circular business models is partly dependent on consumer perception and engagement. With customer reviews, circular businesses can significantly increase the acceptance and credibility of their products or services (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019).

What is still unthinkable in stationary retail is the standardized processes in online retail: Consumers share their shopping experiences with the (digital) public. Nowadays, consumers have unlimited access to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Hardly any purchase decision is made without first consulting customer reviews. Above all, security and trust are essential for consumers when purchasing online. Hence, customer reviews are often critical for building trust between suppliers and consumers (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

In particular, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has led to an increase in online shopping due to the associated restrictions on public life and the temporary closure of retail stores (Truong & Truong, 2022). On the one hand, the growth of online retail is also increasing the receipt and quantity, and consequently, the importance of customer reviews since consumers can share their experiences online without geographical boundaries (Verma & Yadav, 2021). This development is forcing online retailers to look closely at the eWOM topic. If review management is neglected, there is a risk that business potential is not exploited.

By analyzing online reviews of their products, fashion rental services can optimize their marketing strategies or differentiate themselves from their competitors through competitive analysis based on customer preferences or complaints. Additionally, the quality of valuable information in online reviews can attract more potential customers to online fashion rentals and strengthen consumer trust and loyalty (Micu et al., 2017).

As an example of collaborative consumption, fashion rental services promote environmental sustainability by reducing waste and overproduction. Positive eWOM and, thus, online customer reviews can help to attract potential customers and consequently promote environmentally friendly business practices, underlining the relevance and timeliness of this topic (Shrivastava et al., 2021).

The relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion retailers (Kim & Niehm, 2009; Rahman & Mannan, 2018) or other rental services (Pitt et al., 2021; Redditt et al., 2022) has already been investigated in previous literature, but predominantly concerning eWOM on blogs or social media platforms (Kulmala et al., 2013; Leong et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2012). The present research, thus, contributes to prior literature by examining website-integrated review systems on fashion rental platforms in connection with fashion involvement and trust.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

A GWI study (2017) shows that an average of 37.5% of 16- to 64-year-old internet users worldwide consult online reviews when researching products or brands. Due to the high influence on the consumer, the retailer must manage customer reviews actively. This research, therefore, aims to create a comprehensive understanding of the influence of quality of information within customer reviews on consumers' valuations of online fashion rental platforms (Massie, 2016; Rahman & Mannan, 2018).

Research Question 1. Does a higher quality of electronic word of mouth information positively influence the valuation of online fashion rental services?

In addition to eWOM information quality, fashion involvement might be another factor influencing the perception of fashion rentals: Wolny and Mueller (2013) observe that a higher level of consumer involvement in fashion contributes to a greater willingness to interact digitally. Therefore, consumers more involved in fashion may also have a higher perception of fashion rental services. Hence, the aim is to determine whether a consumer's fashion involvement level moderates the relationship between eWOM informational quality and the valuation of online fashion rental services.

Research Question 2. Does the information quality of online customer reviews affect the valuation of fashion rental services based on consumers' fashion involvement?

As previously mentioned, online reviews can increase trust in fashion rental services, mainly because customer reviews are trusted more than information provided by the retailer (Elwalda & Lu, 2016). Furthermore, trust plays a crucial role in influencing purchase intentions and is particularly relevant to this study (Harrigan et al., 2021). In this context, it is of interest whether trust in eWOM also influences the valuation of fashion rental services.

Research Question 3. Can trust in electronic word of mouth affect the relationship between electronic word of mouth information quality and the valuation of online fashion rental services?

The research focuses on customer reviews of products from online fashion rental services and platforms within the fashion retail B2C online trade. Customer reviews integrated into online stores are investigated, as these are mainly standardized and widespread. Furthermore, unlike reviews in forums or blogs, customers can directly assess them during the purchasing process without leaving the store (Nair & Radhakrishnan, 2019).

1.3 Structure

To answer the research questions, a theoretical foundation on the concept of collaborative consumption and fashion rental services is established. After analyzing the consumer purchase decision process, the subjects eWOM, online reviews, their review systems, and the information quality in eWOM are examined, followed by the underlying constructs of fashion involvement and trust in eWOM.

Subsequently, to answer the aforementioned research questions and based on the theory, the methodological framework, including a set of hypotheses, is presented and examined by conducting a quantitative online survey. The results of this survey are then analyzed and evaluated. Finally, conclusions on the research questions are drawn, followed by theoretical and practical implications.

2. Academic Literature Review

2.1 Collaborative Consumption

Collaborative consumption represents a large part of the sharing economy, in which (mostly) companies, such as Airbnb, offer their users goods for a certain period via internet-based communication platforms (Hamari et al., 2015). With collaborative consumption, the commercial aspect of sharing as the primary revenue source is essential (Belk, 2014). Additionally, extending a product's lifecycle can shape more sustainable consumer and business behavior (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).

These practices could impact traditional companies in existing markets since their revenue or customers could shift to collaborative consumption companies (Zervas et al., 2014). This could be because owning things often takes more effort and maintenance than renting them (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). For instance, it is more time-consuming to uphold a car, whereas you can order a ride from the car service provider Uber with a single click on the Internet (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2015; Watkins et al., 2016).

Collaborative consumption aims to benefit all three parties involved in sustainability - ecology, economy, and social sphere (Huang & Rust, 2011). Therefore, it offers the future an essential opportunity as a driver for a more sustainable world. Since collaborative consumption models are highly adaptable, they can be applied in many industries, including fashion (Hall et al., 2012).

2.1.1 Fashion Rental Services

Fashion rental services, a subcategory of collaborative consumption for costumes, weddings, or other special occasions, have existed for a while (Mukendi & Henninger, 2020). However, renting everyday wear through online platforms is a relatively new business concept (Lee et al., 2021). New companies and service providers have conquered the fashion market, offering services such as purchasing used clothing or renting fashion items (Battle et al., 2018; Henninger et al., 2019; Pal & Gander, 2018). For this reason, and also because fast fashion tends to be negatively connotated, many companies consider a change of direction to protect their reputation (Henninger et al., 2019). Nonetheless, environmentally friendly ways to consume fashion are somewhat rare and have not yet become established for reasons such as gaps in sustainability knowledge or prejudices about the appearance of sustainable fashion (Goworek et al., 2012; Henninger et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2019; Pal & Gander, 2018).

2.1.2 “The Purchase Decision Process“

When consumers consider renting clothes on an online platform, they undergo a purchase-decision process involving three main interrelated factors: message appeal (‘How appealing is the review of the product I am considering to rent?’), rental intention (‘How willing am I to rent this garment?’) and, finally, WTP (‘What is the maximum amount I would pay to rent this item?’). If the likelihood of these three factors is increased, the valuation of fashion rental services is higher. Moreover, greater message appeal positively affects both rental intention and WTP (Farzin et al., 2022; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

Message Appeal

Any advertising message can either stimulate the mind and cognition of recipients or appeal to their emotions (Puto & Wells, 1984). Accordingly, a 'rational appeal' can be evoked by messages emphasizing product features. Moreover, an 'emotional appeal' is achieved through emotional content. To gain rational appeal, the information in online customer reviews, for example, is described objectively and factually (Stafford & Day, 1995). At the same time, triggering emotional appeal is reached by presenting content subjectively intended to elicit emotions in the recipient (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). Rational message appeals are more effective if a person is more involved in the communicated topic. If, for instance, the fashion involvement of a fashion consumer is high, rational appeals (e.g., with factual descriptions of the product of interest) have a more significant effect and are more inclined to cause behavioral changes (Noble et al., 2014) and are more likely to lead to a purchase (Page et al., 1990).

Purchase/ Rental Intention

Purchase intention indicates how much a consumer is willing to buy a product in a particular situation (Lu et al., 2014; Morrison, 1979). Hasan and Mohammad (2013) add that purchase intention is needs-oriented and indicates whether a product or service meets the buyer's preferences and expectations. If a buyer's purchase intention is sustainable, sustainable products are preferred over unsustainable ones (Rahim et al., 2016). In their study, Rahim et al. (2016) show that online customer review appeal is crucial in persuading consumers to buy sustainable products. In this work, purchase intention is equated with rental intention.

Willingness to Pay

The WTP describes a price range that indicates the maximum amount buyers are willing to pay for a product or service (Shogren et al., 1994). The WTP of customers depends, for example, on their income (higher income means higher WTP; Vecchio & Annunziata, 2015) or their

gender (female customers have higher WTP than male customers; Harms & Linton, 2016). In addition, Geiger and Keller (2018) suggest that consumers would pay more for fair fashion, which might also apply to renting clothes.

External influences can also impact consumer behavior in addition to the phases of the purchase decision process. eWOM, and thus online customer reviews, are an essential factor influencing consumer decisions in the digital age.

2.2 Electronic Word of Mouth

Litvin et al. (2008) define eWOM as communicating online by informing consumers about the use or features of services or products or their distribution. eWOM communication exclusively occurs via online communication channels, meaning that the location of communication participants is irrelevant. Moreover, information can be spread more quickly and anonymously via the Internet. Content can be stored, allowing unlimited users to search for it. Therefore, the influence on consumers is considerably effective due to the potentially large group of recipients (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Digital word of mouth can occur via various communication channels, such as social commerce websites, e-commerce, chat rooms, e-mail, online communities, forums, blogs, social networks, and similar platforms. In the literature, eWOM is often associated with "viral marketing" since messages are distributed exponentially fast (Gupta & Harris, 2010).

Building on the broad concept of eWOM, online reviews, as an easily accessible form of eWOM, play a crucial role in shaping consumer opinion and purchasing decisions.

2.2.1 Online Customer Reviews

Product ratings and reviews must be distinguished within online customer reviews. Ratings are evaluations on a scale (e.g., a 5-point Likert scale from "very bad" to "very good"), whereas reviews contain more detailed information in text form about a product (Lackermair et al., 2013). In this paper, the emphasis is on reviews, whereas they might contain rating scales.

Online customer reviews can include, for instance, purchase experiences or complaints, user experiences, or information on the retailer. While store reviews share feedback regarding the distributor, product reviews focus on personal experiences with the purchased product. Both review types can provide companies with detailed information about user preferences (Yang et al., 2019). In the case of online customer reviews, the customer critically reports the purchase experience, which can be positive, neutral, or negative (Cheng et al., 2011). To increase the usefulness of product reviews, many online stores offer the option of integrating user-generated

product images and videos into product reviews (Wu et al., 2021). 71% of all online shoppers read online customer reviews before making a purchase, emphasizing their importance (Bai et al., 2018).

Within the fashion sector, many suppliers collect customer data on the fit of their offered clothing (Park et al., 2023). At Hennes and Mauritz (H&M), for example, customers can use a rating scale to assess the fit or length of an item. In addition, generic online customer reviews can be entered as text entries to make it easier for other shoppers to make the right choice (Appendix 1a; Hennes & Mauritz, 2024). Furthermore, fashion rental services such as Rent the Runway, one of the biggest online fashion rental platforms (Baek & Oh, 2021), also provide the option to leave reviews regarding their offered clothes with the option to insert a photo of the item worn (Appendix 1b; Rent the Runway, 2024a).

Positive store and product reviews support purchasing decisions and strengthen trust in a product or service (Sa'ait et al., 2016).

Online Review Frequency

In their study, Hu and Krishen (2019) reveal that, in addition to quality, the quantity of reviews consumed also influences decision-making. Transferring these findings to the fashion rental sector, it could be assumed that the number of online reviews read influences fashion rental service valuations. Additionally, Thakur (2018) states that the engagement and, therefore, the frequency of reading or writing online customer reviews is a form of satisfaction for many users of a platform with a review function. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate to what extent this type of gratification, particularly the frequency of being influenced by an online customer review, affects fashion rental service valuations.

While online customer reviews provide valuable insights into consumers' experiences, their effectiveness depends on the underlying rating systems. The design of review systems is vital for assessing their impact on consumer trust and decision-making.

2.2.2 Review Systems

Online customer reviews can be distributed via various channels:

- a) Distributor website (internal review systems)
- b) Channels controlled by the customer (social media)
- c) Review service providers controlled by third parties (external review systems)

External review systems or those within social media are not directly linked to the purchase decision process, as customers have to leave the online store in order to read them. Therefore, internal rating systems are examined in this thesis (Gvili & Levy, 2016; Kreis & Gottschalk, 2015). The company provides the customer with a website-integrated feature in internal rating systems where personal opinions and experiences can be shared. Therefore, the retailer can decide what to publish (Wan et al., 2023). This often entails the risk of consumers fearing reviews being manipulated, as there is no authenticity proof (Chapter 2.5 addresses trust in eWOM in more detail). Hence, doubts may arise if actual customers wrote positive reviews and whether the retailer should have published negative comments (Duffy, 2017). McKinney and Shin (2016) examined online customer reviews on Rent the Runway, and their analysis shows that there are significantly more positive reviews than negative reviews. However, it was impossible to trace whether some reviews were withheld or deleted.

Since some fashion rental services offer internal rating systems, users can see how previous renters received an item of clothing in terms of fit or quality. For example, the providers Armoire, Nuuly, Rent The Runway, and Vince Unfold have integrated such rating options into their websites (Armoire, 2024; Nuuly, 2024; Rent The Runway, 2024b; Vince Unfold, 2024). On the one hand, offering internal review systems for consumers entails the risk of falsification by the provider. However, on the other hand, it is also the cheaper option for the company compared to external review systems (Hsieh & Li, 2020; Fogel & Zachariah, 2017). In summary, the effectiveness of rating systems is essential to ensure that consumer feedback is accurate and trustworthy. This is related to the concept of information quality, which examines the characteristics of reviews that make information helpful and reliable for users.

2.2.3 Information Quality

Information quality has increasingly become more critical as a result of Web 2.0. Since consumers are not directly communicating, it is more difficult to assess how credible or high-quality information is (Reichelt et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2015). The following aspects are considered relevant in assessing the quality of information: accuracy, timeliness, precision, reliability, currency, completeness, and relevancy (Alshikhi & Abdullah, 2018; McKinney et al., 2002; Nair & Radhakrishnan, 2019; Pan & Zhang, 2011). Lin et al. (2012) claim that not only the content of the message but also its style influences the perceived quality. Therefore, the style includes a consistent tone of voice, the uniqueness of the voice, the presence of an attitude, and the degree of formality and creativity. Additionally, visuality is an essential factor contributing to information quality (Sundar, 1998), as the combination of image and text content

is more likely to be remembered (Lewis et al., 2013). Furthermore, the quality of information is positively related to the recipient's behavioral and purchase intentions (Leong et al., 2022; Park et al., 2007; Yeap et al., 2014), which is particularly relevant for this study, as the effects of information quality on rental intention on fashion rental platforms are part of the research.

If online customer reviews contain both positive and negative reviews, precise advice, or expert knowledge, they are considered more credible due to their objectivity (Casaló et al., 2011; Mackiewicz & Yeats, 2014; Tang et al., 2014; Willemsen et al., 2011).

The quality of reviews is divided into five classes to analyze: 'high-quality', 'medium-quality', 'low-quality', 'duplicate', and 'spam' (Liu et al., 2007). The categories are classified as follows in Table 1 (Chen & Tseng, 2011):

Table 1: *Online Review Quality Classifications*

high-quality	The review is complete and up-to-date and consists of many opinions and attitudes.
medium-quality	The review is product-relevant and helpful, but is not sufficiently convincing.
low-quality	The review is not very informative and too objective for the evaluation of a product.
duplicate	The review may have been manipulated or published twice.
spam	The review does not contain any product-relevant information. This could be third-party surreptitious advertising.

With an increase in quality, meaning with the rise in Table 1 from the bottom ('spam') to the top column ('high-quality'), message appeal and, therefore, purchase intention are increasing (Filiari, 2015; Jiang & Benbasat, 2004; Qiu et al., 2012).

In summary, the quality of information consumers receive significantly influences their purchasing decisions. This interaction is particularly evident in the fashion industry, where information quality impacts the valuation of apparel websites (Kim & Niehm, 2009). Additionally, involvement in fashion also provides further insights into consumer behavior.

2.3 Fashion Involvement

Consumer involvement, in general, is described as the extent to which the features of a product, service, or brand overlap with one's preferences or interests (Parihar et al., 2018; Zaichkowsky, 1985). The greater this extent is, the more likely people are to engage with the topic (Beatty & Smith, 1987) and the stronger the effect of the variable "involvement" on their purchase behavior (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Mitchell (1979) specifies two directions that involvement can take: First, an intensity that describes the affection for an object, and second,

a direction that describes the stimulus to which the arousal is then evoked. Andrews et al. (1990) add a third dimension that describes the time frame of the sustained intensity.

Compared to other categories that can trigger some kind of involvement, it has been shown that fashion involvement is more significant on average (O'Cass, 2004). This could be the case because, for many individuals, clothing serves as a status symbol or identity expression mechanism (McIntyre & Miller, 1992; O'Cass & Choy, 2008).

Since fashion involvement impacts consumers' apparel purchase intentions, this study aims to find out whether this stronger influence also applies to renting fashion. Another aforementioned phenomenon that might impact the purchase decision process is consumers' eWOM trust in online reviews.

2.4 Trust in eWOM

Trust in eWOM

Online ratings are one of the most trusted sources of consumer confidence in e-commerce decisions. (Raja et al., 2021, p. 1)

The more eWOM is trusted, the more likely readers will follow this evaluation of a product or service (Brown et al., 2007; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Mackiewicz (2008) states that trust in eWOM is based on the linguistic expression of reviews, leading back to eWOM information quality. Furthermore, Cosenza et al. (2015) argue that the degree of personalization of the information source, i.e., the reviewer, is essential in building trust. The more personal information the sender reveals, the more likely it is to be trusted (Forman et al., 2008).

In their dual process theory, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) divide trust in eWOM into two decision variables that are used to assess the credibility of eWOM: Informational and normative determinants (Figure 1).

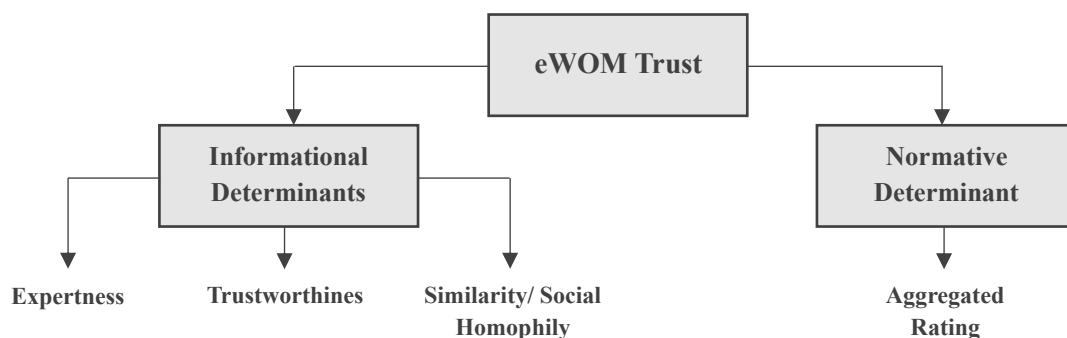


Figure 1: *Determinants of eWOM Trust*

The informational determinants consist of the factors expertness, trustworthiness, similarity, or social homophily, the normative determinant of the aggregated rating. These factors are described subsequently.

Professional competence or expertness defines the knowledge and expertise attributed to the sender. The higher it is rated, the greater the perceived accuracy of information (Ohanian, 1990), and consequently, the more likely it is believed (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Yale & Gilly, 1995). *Trustworthiness* of the sender, such as the objectivity of their arguments, refers to the extent to which a review is considered trustworthy (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Huang & Chen, 2006; Sparkman & Locander, 1980). Trustworthy content positively affects the recipient's perception and attitude change (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Nowak et al., 2023). *Similarity or social homophily* between sender and receiver is divided into demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, or occupation and perceived characteristics such as values or preferences (Gilly et al., 1998; McGuire, 1985; Ohanian, 1990). According to Blanton (2013), information is more likely to be trusted if the recipient classifies it as similar to their own characteristics.

In an *aggregated rating*, i.e., the normative determinant, the recipient reads several product or service reviews. If one of the reviews does not match the others (e.g., a negative review among many positive reviews), it is less likely to be believed (Qiu & Li, 2010). In addition, dissonance is reduced when one's opinion matches the opinion of the majority of the reviews. Overall, a group's opinion is, therefore, more trusted than an individual opinion (Asch, 1955).

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

According to Wells et al. (2011), high-quality information on a website positively influences purchase intentions. If this influence is applied to the eWOM context, it could be assumed that eWOM information quality is likely to impact fashion rental service intentions positively. Due to the mentioned link to eWOM appeal and willingness to pay (Farzin et al., 2022; Filieri, 2015; Jiang & Benbasat, 2004; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Qiu et al., 2012), it can be expected that eWOM information quality has a positive effect on valuations of fashion rental services. Hence, the first hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H1: There will be a positive impact of eWOM information quality (low versus high information quality) on fashion rental service valuations so that:

H1a: The impact of high eWOM information quality will be greater on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay) than the impact of low eWOM information quality.

Since a higher involvement with a specific topic leads to a higher purchase intention (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985), this influence could be transferred to rental intention. Therefore, it can be assumed that a higher fashion involvement has a greater influence on fashion rental service valuations. Furthermore, fashion involvement is higher on average compared to other involvement-generating categories and, therefore, might have a greater influence on purchase decisions (O'Cass, 2004). It can, therefore, be assumed that a high level of fashion involvement increases the influence of eWOM information quality on the valuation of fashion rental services.

H2: The type of fashion involvement will have a positive impact on fashion rental service valuations so that:

H2a: The higher the type of fashion involvement, the greater the impact on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay) since a high fashion involvement intensifies the impact of eWOM information quality of the fashion rental service.

Based on the proposed effects of each, eWOM information quality and fashion involvement, on the evaluation of fashion rental services, it is assumed that high-quality information and high fashion involvement will have a more significant impact on consumers' intentions to rent clothes compared to situations with low fashion involvement and low eWOM information quality. This assumption is also supported by O'Cass and Choy (2008), who identified an influence of fashion involvement on consumers' WTP a price premium. Hence, the third set of hypotheses is proposed as follows:

H3: There will be a moderating effect of the type of fashion involvement between eWOM information quality (low versus high information quality) and fashion rental service valuations so that:

H3a: The higher (versus the lower) eWOM information quality and the higher (versus the lower) fashion involvement, the greater the impact on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay).

Prior literature suggests that individuals can rely on each other in an exchange relationship (Blau, 1964). Likewise, the evaluation of branded products and services is also indirectly influenced by the level of perceived trust in the goods and services being promoted (Ventre & Kolbe, 2020). Within the eWOM domain an exchange of information via eWOM is also expected to occur. Additionally, consumer trust has been shown to influence consumers' purchasing behavior positively (Ha & Janda, 2014; Nilashi et al., 2016). As such, it is expected that if the eWOM information is trusted, the effect on fashion rental service valuations will also be influenced. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is formally suggested as follows:

H4: eWOM trust will mediate the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay).

The following conceptual model (Figure 2) is thus proposed to investigate the impact of eWOM information quality on the valuation of fashion rental services, more precisely, eWOM appeal, rental intention, and WTP. The investigation also includes the aforementioned mediating effect of fashion involvement and the moderating effect of eWOM trust. Additionally, the influence of the covariate online review frequency on the moderation analysis is examined.

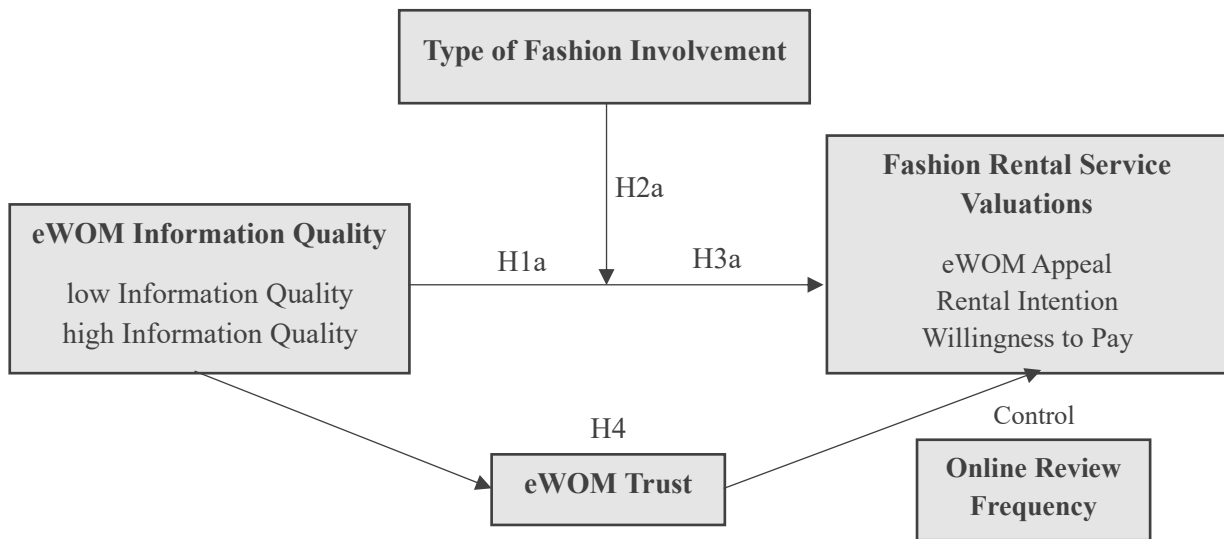


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

4. Methodology and Data Collection

This thesis aims to examine whether the direction of eWOM information quality affects the valuation of fashion rental services. Additionally, the moderating role of fashion involvement and the mediating influence of eWOM trust are tested. To fulfill the research objectives of this thesis, a pilot study was first carried out to check the manipulations and determine whether they were feasible for the main study. Subsequently, the main study was conducted to test the research hypotheses.

4.1 Research Method

The pilot and main studies were experimentally manipulated, each carried out online using a survey format. The surveys were created using the online tool Qualtrics, which offers numerous advantages for the creation and distribution of online surveys thanks to its user-friendly interface (Molnar, 2019) and the ability to transfer data directly to the SPSS analysis platform (Barnhoorn et al., 2015).

In addition, online surveys have advantages over other survey instruments: participants can answer openly and honestly, as the anonymous procedure minimizes social desirability, and the process is flexible regarding time and place (Braun et al., 2021). In addition, essential design elements were considered in the survey that are important for correct implementation: the questions were all kept as short as possible and with clear and unambiguous wording (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Smyth, 2016). In addition, the overall length of the survey was minimized to keep the dropout rate as low as possible (Revilla & Ochoa, 2017).

The survey distribution and the participants' quick receipt are also easier and faster in an online format. Using an anonymized link shared via social media (Instagram, WhatsApp), it was possible to generate a greater reach than with non-digital distribution (Lefever & Matthíasdóttir, 2007).

4.2 Sampling

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was applied for the study. Convenience sampling is a technique that offers advantages for research, such as cost efficiency and simplified recruitment and availability. In this, the researcher collects data from a readily available population to participate in the study (Malhotra et al., 1999). This is because the respondent's probability of being included in the sample is uncertain. To encourage honest participation, it is emphasized to let participants know that their responses are anonymous and will remain private.

As previously mentioned, participants were contacted via social media platforms to reach a reasonably large group of participants.

4.3 Research Instruments

The two experimental studies (pilot and main study) are described below, and the procedures adopted throughout the research instruments are discussed. More specifically, the effectiveness of the manipulations in the pilot study is examined. Thereafter, the procedure in the main study is explained using the variables listed in the conceptual model described above to test the hypotheses.

4.3.1 Pilot Study

A total of 43 people finished the pilot study between March 20th and April 9th. The objective of the pilot study (Appendix 2a) was to test the functioning of the manipulations for the independent variables. With regard to this, the participants were shown two different scenarios ("low eWOM information quality" and "high eWOM information quality") using randomization, which they were then asked to evaluate. In order to determine the direction (low versus high), two manipulation check questions were asked to assess the eWOM information quality perceived by the participants. More specifically, the first question was aimed at determining whether the participants felt that the information provided adequately reflected the characteristics of the product being evaluated (in this case, jeans). The second question dealt with the perceived influence of manipulation on the decision to rent a pair of jeans.

A univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate both manipulation checks, which revealed statistically significant differences between the assessment of both stimuli, as presented in Table 2. Firstly, participants who received the stimulus with the high eWOM information quality classified it as more adequate than those exposed to low eWOM information quality ($M_{low} = 1.28$, $SD_{low} = .46$ versus $M_{high} = 6.67$, $SD_{high} = .49$, $F(1,41) =$

1377.21, $p < .001$). Additionally, the likelihood of renting a pair of jeans was higher when the quality of information was high than when it was low ($M_{\text{low}} = 1.48$, $SD_{\text{low}} = .59$ versus $M_{\text{high}} = 6.50$, $SD_{\text{high}} = .51$, $F(1,41) = 848.72$, $p < .001$).

Table 2: *Pilot Study Manipulation Check 1 and 2 (univariate Anova)*

	Adequate Information		Willingness to Rent		N
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Low eWOM Information Quality	1.28	.46	1.48	.59	25
High eWOM Information Quality	6.67	.49	6.50	.51	18
<i>F-Test</i>	1377.21***		848.72***		

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Despite the slight discrepancy in sample size across each condition, participants perceived the manipulations correctly.

Since a couple of questions related to fashion involvement followed the manipulation check questions, these were used to determine whether the participants were interested and involved in fashion and whether this variable could be considered as a moderator for the main study. 68.63% of the participants agreed or completely agreed with the question of whether renting a pair of jeans feels meaningful, relevant, important, and exciting, and approximately 51.3% would completely rent clothes. The use of fashion involvement as a moderator was therefore considered appropriate. In addition, 69.8% completely agreed with whether they would read the reviews before renting a product, which underlines the topic's relevance. The demographic measures were then applied, which revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (67.4%), between 25 and 39 years (64.7%), university students (62.8%) with a completed bachelor's or master's degree (86%) and from Germany (100%) with an annual income of under 20,000€ (58.1%).

After the study was closed, participants were asked for specific suggestions intended to improve the stimuli in the main study. Thus, modifications were made according to their feedback so that the main study could be launched.

4.3.2 Main Study

The main study (Appendix 2b) was launched in English between April 22nd and May 4th, and a total of 370 responses were collected, of which 223 were fully completed. Overall, 118 participants were randomly exposed to an online customer review with a low quality of information and 105 to a high quality. This number exceeds the required amount adequate for high validity and consistency in experimental research (Saunders et al., 2009).

4.4 Design and Procedure

The study's main objective was to evaluate the influence of eWOM information quality in online customer reviews within fashion rental platforms on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, WTP). The moderating role of fashion involvement, together with the covariate online review frequency and the mediating influence of eWOM trust, are analyzed. Accordingly, the study design followed a 2 (eWOM information quality: low versus high) between-within-subjects design with fashion involvement and eWOM trust measured as a continuous moderator and mediator variable, respectively.

The study consisted of six parts (Figure 3). The I. part of the survey introduced the participants to the content, aim, and duration of the survey. In addition, they were assured that their answers would remain anonymous.

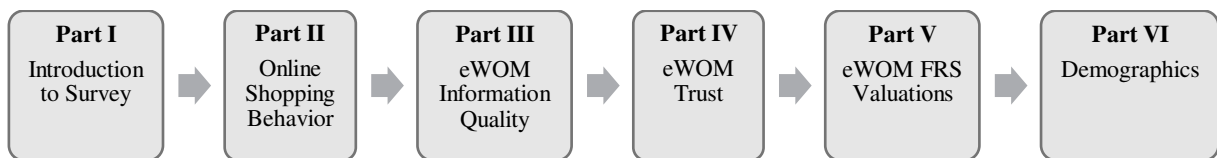


Figure 3: *Structure Main Study*

The II. part assessed the level of fashion involvement of the participants by asking about their online shopping behavior. Afterward, participants were randomly allocated to two scenarios representing both eWOM's low and high information quality. In each manipulated scenario, participants were exposed to a series of questions that consulted their perceived eWOM information quality (part III), trust (part IV), and their fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, WTP) in part V. Finally, the demographic data (gender, age, occupation, educational level, residency, income) of the respondents was collected in the VI. part.

4.5 Stimuli Development

Firstly, participants were placed in an environment similar to a fashion rental platform. The stimuli selected for the survey were either an online customer review with low or high eWOM information quality (Appendix 2c). The rating was applied to a gender-neutral pair of jeans without a restricted target group. The reviewers' names were also kept unisex. The reviews consisted of visual and textual elements to maximize the details displayed to the recipients (Wu et al., 2021). Two individual ratings were shown for each stimulus, as aggregated ratings are more likely to be trusted (Asch, 1955; Qiu & Li, 2010). Both reviews were designed using similar images, structure, and wording to ensure consistency across manipulations.

However, the stimuli differed in terms of their eWOM information quality, namely in precision, reliability, completeness, and relevancy (Alshikhi & Abdullah, 2018), creativity, and visuality (Lin et al., 2012; Sundar, 1998) as well as comprehensibility (Lee et al., 2008; Savolainen, 2011). More specifically, the resolution of the photo included in the review was significantly better for the manipulation of high eWOM information quality. Additionally, the reviewers of the high eWOM information quality manipulations were titled 'Top Contributors', which they are not in the manipulation with a low eWOM information quality. Furthermore, in contrast to the low eWOM information quality reviews, the manipulations with high eWOM information quality contained information on the size worn, the fit, and the general experience with the jeans.

4.6 Variable Descriptions

The variables shown in the conceptual model in Chapter 3 are described in the following for ease of understanding.

Manipulation Check

Three manipulation checks were carried out immediately after the animations were shown to check whether the study participants understood the manipulations contained in the two review scenarios correctly. These were used to evaluate whether the direction of the eWOM information quality (low versus high) was perceived appropriately. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the three statements regarding the displayed stimuli ('The review has a sufficient amount of content.'; 'The review accurately reflects the features of the pair of jeans.'; 'The review has a good reputation.') adapted from Lee et al. (2002) using a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - completely disagree' to '7 - completely agree').

The dependent and independent variables were conducted after exposing participants to the experimental manipulations and the concerning manipulation check questions.

Independent Variable

eWOM Information Quality – low versus high: manipulated and randomly presented to participants.

Dependent Variables – fashion rental service valuations

eWOM Appeal – measured by assessing participants' appeal of eWOM on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - completely disagree' to '7 - completely agree'), adapted from Park et al. (2007).

Rental Intention – measured by determining participants' intention to rent fashion on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - completely disagree' to '7 - completely agree') following Kim and Park (2013).

Willingness to Pay – measured by examining participants' WTP (from €0 to €500) as a rental fee for the pair of jeans they were exposed to.

Moderator

Fashion Involvement – measured by assessing participants' involvement in fashion on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - completely disagree' to '7 - completely agree'), based on Zaichkowsky (1994).

Control Variable

Online Review Frequency – measured by assessing participants' frequency on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 – never' to '7 – always') of reading and of being influenced by online customer reviews.

Mediator

eWOM Trust – measured by determining participants' trust in eWOM on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - completely disagree' to '7 - completely agree'), adapted by Soh et al. (2009), Ohanian (1990) and Lee et al. (2002).

The scales used to assess the variables can be found in the main survey in Appendix 2b. Each scales' expression for every variable used for the analyses are listed in Appendix 2d.

5. Results and Analysis

The results concerning the research questions and the hypotheses are described in this section. First, the structure of the sample that took part in the study is described.

5.1 Sampling Characterization

Among the 223 study participants, 82.4% were female, and 17.6% male. The age distribution showed that most (36.5%) participants were between 18 and 24 years old, followed by 28.8% aged 25 to 34. Except for 1.4% who are younger than 18 years, the remaining (33.3%) are older than 34 years. Most participants are employed (45%) or students (49.1%). Regarding education, 36.2% have a high school diploma, 29.9% have a bachelor's and 27.1% have a master's degree. In addition, 83.9% currently live in Germany, 5.1% in Belgium, 2.3% each in Austria and the USA, and 1.4% in Sweden. Finally, most of the participants earn less than €20,000 per year (38.9%) or stated that they did not wish to provide any information on their income (19%). More detailed information on the sampling characterization is provided in Appendix 2e.

5.2 Scale Reliability

Most variables used for this study were adapted from previous literature. However, in order to investigate whether the scales for their measurement are also reliable in the context of this study, a factor analysis with principal component and varimax rotation, as well as a reliability analysis was carried out for all scales with more than two items: Fashion involvement, eWOM trust, eWOM appeal and rental intention were therefore considered for both measurement procedures. For fashion involvement, only three items were used for the investigation, since the other two items were measured using different scale points, and thus, can not be considered to be aggregated together.

Subsequently, a bi-variate correlation analysis was performed for the two items of the covariate online review frequency to test whether the items adequately measure the intended variable and whether there is a strong correlation between them.

The results of the factor analysis showed the following:

eWOM Appeal. Factor analysis results show that one factor was extracted from the analysis of five items (factor loadings between .73 and .86).

Rental Intention. Factor analysis results show that one factor was extracted from the analysis of three items (factor loadings between .72 and .88).

Fashion Involvement. Factor analysis results show that one factor was extracted from the analysis of three items (factor loadings between .84 and .86).

eWOM Trust. Factor analysis results show that one factor was extracted from the analysis of seven items (factor loadings between .71 and .78).

Only one component was extracted for each scale of the four aforementioned variables. Therefore, no modifications needed to be applied and the items of each scale can be grouped accordingly since they measure the same construct.

A reliability analysis was then carried out to check the reliability of these scales. The Cronbach's α (alpha) assessment was applied to examine whether scales with three or more items measure the same. The magnitude of Cronbach's α is between .1 and 1, which indicates the internal consistency and reliability of scale items that examine a variable (Christmann, & Van Aelst, 2006). If the value is above .6, there is a high homogeneity and correlation and the scale can therefore be used for statistical evaluations (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis for Multi-Item Scales

Scale	Initial number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha if deleted	Items deleted	Final number of items
eWOM Appeal	5	.89	-	-	5
Rental Intention	3	.87	-	-	3
Fashion Involvement	3	.91	-	-	3
eWOM Trust	7	.95	-	-	7

The results of the analysis (Table 3) show that all four scales exhibit high homogeneity and correlation with Cronbach's α values between .87 and .95.

Online Review Frequency. If a Pearson correlation value is above .5, the items are considered strongly correlated. The result of the online review frequency items shows a significant strong positive relationship ($r(221) = .70, p < .001$), thus the new covariate online review frequency could be transformed.

5.3 Manipulation Check Results

In order to check whether the participants perceived the stimuli correctly, it was analyzed whether the manipulations with low and high eWOM information quality were also considered as such by the participants. For this purpose, independent t-Tests with a confidence level of 95% were carried out.

Table 4: Main Study Manipulation Check (independent t-Test)

	Low eWOM Information Quality		High eWOM Information Quality		t-Test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Sufficient Content Amount	2.87	1.63	5.18	1.31	-11.72***
Accurate Feature Reflection	2.65	1.43	5.02	1.35	-12.51***
Good Reputation	3.73	1.61	5.24	1.32	-7.55***

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

The results of the t-Tests (Table 4) show that the amount of content of the manipulations with low eWOM information quality was perceived as less sufficient than those with high eWOM information quality ($M_{\text{low}} = 2.87$ versus $M_{\text{high}} = 5.18$; $t(219) = -11.72$; $p < .001$). In comparison to high eWOM information quality, the reflection of the features of the jeans was also considered less adequate when the stimulus of low eWOM information quality was presented ($M_{\text{low}} = 2.65$ versus $M_{\text{high}} = 5.02$; $t(216) = -12.51$; $p < .001$). The following also emerged with regard to the perceived reputation of the review shown: the recipients of the manipulation of low eWOM information quality perceived the reputation to be inferior than those of high eWOM information quality ($M_{\text{low}} = 3.73$ versus $M_{\text{high}} = 5.24$; $t(214) = -7.55$; $p < .001$).

Overall, it can be concluded that both manipulations were perceived as expected, allowing to proceed with further analysis.

5.4 Main Results

After the variables and manipulations have been checked and their usability has been confirmed, the hypotheses set out in Chapter 3 are tested in this section. Overall, the influence of eWOM information quality (low versus high) on the valuation of fashion rental services (eWOM appeal, rental intention, WTP) is analyzed. In addition, it is examined whether this influence is altered by the moderating effect of fashion involvement and the mediating effect of trust in eWOM.

5.4.1 Impact of eWOM Information Quality on Fashion Rental Service Valuations

H1: There will be a positive impact of eWOM information quality (low versus high information quality) on fashion rental service valuations, so that:

H1a: The impact of high eWOM information quality will be greater on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay) than the impact of low eWOM information quality.

To test the first set of hypotheses, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted. Results show a significant main interaction effect of eWOM information quality on the dependent variables eWOM appeal ($F(1,221) = 53.76, p < .001$), rental intention ($F(1,221) = 4.27, p < .05$) and WTP ($F(1,221) = 6.77, p < .05$), validating hypothesis 1 (Table 5).

Table 5: eWOM Information Quality Main Effect (MANOVA)

	Low eWOM Information Quality		High eWOM Information Quality		F-Test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
eWOM Appeal	3.73	1.27	4.98	1.27	53.76***
Rental Intention	3.19	1.41	3.60	1.58	4.27*
WTP	45.86	27.93	59.77	50.00	6.77*

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

To further test the first set of hypotheses, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the three aforementioned dependent variables to compare their means for both conditions (low versus high eWOM information quality).

Results (Table 6) indicate statistically significant differences between low and high eWOM information quality in the means of all three dependent variables: Consumers had a higher eWOM appeal (eWOM appeal: $M_{\text{low information quality}} = 3.73, SD = 1.27$ versus $M_{\text{high information quality}} = 4.98, SD = 1.27$; $t(221) = -7.33; p < .001$), a higher rental intention (rental intention: M_{low}

information quality = 3.19, SD = 1.41 versus $M_{\text{high information quality}} = 3.60$, SD = 1.58; $t(221) = -2.07$; $p < .05$), and a higher WTP (WTP: $M_{\text{low information quality}} = 45.86$, SD = 27.93 versus $M_{\text{high information quality}} = 59.77$, SD = 50.00; $t(221) = -2.52$; $p < .01$) when the eWOM information quality was high than when it was low.

Table 6: *Effect of eWOM Information Quality on Fashion Rental Service Valuations (independent t-Test)*

	Low eWOM Information Quality		High eWOM Information Quality		<i>t-Test</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
eWOM Appeal	3.73	1.27	4.98	1.27	-7.33***
Rental Intention	3.19	1.41	3.60	1.58	-2.07*
WTP	45.86	27.93	59.77	50.00	-2.52**

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Overall, perceiving a high eWOM information quality has a greater impact on fashion rental service valuations, more specifically on eWOM appeal, rental intention and WTP, than a low eWOM information quality, fully validating hypothesis 1a.

5.4.2 Influence of Fashion Involvement on Fashion Rental Service Valuations

H2: The type of the fashion involvement will have a positive impact on fashion rental service valuations, so that:

H2a: The higher the type of fashion involvement, the greater the impact on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay) since a high fashion involvement intensifies the impact of eWOM information quality of the fashion rental service.

To test the second hypothesis, three simple linear regressions were performed in succession to examine the influence of fashion involvement on the three dependent variables eWOM appeal, rental intention and WTP. Results are shown in Table 7.

In all three cases, the Durbin Watson value indicates that the assumption of independence of observations is met, as the values are between one and three in each case. With the values 2.08 (eWOM appeal), 1.88 (rental intention) and 2.04 (WTP), there is therefore no significant autocorrelation.

Regarding the first linear regression, it can be concluded that fashion involvement has a significant and low to moderately positive influence on eWOM appeal with a correlation of .22 ($p < .001$). If a consumer's fashion involvement increases by one unit, their eWOM appeal increases by .22 units if everything else remains constant. In addition, 4.9% of the variability of eWOM appeal is explained by fashion involvement.

A significant ($p < .01$) and also slightly to moderately positive effect with a correlation of .19 was found in the influence of fashion involvement on rental intention. With an increase in fashion involvement of one unit, the rental intention also increases by .20 units. 3.8% of the variance in rental intention was predicted by fashion involvement.

No significant correlation was found regarding WTP ($p = .82$).

Table 7: *Effect of Fashion Involvement on Fashion Rental Service Valuations (Linear Regressions)*

Fashion Involvement	Coefficient	SE	Correlation	R²
eWOM Appeal	.22***	.07	.22	4.9%
Rental Intention	.20**	.07	.19	3.8%
WTP	-.44	1.89	.02	0

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

In summary, fashion involvement significantly influences eWOM appeal and rental intention, but not WTP, partly validating hypothesis 2a.

5.4.3 The Moderation of Fashion Involvement

H3: There will be a moderating effect of the type of fashion involvement between eWOM information quality (low versus high information quality) and fashion rental service valuations, so that:

H3a: The higher (versus the lower) eWOM information quality and the higher (versus the lower) fashion involvement, the greater the impact on fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay).

The third set of hypotheses proposes that higher fashion involvement positively moderates the impact of higher eWOM information quality on the three dependent variables eWOM appeal, rental intention, and WTP. The moderation analysis was conducted using Hayes linear regression model 1 (Hayes, 2015, 2017). If the confidence interval does not include the value zero (i.e. the upper and lower limit is positive and negative, respectively), the moderating effect is confirmed.

eWOM Appeal. Results (Table 8) indicate that there was a significant main effect of eWOM information quality on eWOM appeal ($b = 1.53$, $SE = .19$, $t(219) = 8.13$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [1.16, 1.90]$) and of fashion involvement ($b = .18$, $SE = .07$, $t(219) = 2.72$, $p < .01$, $95\% CI = [0.05, 0.31]$) on eWOM appeal, but no significant two-way eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect on eWOM appeal ($b = .14$, $SE = .13$, $t(219) = 1.10$, $p = .28$, $95\% CI = [-0.12, 0.40]$).

Rental Intention. Results show that there was no significant main effect of eWOM information quality ($b = .35$, $SE = .20$, $t(219) = 1.80$, $p = .07$, $95\% CI = [-0.03, 0.74]$), but a significant effect of fashion involvement ($b = .19$, $SE = .07$, $t(219) = 2.82$, $p < .01$, $95\% CI = [0.06, 0.33]$) on the intention to rent. However, more importantly, a significant two-way eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect was obtained on this dependent variable ($b = .28$, $SE = .14$, $t(219) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $95\% CI = [0.01, 0.55]$).

Table 8: Two-Way Interaction eWOM Information Quality x Fashion Involvement
(Hayes Process Macro - Model 1)

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Lower CI</i>	<i>Upper CI</i>
eWOM Appeal	.14	.13	-.12	.40
Rental Intention	.28*	.14	.01	.55
WTP	-3.60	3.77	-11.03	3.83

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008) was then carried out to examine the differences between the conditional effects at one standard deviation below and above the mean ($\pm 1SD$). Findings indicate that as fashion involvement grows, rental intention differences become apparent when participants are exposed to high-quality versus low-quality eWOM information. Higher fashion involvement leads to greater perceived rental intention when individuals are exposed to high eWOM information quality (Figure 4).

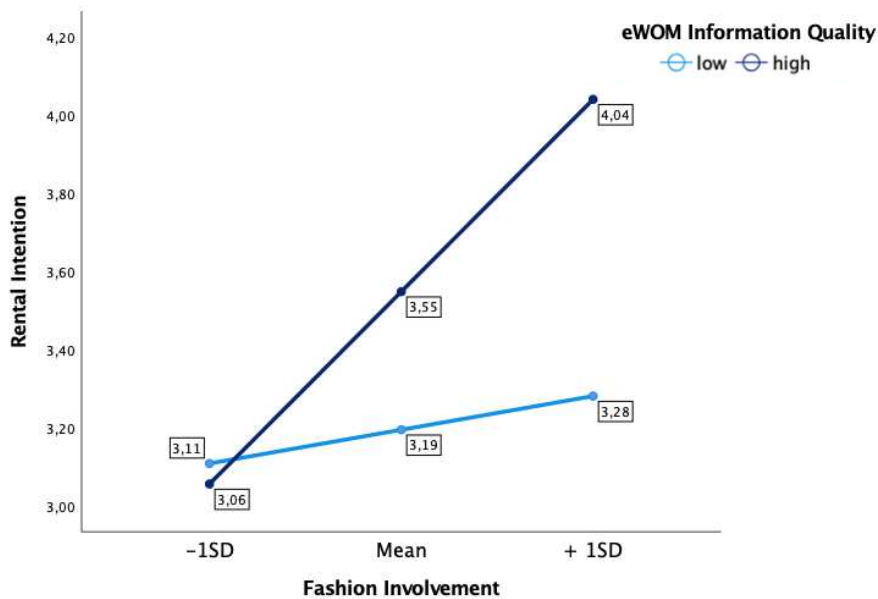


Figure 4: Fashion Involvement as a Moderator on the Effect of eWOM Information Quality and Rental Intention

Willingness to Pay. Results (Table 8) indicate that there was a significant main effect of eWOM information quality on WTP ($b = 14.25$, $SE = 5.39$, $t(219) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, $95\% CI = [3.64, 24.87]$). Both, the effect of fashion involvement ($b = -.97$, $SE = 1.88$, $t(219) = -.52$, $p = .61$, $95\% CI = [-4.67, 2.74]$) and the two-way eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect ($b = -3.60$, $SE = 3.77$, $t(219) = -.95$, $p = .34$, $95\% CI = [-11.03, 3.83]$) on WTP were not significant.

In summary, higher fashion involvement only has a statistically significant positive effect on the relationship between high eWOM information quality and rental intention.

To further examine the findings obtained in H3a, a control variable was added to the moderation analysis to test if it enhances the overall model fit. As initially predicted, the online review frequency of participants could indirectly influence fashion rental service valuations, thus, it was added as a covariate into the analysis. Interestingly, when this covariate was entered into the regression model, results improved slightly across two of the three dependent variables.

eWOM Appeal. Results show both a statistically significant main effect of eWOM information quality ($b = 1.07$, $SE = .15$, $t(218) = 7.14$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [0.78, 1.37]$), and online review frequency ($b = .66$, $SE = .05$, $t(218) = 12.25$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [0.55, 0.77]$) on eWOM appeal. More importantly, results show a marginally significant two-way eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect on eWOM appeal ($b = .19$, $SE = .10$, $t(218) = 1.88$, $p = .06$, $95\% CI = [-0.01, 0.39]$) when adding the covariate into the regression model. To further investigate the effect, slope analysis was carried out to examine the differences between the conditions at one standard deviation below and above the mean ($\pm 1SD$).

Findings indicate that differences between low and high eWOM information quality are present at low (-1SD) ($b = .80$, $SE = .21$, $t(218) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [0.38, 1.22]$) average (Mean) ($b = 1.07$, $SE = .15$, $t(218) = 7.14$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [0.78, 1.37]$) and high (+1 SD) ($b = 1.35$, $SE = .21$, $t(218) = 6.51$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [0.94, 1.75]$) fashion involvement levels. Yet, the direction of the slopes varies according to eWOM information quality; specifically, the research findings indicate that higher fashion involvement leads to greater perceived appeal of eWOM when individuals are exposed to high eWOM information quality. However, when individuals perceive low eWOM information quality, increased fashion involvement leads to a decrease in perceived eWOM appeal (Figure 6).

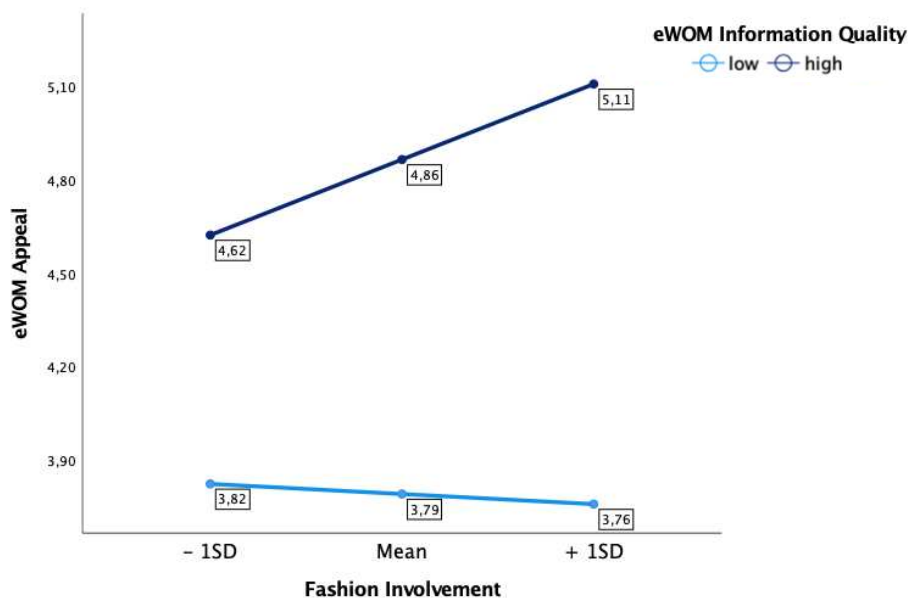


Figure 5: Fashion Involvement as a Moderator on the Effect of eWOM Information Quality and eWOM Appeal with the Additional Impact of Online Review Frequency

Rental Intention. Results indicate no statistically significant main effect of eWOM information quality ($b = .21$, $SE = .20$, $t(218) = 1.05$, $p = .29$, $95\% CI = [-0.18, 0.60]$), but a statistically significant main effect of online review frequency ($b = .21$, $SE = .07$, $t(218) = 2.86$, $p < .01$, $95\% CI = [0.06, 0.35]$) on rental intention. The two-way eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect on rental intention influenced by online review frequency remained statistically significant ($b = .30$, $SE = .14$, $t(218) = 2.20$, $p < .05$, $95\% CI = [0.03, 0.57]$). By conducting slope analysis, findings show no differences between low and high eWOM information quality at low (-1SD) and average (Mean) fashion involvement levels (-1SD: $b = -.22$, $SE = .28$, $t(218) = -.77$, $p = .44$, $95\% CI = [-0.77, 0.34]$; Mean: $b = .21$, $SE = .20$, $t(218) = 1.05$, $p = .29$, $95\% CI = [-0.18, 0.60]$). However, there were differences at high (+1SD) fashion involvement levels ($b = .64$, $SE = .28$, $t(218) = 2.31$, $p < .05$, $95\% CI = [0.09, 1.18]$). Findings indicate that as fashion involvement grows, rental intention differences become apparent when participants are exposed to high-quality versus low-quality eWOM information. Higher fashion involvement leads to greater perceived rental intention when individuals are exposed to high eWOM information quality (Figure 7).

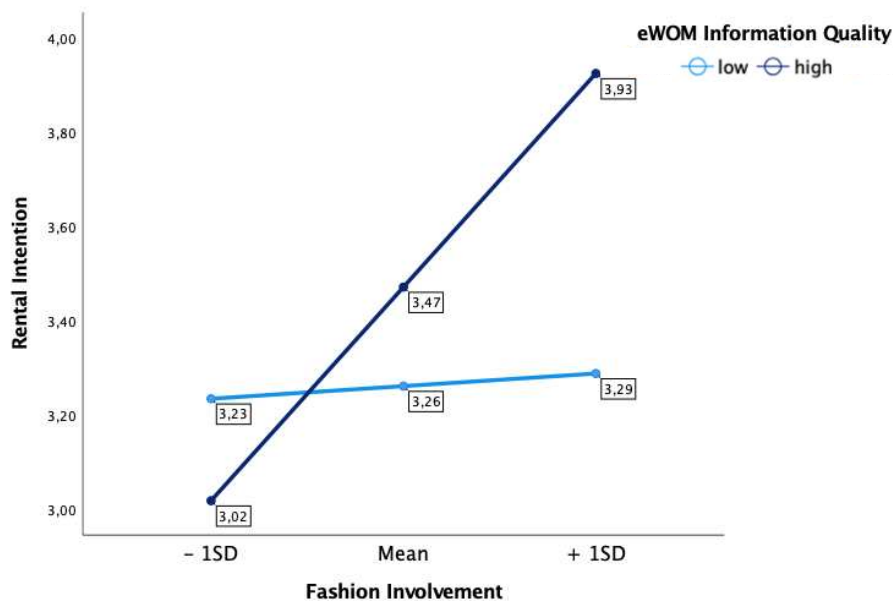


Figure 6: Fashion Involvement as a Moderator on the Effect of eWOM Information Quality and Rental Intention with the Additional Impact of Online Review Frequency

Willingness to Pay. Results show a significant main effect of eWOM information quality on the WTP dependent variable ($b = 16.72$, $SE = 5.54$, $t(218) = 3.02$, $p < .01$, 95% CI = [5.81, 27.63]) despite non-significant fashion involvement ($b = -.37$, $SE = 1.90$, $t(218) = -.20$, $p = .85$, 95% CI = [-4.12, 3.37]) and online review frequency ($b = -3.54$, $SE = 1.99$, $t(218) = -1.78$, $p = .08$, 95% CI = [-7.45, 0.37]) main effects. Additionally, a non-significant eWOM information quality x fashion involvement interaction effect ($b = -3.85$, $SE = 3.75$, $t(218) = -1.03$, $p = .31$, 95% CI = [-11.25, 3.55]) was verified, showing that after controlling for online review frequency it did not significantly affect WTP valuations of participants.

In summary, adding the frequency of consuming online reviews barely improves the moderating effect of fashion involvement, so that there was a marginally significant effect on eWOM appeal, partially validating hypothesis 3a.

5.4.4 The Mediation of eWOM Trust

H4: eWOM trust will mediate the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations (eWOM appeal, rental intention, and willingness to pay).

To test hypothesis 4, a simple mediation analysis was performed with eWOM information quality as the independent variable, eWOM appeal, rental intention, and WTP as the dependent variables, and eWOM trust as the mediator (Figure 8). The aim is to find out to what extent eWOM trust indirectly impacts the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations. A simple mediation was conducted using again Hayes (2015, 2017) Process Macro software for SPSS, Model 4. If the regression analysis's lower and upper confidence intervals contain the value zero, there is no mediating effect. If there is no zero in this interval, there is a mediating effect with 95% confidence. The extent of mediation can vary, depending on the relationship between the independent variable and the outcome variable, such as the relationship between low or high eWOM information quality and the dependent variables. A full mediation happens when this relationship disappears, meaning the direct effect is no longer significant. On the other hand, partial mediation occurs when this relationship is significantly reduced (Hofmann et al., 2020).

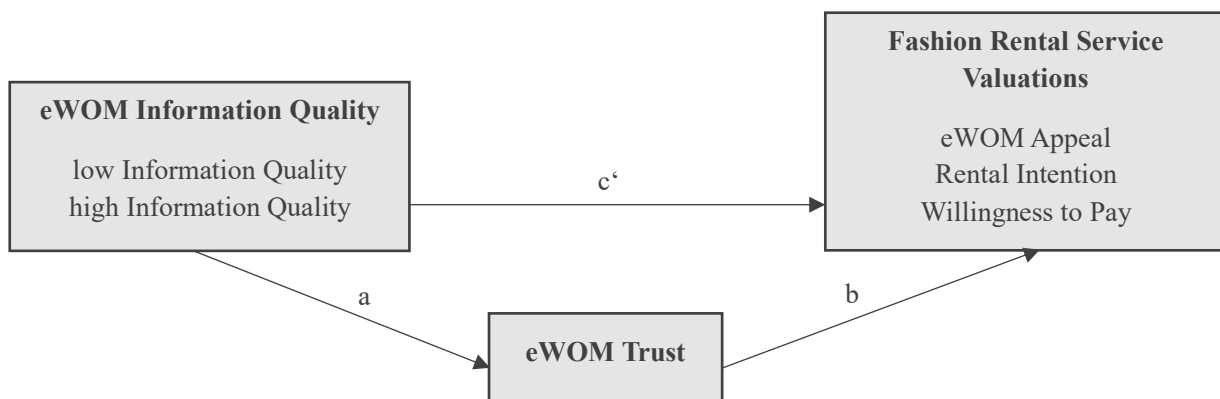


Figure 7: Model for eWOM Trust Mediation

eWOM Appeal. Results (Table 9) show that eWOM trust partially mediates the effect of eWOM information quality on eWOM appeal (*indirect effect*: .33; SE = .08; $p < .05$; 95% CI = [0.19, 0.48]). Specifically, both the impact of eWOM information quality on eWOM trust ($b = .73$; SE = .03; $p < .001$; 95% CI = [0.66, 0.79]) and of eWOM trust on eWOM appeal ($b = .45$; SE = .09; $p < .001$; 95% CI = [0.27, 0.64]) are significant. Yet, the direct effect of eWOM information quality on eWOM appeal is still significant (*direct effect*: .18; SE = .08; $p < .05$; 95% CI = [0.02, 0.34]). Consequently, the impact of eWOM information quality on eWOM appeal via eWOM trust is partially mediated.

Table 9: *eWOM Trust Mediation with eWOM Appeal as Dependent Variable*
(Hayes Process Macro - Model 4)

Indirect Effect Paths	Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust	.73***	.66	.79
b eWOM Trust → eWOM Appeal	.45***	.27	.64
Indirect Effect	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a*b eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust → eWOM Appeal	.33*	.19	.48
Direct Effect Path	Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
c' eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Appeal	.18*	.02	.34

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Rental Intention. Results (Table 10) indicate that eWOM trust mediates the influence of eWOM information quality on rental intention (*indirect effect*: .22; SE = .09; $p < .05$; 95% CI = [0.05, 0.40]). More precisely, the impact of eWOM information quality on eWOM trust ($b = .73$; SE = .03; $p < .01$; 95% CI = [0.66, 0.79]), and also from eWOM trust on rental intention ($b = .30$; SE = .12; $p < .05$; 95% CI = [0.06, 0.54]) are significant. Additionally, the direct effect of eWOM information quality on rental intention is not significant (*direct effect*: .06; SE = .11; $p = \text{n.s.}$; 95% CI = [-0.15, 0.27]), indicating complete mediation of eWOM trust on rental intention.

Overall, the effect of eWOM information quality on rental intention is fully mediated by eWOM trust.

Table 10: *eWOM Trust Mediation with Rental Intention as Dependent Variable*
(Hayes Process Macro - Model 4)

Indirect Effect Paths	Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust	.73***	.66	.79
b eWOM Trust → Rental Intention	.30*	.06	.54
Indirect Effect	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a*b eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust → Rental Intention	.22*	.05	.40
Direct Effect Path	Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
c' eWOM Information Quality → Rental Intention	.06	-.15	.27

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Willingness to Pay. As shown in Table 11, there was no significant effect of eWOM trust mediating the relationship of eWOM information quality and WTP since the confidence interval of the indirect effect straddles zero (*indirect effect*: -1.04; SE = 2.13; $p = \text{n.s.}$; 95% CI = [-5.16, 3.38]).

Table 11: *eWOM Trust Mediation with WTP as Dependent Variable*
(Hayes Process Macro - Model 4)

Indirect Effect Paths	Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust	.73***	.66	.79
b eWOM Trust → WTP	-1.43	-8.16	5.29
Indirect Effect	Indirect Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
a*b eWOM Information Quality → eWOM Trust → WTP	-1.04	-5.16	3.38
Direct Effect Path	Direct Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI
c' eWOM Information Quality → WTP	2.15	-3.80	8.10

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Overall, it can be concluded that eWOM trust has a marginally significant mediating effect on eWOM appeal, a significant mediating effect on rental intention, and no mediating effect on WTP, partly validating hypothesis 4.

6 Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to answer three research questions: First, whether a high eWOM information quality positively influences the intention to use online fashion rental services. Second, whether the type of consumer receiving eWOM, specifically a consumer with high involvement in fashion activities, clarifies the relationship between eWOM information quality and the intention to use online fashion rental services. Lastly, whether trust in eWOM influences the strength of the relationship between eWOM information quality and evaluation of online fashion rental services. An experimental study investigated these research questions and the subordinate hypotheses.

Research Question 1. Does a higher quality of electronic word of mouth information positively influence the valuation of online fashion rental services?

Concerning the first research question, the study's findings show that a high eWOM information quality has a significant positive effect on fashion rental service valuations. More specifically, a high quality of information in online customer reviews of clothing on online fashion rental services has a greater influence than reviews with a low eWOM information quality. It is thus the case that differences in the areas of accuracy, timeliness, precision, reliability, currency, completeness and relevancy (Alshikhi & Abdullah, 2018), creativity and visuality (Lin et al., 2012; Sundar, 1998), and comprehensibility, specificity and reliability (Lee et al., 2008; Savolainen, 2011) have an impact on the valuations of fashion rental services embedded in the purchase decision process. This finding supports the statements by Filieri (2015), Jiang and Benbasat (2004), and Qiu et al. (2012), who state that an increase in eWOM information quality also increases eWOM appeal and purchase intention (Chapter 2.3.2).

Consequently, the first research question could be verified.

Research Question 2. Does the information quality of online customer reviews affect the valuation of fashion rental services based on consumers' fashion involvement?

This question was investigated in two phases: First, it was examined whether and to what extent high fashion involvement positively impacts fashion rental service valuations. Results showed that this assumption was only confirmed for eWOM appeal and rental intention but not for WTP. This could be because the range for the choice of an upper limit for WTP was extensive (€0 to €500), and there were a few outliers (5.2%) within this range. In contrast to the remaining 94.8%, these study participants each gave significantly higher values for their WTP (i.e., between €104 and €358), which may have reduced the model's overall fit or even skewed the

estimated coefficients. Furthermore, the moderating effect of a higher fashion involvement between a higher eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations was investigated. Here, the results only showed a moderating effect on rental intention but not on eWOM appeal or WTP. Thus, if a consumer is confronted with an online customer review with high eWOM information quality and is highly involved in fashion activities, their intention to rent the garment in the review is also higher than a person with low involvement. The covariate online review frequency was added to this investigation to analyze whether adding a covariate improves the results. As expected, a slight optimization resulted in a marginally significant effect on eWOM appeal. This means that the moderating influence of fashion involvement did not reach conventional levels of significance (95%). Still, the trends of the standard deviations claim a potential positive association between a higher eWOM information quality, a higher fashion involvement, and eWOM appeal. The results for rental intention remained statistically significant, with a slight improvement due to the addition of the covariate. However, the results for WTP remained statistically insignificant.

Overall, the second research question was thus partially confirmed.

Research Question 3. Can trust in electronic word of mouth affect the relationship between electronic word of mouth information quality and the valuation of online fashion rental services?

The third research question examined the mediating effect of trust on the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations. It was concluded that there is a partial mediating effect of eWOM trust between eWOM information quality and eWOM appeal. However, as there is also a direct significant effect of eWOM information quality and eWOM appeal, eWOM trust only partially mediated this relationship. About the relationship between eWOM information quality and rental intention, there was a fully mediating effect of eWOM trust. Therefore, the effect of eWOM information quality on rental intention is entirely explained by the presence of eWOM trust. However, there was no significant effect of eWOM trust mediating the relationship between eWOM information quality and WTP, possibly for the reasons already mentioned concerning the second research question.

The third research question can, therefore, be partially supported.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study essentially contributes to the collaborative consumption literature from the angle of resource protection. The fashion rental service is part of the circular economy, which addresses an important topic related to second-hand fashion consumption. With this issue, namely sustainable fashion consumption and fashion rental services, as well as the eWOM information quality of customer reviews and the influence of fashion involvement and eWOM trust, this dissertation contributes to existing literature. Overall, findings follow the literature on circular economy and collaborative consumption as fashion rental services are embedded in these topics (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; McNeill & Venter, 2019; Park & Armstrong, 2019; Pedersen & Netter, 2015), also in the context of clothing rental and associated trust and the intention to use such platforms (Lee et al., 2021).

The relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion retailers (Kim & Niehm, 2009; Rahman & Mannan, 2018) or other rental services (Pitt et al., 2021; Redditt et al., 2022) has already been examined in previous studies, but mainly concerning eWOM on blogs or social media platforms (Kulmala et al., 2013; Leong et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2012). The present research, thus, contributes to the prior literature by shedding light on website-integrated review systems on fashion rental platforms in connection with fashion involvement and trust.

The link between eWOM information quality and trust has already been studied regarding consumers' intention to repurchase (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018; Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). However, this work focuses on customer acquisition rather than retention, aiming to introduce new customers to fashion rental platforms, making it a crucial topic for a potentially new audience.

Although literature exists in the fields mentioned above, a research gap was detected regarding the influence of high fashion involvement and eWOM trust on the relationship between eWOM information quality and fashion rental service valuations, which this study aimed to close.

6.2 Managerial Implications

This work can provide brand managers insights in the areas of fashion rental platforms or rental platforms for other products:

Sustainability, mass consumption, and climate change are constantly gaining media attention (Rebich-Hespanha & Rice, 2016). As a result, consumers are having their consciences pricked, are rethinking their purchasing behavior, and are increasingly turning to sustainable alternatives (Evans, 2019). In the area of fashion consumption in particular, words such as 'fast fashion',

'overconsumption', and 'greenwashing' are gaining media presence and prompting consumers to reflect on their actions. This forces companies to rethink their often long-standing business models and, if necessary, revolutionize them (Yildirim, 2023). However, one way that has emerged as a result of rethinking and as a more sustainable form of fashion consumption is fashion rental platforms, which can gain a competitive advantage over the conventional fashion industry through unique selling points such as renting fashion as a sustainability strategy (Mukendi & Henninger, 2020). As the eWOM information quality of customer reviews was identified as a driver of fashion rental service valuations, marketers could, for example, create incentives to encourage the posting of online customer reviews. For instance, this might involve discount codes or raffles for fully completed review templates displayed to consumers after placing an order on the fashion rental platform. Thus, the writing of reviews could be increased, leading to aggregated reviews (Chapter 4.5) and reducing the dissonance of the recipients of online customer reviews. In addition, product ratings with a seal of approval might further strengthen this effect and convince potential customers who need clarification on the retailer's reliability by reducing their perceived purchase risk.

Concerning trust in eWOM, discussed in this paper, the following measures could be taken: As there is a risk of deleted negative reviews, fashion rental services might allow customers to write a review only after the purchase has been completed in order to increase trust in the authenticity of the reviews. In addition, reviews for a product could be sorted into positive and negative so that both sides are directly visible to consumers. Furthermore, active review management might answer the negative comments and clarify any questions they contain so that customers feel valued when their feedback is accepted. Moreover, labeling a verified review could also increase the eWOM trust of consumers.

Another review management task might be to filter the reviews thematically to help customers find answers to their questions about a product. At the same time, this could be linked to an internal system in which review management categorically incorporates customer feedback or criticism. The business development team could also access this system, which might convert the reviews into direct operational optimization measures. These aspects could also help to improve the quality of the reviews.

In conclusion, the integration of a review system, taking into account the factors mentioned in the paper, should be considered in the marketing budget, as they can support marketing activities.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Due to time and resource constraints, limitations have occurred throughout this study:

Firstly, factors other than fashion involvement or eWOM trust, such as involvement in online customer reviews, purchase intention, or openness to new topics, could have influenced the evaluation of fashion rental services by consumers not considered in this survey. Furthermore, in addition to eWOM appeal, rental intention, and WTP, other factors such as website appeal, the user interface, or the range of products offered could have been included in fashion rental service valuations.

Moreover, it should not be ignored that the participants' psychological response tendencies could have influenced the results. Accordingly, participants could consciously or unconsciously provide falsified information due to social desirability.

Trust is also challenging to measure and can only be quantified or verbalized by test subjects to a limited extent. This could have led to distortions within the results. During the study, it was also impossible to fully clarify whether negative online customer reviews can be deleted from Rent the Runway (Chapter 2.3.1). Another fundamental weakness within the study is the lack of generalizability of the results. Due to the relatively homogeneous sample (82.4% female, 65.3% between 18 and 34 years, 83.9% German), these cannot be transferred to other situations or consumers without restrictions.

A research question on whether, for example, women or men are more likely to be influenced by customer reviews could provide relevant results for addressing consumers. Whether customer reviews are more significant for existing customers or new visitors to an online store could also be important. Otherwise, whether consumers who write reviews themselves are more relevant to customer reviews than those who do not.

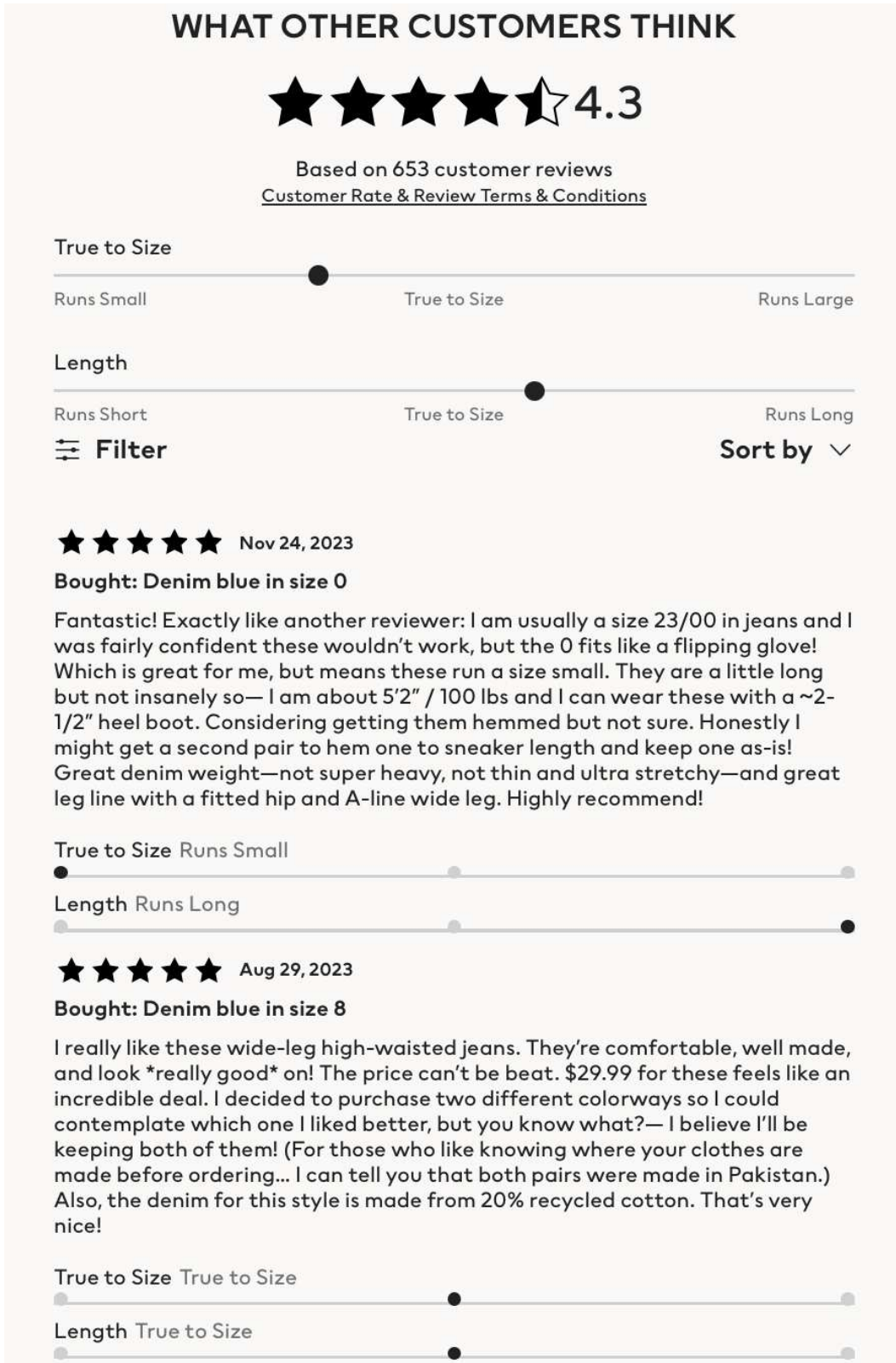
Furthermore, the website (Rent the Runway) may not have appeared attractive to some participants, thus biasing their response behavior. Further studies could use choice-based conjoint analysis to investigate additional fashion rental services by comparing consumer-perceived credibility or website appeal.

Further studies could also broaden the product scope and investigate whether factors such as product involvement or perceived purchase risk similarly influence the perception of customer reviews across several product categories.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Figures

Appendix 1a: Example of an H&M jeans review (Hennes & Mauritz, 2024)



Appendix 1b: Example of a Rent the Runway dress review (Rent the Runway, 2024a)


Reviews

★★★★★ (1)

Fit

SMALL	(0)
TRUE TO SIZE	(1)
LARGE	(0)

ALL PHOTOS (1)



SORT

Featured ▾

FILTER

Select Size ▾

Wendy
TOP CONTRIBUTOR


SIZE WORN: S
OVERALL FIT: TRUE TO SIZE
RENTED FOR: OTHER

USUALLY WEARS: 2
HEIGHT: 5' 7"
AGE: 51
BUST SIZE: 34C
BODY TYPE: ATHLETIC
WEIGHT: 130LBS

★★★★★
(5 out of 5 stars)
MARCH 2ND, 2024

Pretty!!!

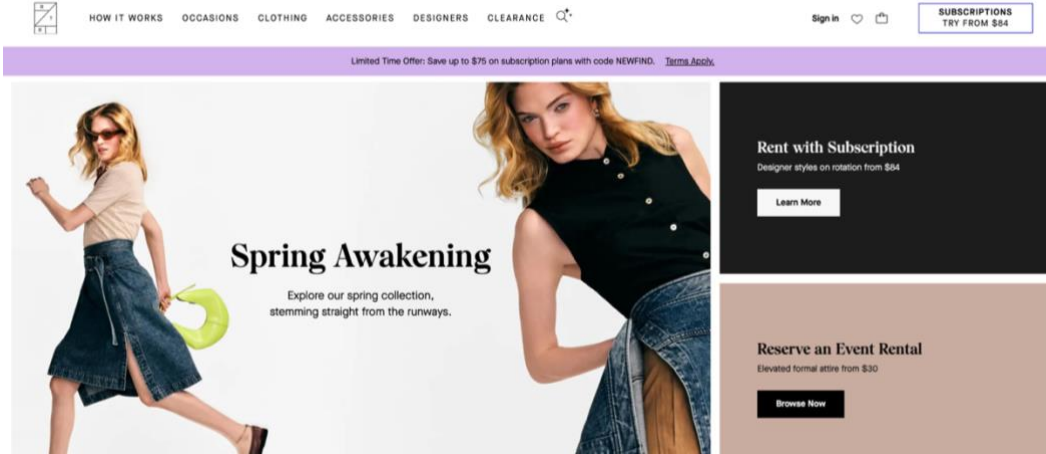
Loved this dress...more than I expected to! Came with tags, which is always a bonus. Fit great!!!



Appendix 2: Survey

Appendix 2a: Pilot Study

Put yourself in the situation where you want to rent a pair of pants on the fashion rental service platform **Rent the Runway**.




You enter the website, navigate to the ‘jeans & pants’ section, and select the ones that you personally like best.

→ randomization: either first (low information quality) or second review (high information quality) is displayed

The review of these pants appears as follows:

<p>Ali TOP CONTRIBUTOR</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: NOT SPECIFIED OVERALL FIT: NOT SPECIFIED RENTED FOR: NOT SPECIFIED</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: NOT SPECIFIED HEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED AGE: NOT SPECIFIED BUST SIZE: NOT SPECIFIED BODY TYPE: NOT SPECIFIED WEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED</p>	<p>★★★★★ (5 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>such fun jeans!</p>
--	---

low information quality

<p>Ali TOP CONTRIBUTOR</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: 27 OVERALL FIT: TRUE TO SIZE RENTED FOR: EVERYDAY</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: 2 HEIGHT: 5' 7" AGE: 34 BUST SIZE: 32D BODY TYPE: ATHLETIC WEIGHT: 130LBS</p>	<p>★★★★★ (5 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>such fun jeans! The wash on the side panels is darker than in the model picture. I'm usually a 26 and tried the 27 which were fine, a little bit big but wearable. The jeans arrived within a few days, which was really great. They are very well manufactured, rather tight at first, but after wearing them a few times they are super comfortable. Although they have a wider cut, they still create a fantastic shape and I would definitely recommend them to others. Have fun with them!</p> 
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high information quality

How much do you agree with the following statement?

mancheck_1_information_quality

"Based on the information I just saw, the review provides me with adequate information regarding the product features (e.g., quality, fit)."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How much do you agree with the following statement?

mancheck_2_information_quality

"Based on the information I just saw, the content of the review contributes to my decision on whether I want to rent the pants."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please choose from the scale which word fits best for you personally in the brackets of the following statement.

fashion_renting_involvement

"When renting a pair of jeans, it feels (...) to me."

	not at all	slightly	moderately	very	extremely
“exciting”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“important”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“relevant”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
“meaningful”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

fashion_renting_general

"In general, I would rent clothes."

"If I were to rent clothes, I would read the reviews before renting a product."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Now just a few more *questions about yourself* and you're all set.

Which gender do you identify with?

gender

- female
- male
- non-binary/ third gender

How old are you?

age

- under 18
- 18 – 24
- 25 – 39
- 40 – 54
- 55 or older

What is your current professional situation?

profession

- unemployed
- high school student
- university student
- employed
- retired

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

education

- less than high school
- high school
- bachelor degree
- master degree
- doctoral degree
- professional degree

In which country do you currently reside?

residency

▽ *drop down menu with list of countries*

What is your current annual income in Euros?

income

- under 20,000€
- 20,000€ - 29,999€
- 30,000€ – 49,999€
- 50,000€ - 69,999€
- 70,000€ - 100,000€
- over 100,000€
- I do not wish to provide any information on this.

THANK YOU for participating in the survey today. Please do not discuss the nature of the study with any other participants, as it may bias future results.

Please click on the button below to end the study.

Appendix 2b: Main Study

Dear participant,

🤝 Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. You are contributing to my master's research at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

💡 The study aims to evaluate **people's perception about fashion products**. Your answers will of course remain anonymous and confidential, so please be honest. There is no right or wrong way to respond.

🕒 It should take you approximately **8 minutes** to complete this survey.

📁 In the end, one **Amazon gift card** of 20€ will be randomly distributed among participants to outline my appreciation for taking part in my research. In the last part of the survey, you may insert your email address to participate in the raffle, which is, of course, not mandatory. Your e-mail address will neither be used for the statistical evaluation of the survey nor for purposes other than the raffle.

? If you have any further questions or concerns or are interested in the progress of this survey, please feel free to contact s-nlierheimer@ucp.pt.

🙏 Your contribution is highly appreciated!

Thank you very much for your time.

Nina Lierheimer
s-nlierheimer@ucp.pt

💡 First, you will be asked a few questions related to your attitude towards fashion.
Please remember: There is no right or wrong way to respond – please answer according to your honest opinion.

Regardless of whether you have kept or returned the clothing, how often have you ordered clothes online in the last 12 months?

frequency_fashion

- several times a week
- once a week
- once every two weeks
- once a month
- once a quarter
- once every six months
- once a year
- I generally do not buy clothes online.

On average, how much do you spend per month on clothing and accessories?

expenditures_fashion

less than 50€ 50€ - 100€ 100€ - 200€ 200€ - 500€ more than 500€

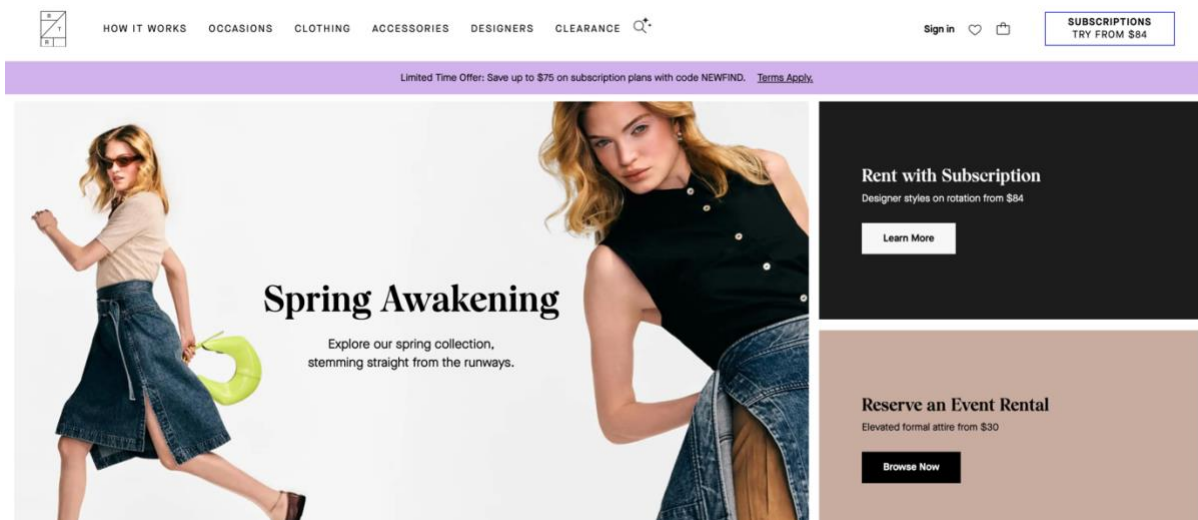
How would you describe your attitude towards fashion on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)?

	involvement_fashion						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
Fashion is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fashion is interesting to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fashion is relevant to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Based on Zaichkowsky (1994).

💡 Now you are questioned about your **opinion on online customer reviews**.

Imagine you want to rent a pair of jeans on the fashion rental service platform **Rent the Runway**.



You enter the website, navigate to the 'jeans & pants' section, and select the ones that you personally like best.

The reviews of these pants appear as follows.

Please take the time to **carefully** look at all the information provided.

→ randomization: either first (low information quality) or second review (high information quality) is displayed (see **Appendix 2c: Stimuli Main Study**)

Please rate the following statements referring to the review you just saw on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

information_quality

	1 completely disagree	2 mostly disagree	3 slightly disagree	4 neither agree, nor disagree	5 slightly agree	6 mostly agree	7 completely agree
The review has a sufficient amount of content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The review accurately reflects the features of the pair of jeans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The review has a good reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Based on Lee et al. (2002).

Please rate the following statements referring to the review on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

message_trust

	1 completely disagree	2 mostly disagree	3 slightly disagree	4 neither agree, nor disagree	5 slightly agree	6 mostly agree	7 completely agree
The message is credible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message is reliable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message is trustworthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would consider the author of the message as an expert.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would consider the author of the message as experienced.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would consider the author of the message as knowledgeable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I would consider the author of the message as qualified.

I trust the author of the review to adequately reflect the quality and characteristics of the jeans.

Source: Based on Soh et al. (2009); Ohanian (1990); Lee et al. (2002).

Please rate your agreement with the following statements, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). eWOM_appeal

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
The content of the customer review I just saw would contribute to my decision whether to rent these pants.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I want to buy a product online, it's important to me that it has a customer review like the one I just saw.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer reviews like the one I just saw help me to choose a product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Based on Park et al. (2007).

Assuming there are online customer reviews like the one you just saw for a fashion product, how often would you read them when shopping online, on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always)? usage_ocr

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	very rarely	rarely	occasionally	often	very often	always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

→ filter question: For respondents who selected “1 – never”, the next question is skipped.

How often do you think that online customer reviews like the one you just saw of a fashion product have influenced your purchase decision, on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always)?

purchase_decision_ocr

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| never | very rarely | rarely | occasionally | often | very often | always |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

How much do you agree with the following statements, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)?

rent_intention

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	completely disagree	mostly disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree, nor disagree	slightly agree	mostly agree	completely agree
I am likely to rent the pair of jeans I just saw.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to rent clothes on Rent the Runway.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Given the opportunity, I would consider renting clothes on Rent the Runway in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Based on Kim and Park (2013).

Independent from your financial situation, how much would you be willing to pay as a rental fee for the pair of jeans you just saw (assuming that it matches your expectations in terms of look, quality, and fit) from the fashion rental service Rent the Runway?

Reminder: You can keep the item for as long as you want.

willingness_to_pay

0	50	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500
---	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

💡 Almost there! Only a few more **questions about yourself** and you're all set.

Which gender do you identify with?

demographics_gender

- female
- male
- non-binary/ third gender
- I prefer not to say.

How old are you?

demographics_age

- under 18 years
- 18 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- over 64 years

What is your current professional situation?

demographics_profession

- unemployed
- student
- student with a part-time job
- employed
- retired

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

demographics_education

- Less than High School
- High School Graduate
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree

In which country do you currently reside?


demographics_residency

▽ *drop down menu with list of countries*


What is your current annual household income in Euros?

demographics_income

- under 20,000€
- 20,000€ - 29,999€
- 30,000€ – 49,999€
- 50,000€ - 69,999€
- 70,000€ - 100,000€
- over 100,000€
- I prefer not to say.



 If you would like to take part in the raffle for the **20€ amazon gift card**, you can now enter your email address.

text entry



 **Thank you** for participating in the survey today. I am very grateful to you for taking the time to answer this study. Please click on the button below to end the survey, so that your answer can be taken into account.

Appendix 2c: Stimuli Main Study

I) Low Information Quality

<p>Kim</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: NOT SPECIFIED OVERALL FIT: NOT SPECIFIED RENTED FOR: NOT SPECIFIED</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: NOT SPECIFIED HEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED AGE: NOT SPECIFIED BUST SIZE: NOT SPECIFIED BODY TYPE: NOT SPECIFIED WEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED</p>	<p>★★★★★ (5 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>super cool jeans!!!!</p>	
<p>Noah</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: NOT SPECIFIED OVERALL FIT: NOT SPECIFIED RENTED FOR: NOT SPECIFIED</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: NOT SPECIFIED HEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED AGE: NOT SPECIFIED BUST SIZE: NOT SPECIFIED BODY TYPE: NOT SPECIFIED WEIGHT: NOT SPECIFIED</p>	<p>★★★★☆ (4 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>a bit too big, but still nice!!</p>	

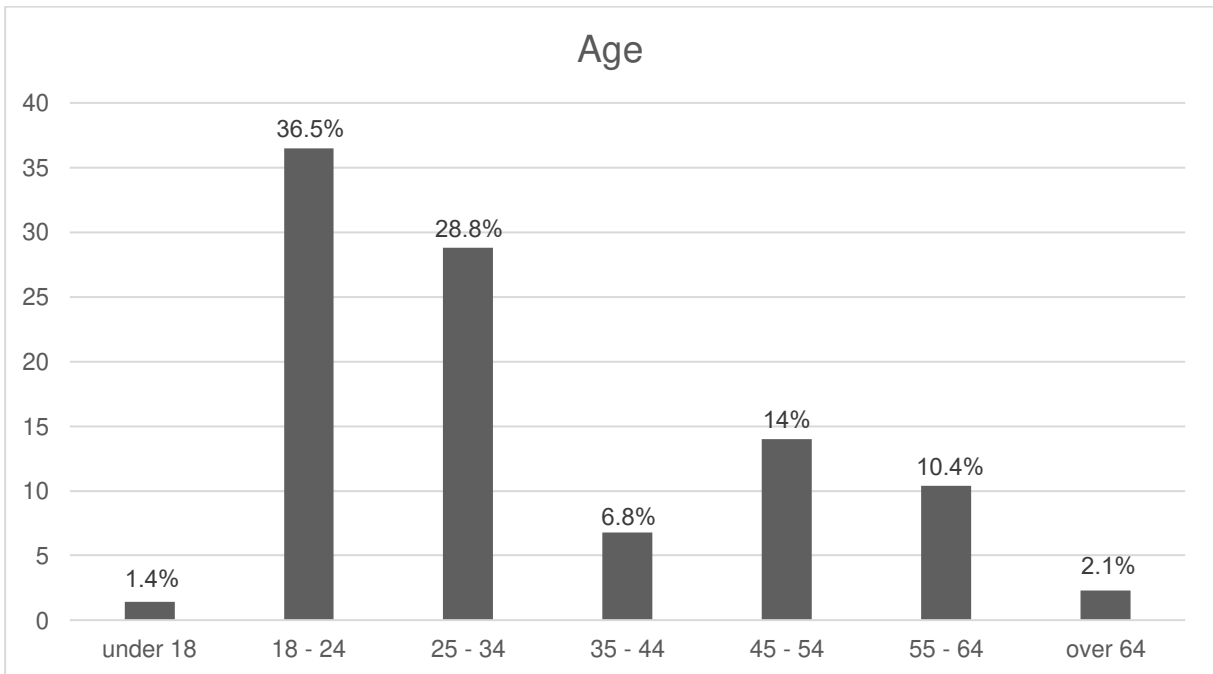
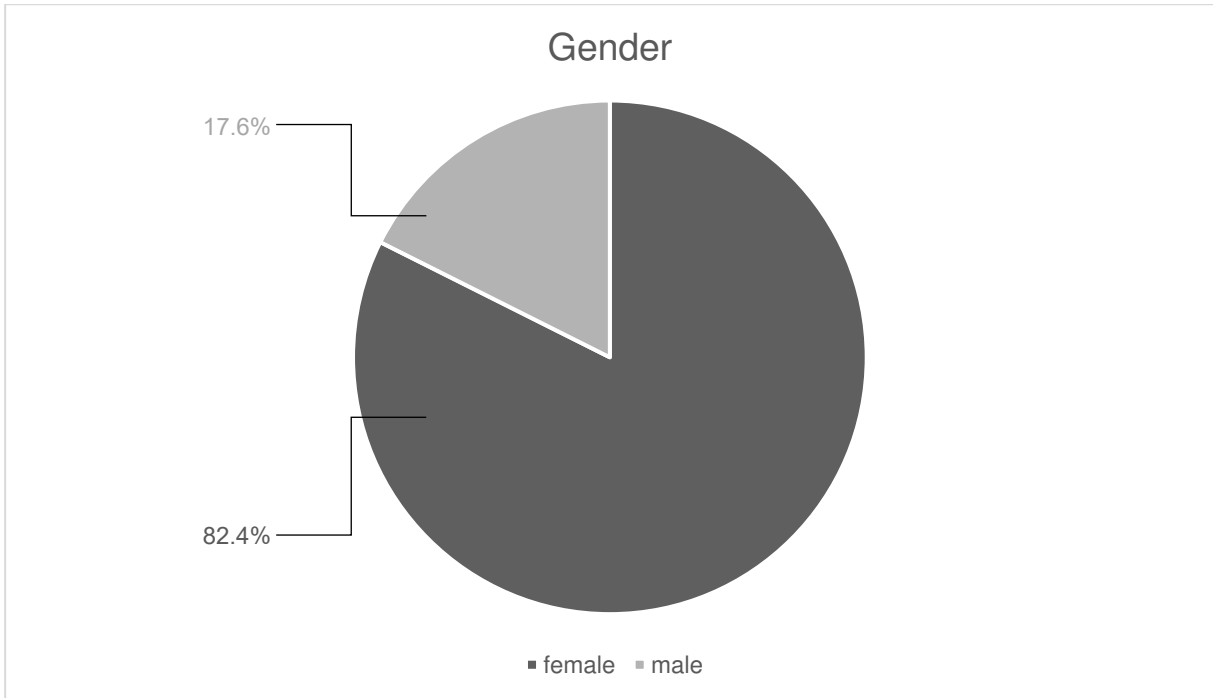
II) High Information Quality

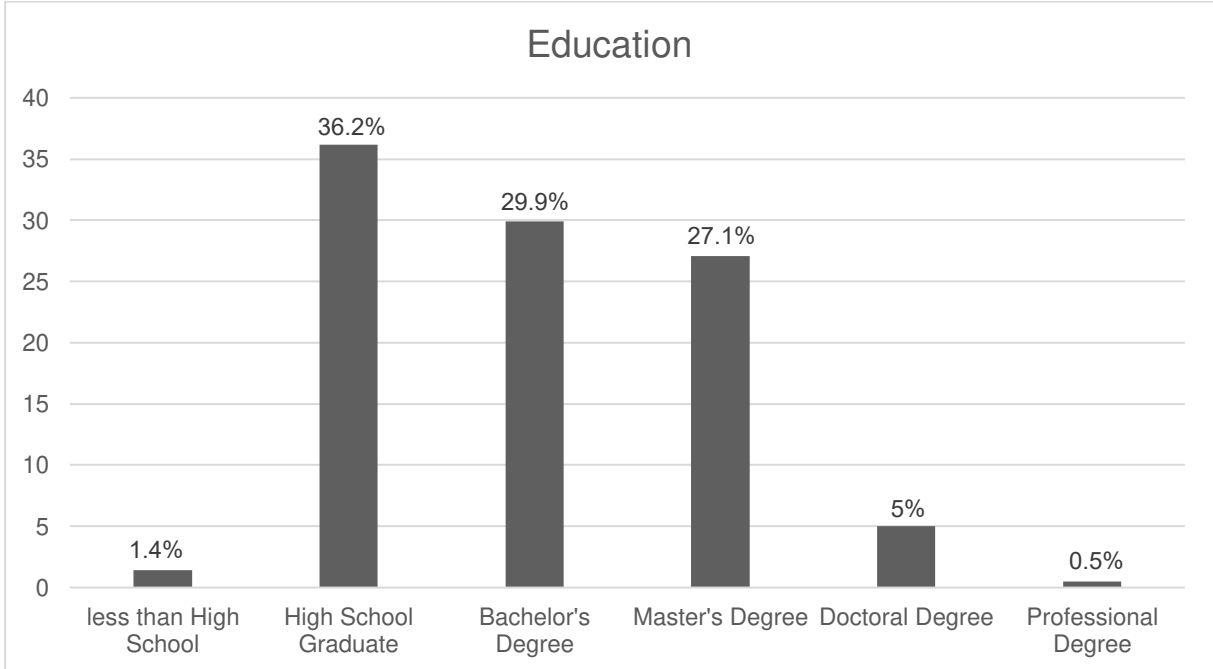
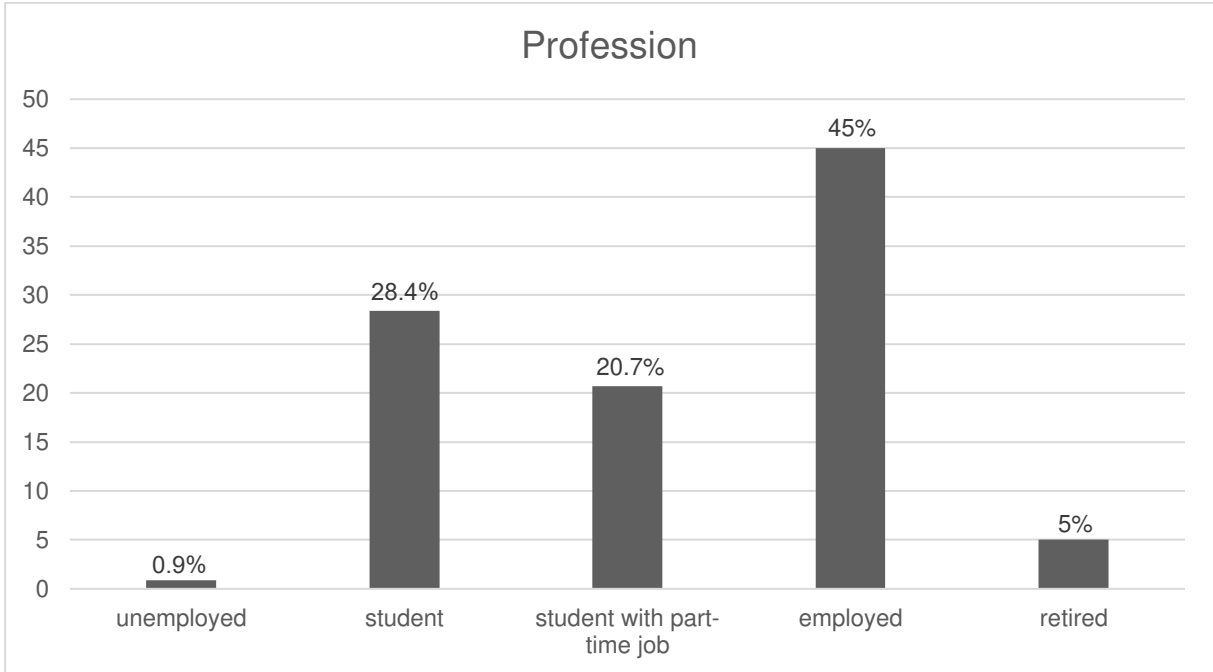
<p>Kim TOP CONTRIBUTOR</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: 28 OVERALL FIT: RUNS A BIT LARGE RENTED FOR: EVERYDAY</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: 28 HEIGHT: 5' 7" AGE: 31 BUST SIZE: 36D BODY TYPE: FEMININE WEIGHT: 140LBS</p>	<p>★★★★★ (5 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>They ran slightly larger, but I like that in general, so I was really happy with them. The quality was extremely good, a firmer denim I would say. I wore them a lot and combined them with all sorts of things, mostly just to work, but also in the evening with high heels and a blouse. They were very comfortable. I've ordered from Rent the Runway many times and this has been my favorite so far - great recommendation!</p>	
<p>Noah TOP CONTRIBUTOR</p> <hr/> <p>SIZE WORN: 26 OVERALL FIT: RUNS RATHER LARGE RENTED FOR: EVERYDAY</p> <p>USUALLY WEARS: 26 HEIGHT: 5' 9" AGE: 34 BUST SIZE: 32B BODY TYPE: ATHLETIC WEIGHT: 120LBS</p>	<p>★★★★★ (4 out of 5 stars) MARCH 14TH, 2024</p> <p>Team RTR Review</p> <p>Fantastic pants! Unfortunately, the jeans were a bit too big for me, so next time I would order them in a size smaller. I really liked the quality and the wash and color were beautiful. I love Rent the Runway in general because I'm a fashionista and always want to be on top of new trends and otherwise my closet would be far too full.</p>	

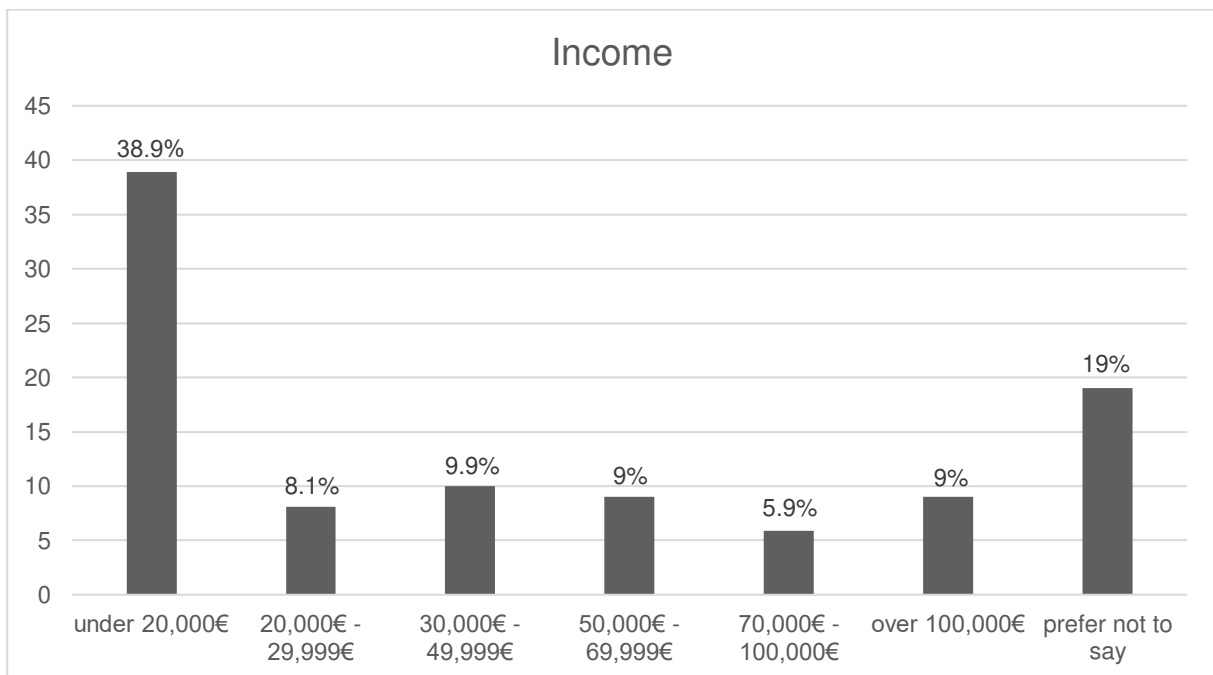
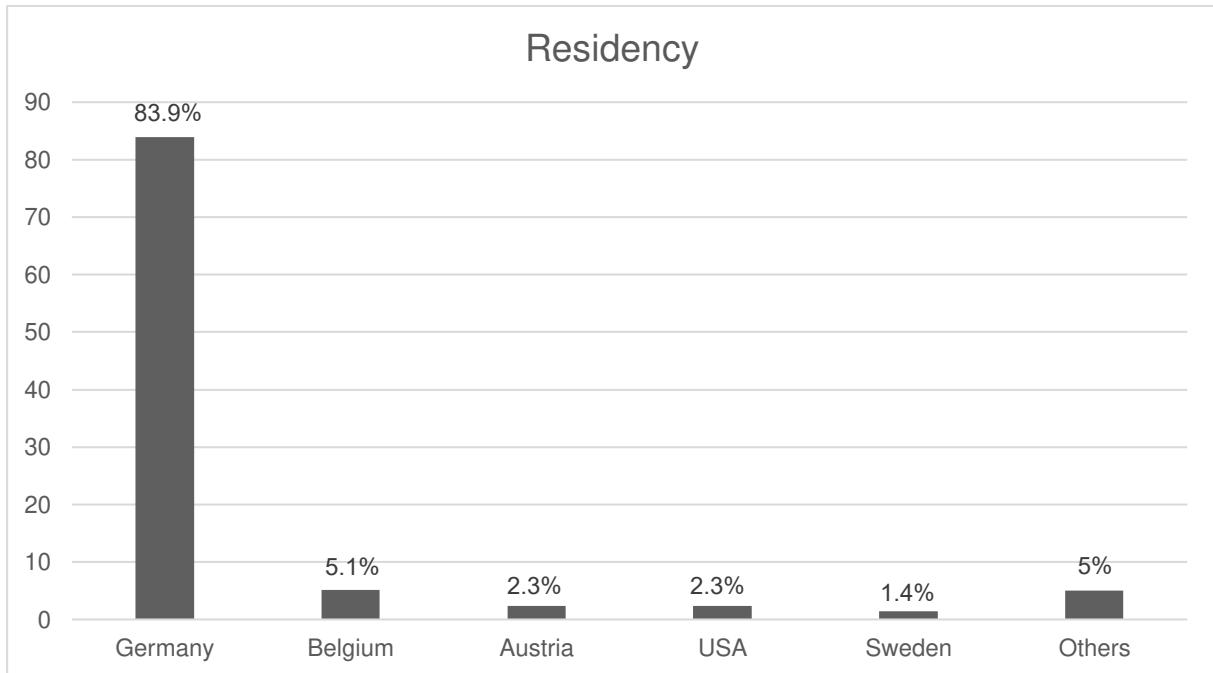
Appendix 2d: Variables' Scale Expressions

Variable	Expression
Manipulation Check	information_quality
Independent Variable eWOM Information Quality	<i>(manipulations)</i>
Dependent Variables eWOM Appeal Rental Intention Willingness to Pay	eWOM_appeal usage_ocr purchase_decision_ocr rent_intention willingness_to_pay
Moderator Fashion Involvement	frequency_fashion expenditures_fashion involvement_fashion
Control Variable Online Review Frequency	usage_ocr purchase_decision_ocr
Mediator eWOM Trust	message_trust

Appendix 2e: Sampling Characterization







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