

A Study of Psychological Ownership in Different Stages of Access-Based Fashion Consumption

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ABSTRACT

Access-based consumption (ABC) is becoming an increasingly prevalent form of consumption. Prior research has demonstrated that users may experience psychological ownership (PO) of access-based items (ABIs). However, it produced inconsistent and contradictory findings on how users come to experience PO towards ABIs, ignoring the role of possession rituals (PRs) in exploring feeling of ownership in ABC. This thesis aims to understand whether and how PO manifests itself in ABC, how users achieve this sense of PO over ABIs, and how feelings of PO influence users' interactions with ABIs. Focusing on the users of US-based access-based fashion platform Rent the Runway (RTR), this study adopts a multi-method qualitative approach, combining netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography.

The findings provide new insights into how PO is experienced in ABC, identifying two distinct but interrelated forms of PO experienced by participants - temporary PO and quasi-PO. Temporary PO is a sense of ownership wherein one feels that a physical item is temporarily 'mine' during possession whilst quasi-PO refers to sense of ownership that users experience with digital representation of an item, even when they do not possess its physical counterpart. Furthermore, the study explores the PRs performed by consumers pre-access, during access and post-access in order to create and sustain these interrelated forms of PO. Lastly, the study identifies key outcomes (such as responsibility, pride and enduring ownership reduction) of PO that influence the user-item relationship. This study therefore contributes to literature on ABC and to wider literature on PO, highlighting variations in how PO can be experienced. Additionally, it presents managerial recommendations to assist managers of ABC services in making their ABIs better candidates for development of PO by facilitating PRs.

PUBLICATIONS

Conference papers

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations

ABC = Access-based consumption

ABFC = Access-based fashion consumption

PO = Psychological ownership

QPO = Quasi-psychological ownership

TPO = Temporary psychological ownership

ABI = Access-based item

ABIs = Access-based items

RTR = Rent the Runway

PR = Possession Ritual

PRs = Possession Rituals

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Whilst consumer behaviour literature initially focused on acts of consumption that involved the transfer of private ownership, the last decade has seen rapid developments in Access-Based Consumption (ABC) – i.e. modes of consumption dependent on temporary access and not involving the transfer of ownership (Belk 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Scaraboto 2015). ABC replaced the long-established norm of enduring ownership (Belk 2007) with a logic based on access, seen as a radical alternative in the interests of the consumer and society as a whole (Frenken and Schor 2017). The success of ABC is down to the emergence of platforms (e.g. Airbnb, Uber and Nextbike) and associated digital advancements making access possible on a larger scale (Cohen and Kietzmann 2014). For instance, ABC platforms have emerged in a wide variety of contexts, such as bike-sharing (e.g. Nextbike), car-sharing (e.g. Zipcar), accommodation (e.g. Airbnb) and Access-Based Fashion Consumption (ABFC) (e.g. Rent the Runway (RTR)). According to PwC (2015), the global revenue of the five major ABC sectors – finance, online staffing, accommodation, car-sharing and media streaming – will reach \$335 billion in 2025.

ABC comes as a response to many challenges facing societies, such as unsustainable consumption (Albinsson and Perera 2018). It has recently become widespread in some contexts such as fashion, bringing significant economic, environmental and social promises to address those challenges (Fogel et al. 2017). The need for further research into ABC is reinforced by the interests of environmentalists and policymakers (Noppers et al. 2014; Hamari et al. 2016). A shift towards access is encouraged to reduce enduring ownership and dematerialised consumption (Johnson and Plepys 2021). In this context, the feeling of ownership is relevant and represents a possible avenue to help this shift toward more sustainable consumption (Süssenbach and Kamleitner 2018; Morewedge et al. 2021).

Enduring ownership restricts consumers with its burdens and the commitment associated with owning items (Schaefers et al. 2016). ‘Burdens of ownership’ are considered the most meaningful way to distinguish between enduring ownership and ABC (Moeller and Wittkowski 2010). These burdens range from financial risk through performance risk to social risk (Schaefers et al. 2016; Lawson 2011). ABC frees consumers from many, if not all, of these burdens of ownership. However, interaction with Access-Based Items (ABIs) becomes more liquid and temporary, resulting in complex implications for user–item

relationships (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Although ABC frees consumers from many, if not all of these burdens of ownership, the nature of psychological engagement and to what extent users deal with the psychological burdens of ABIs remain unexplored. Thus, there is a need to explore psychological ownership (PO) because of the major change in the user–item relationship (Peck and Luangrath 2018).

The term ‘psychological ownership’ refers to ‘the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is “theirs”’ (Pierce et al. 2003, p.86). Indeed, previous research acknowledges that PO can occur in the absence of legal ownership (Belk, 1988; Pierce et al. 2003) and even physical possession (Reb and Connolly 2007). Drawing from Pierce et al.'s (2003) comprehensive conceptual model of PO, researchers have been able to examine the motivations for PO (efficacy and effectance, stimulating self-identity, and the need for home) and routes to ownership (control, self-investment, intimate knowledge). These are related to individual PRs (Belk 2014; Amati and Pestana 2015), leading to different outcomes (Jussila et al. 2015; Kirk et al. 2017). PO has a substantial impact on how consumers react to objects, as proven by several theoretical and empirical works in consumer research (Jussila et al. 2015; Karahanna et al. 2015; Hulland et al. 2015; Hillenbrand and Money 2015). It can strongly influence consumer attitudes and behaviour towards objects (Baumeister and Wangenheim 2014).

Arguably, ABC is a step further from enduring ownership, and there is no need to explore ownership issues. However, the focus here is on psychological aspect of ownership over ABIs. The concepts of individual ownership and access are central to the development of ABC discourses because of the user–item relationship and its outcomes. Still, the more complex reality of the psychological relationship with ABIs needs to be addressed. Whilst ABC involves a shift from individual ownership to access (Rogers and Botsman 2010), it cannot be assumed that PO is equally absent. Moreover, recent developments in the field of ABC have led to renewed interest in PO.

This thesis has been inspired by ongoing debates regarding what actually constitutes PO in ABC (e.g., Peck and Luangrath 2018; Morewedge 2021; Morewedge et al. 2021). Although ABC has been researched in-depth in the last few years (e.g. business model (Kumar et al. 2017), sustainability (Camacho-Otero et al. 2018) and barriers to ABC (Hazée et al. 2017)), remarkably few studies focus on PO, and many scholars still call for research to deepen understandings of the construct (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Peck and Luangrath 2018; Fritze et al. 2020; Morewedge 2021). PO is also considered a relatively new area in consumer research (Jussila et al. 2015). Consumer research has yet

to explore the impact and outcome of such psychological states on user framing, perception, evaluation and consumption of ABIs (Peck and Luangrath 2018) because previous research merely focused on enduring ownership items (Jussila et al. 2015). Current research into ABC provides inadequate insight into how PO is perceived in ABC contexts such as transportation (e.g., Zipcar) (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Paundra et al. 2017) and accommodation (e.g., Airbnb) (Lee et al. 2019).

Conceptual research has argued that PO has high potential to represent a powerful construct for understanding users' attitudes, behaviours and motivations in relation to ABC (Singh and Giacosa 2019; Rogers 2021; Baker et al. 2021; Morewedge 2021). For example, the link between ritualised access acts and elements of PO in ABC has only been mentioned in recent conceptual and anecdotal papers (Morewedge et al. 2021; Rogers 2021; Baker et al. 2021). Baker et al. (2021) synthesised the theories of PO and engagement and argued that individual and collective PO are antecedents of positive outcomes in ABC. Recent empirical research provided different insights into the role of PO in ABC (Park and Joyner Armstrong 2019; Lee and Chow 2020; Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021; Pino et al. 2022). For example, Lawson et al. (2016) reported that consumers who are keen to develop feelings of ownership are not as inclined to participate in ABC. However, Fritze et al. (2020) found that PO can be felt, acting as a psychological substitute for legal ownership and increasing usage intention. No exploratory research has been undertaken into forms of PO over ABIs, and how user interactions at different stages of access lead to particular outcomes and manifestations of PO.

A stigma is also associated with sharing clothing, which might weaken desire to adopt ABC (Belk 2007). For example, consumers might be seen as unable to afford to own new items (Beard 2008; Fisher et al. 2008). Mont (2004) found refurbished products and sharing schemes to have a low profile in society, noting that ABC can be perceived as having second-class status. Similarly, Norum and Norton (2017) concluded that items within alternative consumption mode are recognised as inferior products among consumers in the US. Such studies, however, have only focused on the economic perspective. Exploring alternative consumption modes should consider both economic and cultural factors to understand such consumer behaviour fully (Horne and Maddrell 2002). The term 'inferior good' has come to refer to an inverse relationship between income and demand for some types of goods (Deaton and Muellbauer 1980).

This, in turn, could constrain consumer adoption of ABFC, potentially hindering the development of PO. ABFC is more acceptable than ever and is no longer seen as an inferior

consumption style – rather as challenging traditional consumption modes such as ownership because of its novelty and utility (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Pantano and Stylos 2020). The more consumers are exposed to the offerings of ABFC, the more positive the perceptions consumers have of these modes of consumption, thus overcoming any concerns associated with ABFC (Armstrong et al. 2016; Lang and Armstrong 2018). Norum and Norton (2017), who have argued that user participation in ABFC can be expanded by exposing younger generations to it, support this view – ABFC has been identified as a relatively new trend in ABC (Becker-Leifhold and Iran 2018).

Although many access-based platforms provide interesting new offerings, many such initiatives continue to go out of business (Armstrong et al. 2015; Frenken and Schor 2017) because of different reasons such as consumption habits and ownership issues (Catulli 2012; Becker-Leifhold and Iran 2018). Some providers also suffer from user misbehaviour (e.g. lack of a sense of responsibility) (Schaefers et al. 2016). It is anticipated that developing a deeper understanding of the psychological aspect of ownership will contribute to ABC in a variety of ways, ABC has a high potential to create a meaningful consumption experience that benefits users, providers and the sustainability of access-based platforms, leading to higher likelihood of consumers accessing instead of buying new (Fritze et al. 2020). Identifying the antecedents and outcomes of PO, and the boundary conditions for this feeling, might offer new conceptualisations for ABC. Scholars have recognised the importance of exploring PO in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Morewedge et al. 2021) and acknowledge that the degree of PO towards ABIs can impact adoption of ABC (Fritze et al. 2020; Paundra et al. 2017).

PO could help to make ABC more appealing to consumers and/or positively influence their behaviours when they use ABIs (Rogers 2021). This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of PO that exist in ABC because this context has brought different realities to user–item relationships (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021). The theory of PO, when applied to ABC, offers explanations, predictions, and a more in-depth understanding of the user–item relationship (Morewedge 2021). This also challenges and extends existing knowledge about consumer behaviour because of the change brought by ABC in terms of ownership. More importantly, previous literature does not deal with how PO manifests itself in ABC or how users achieve a sense of PO over ABIs at different stages of access (Fritze et al. 2020). Consumer research in ABC does not have a consensus on whether PO has positive and negative outcomes that significantly impact the ways in which users think, feel and behave.

The literature review demonstrates the clear distinction in consumer research between the concepts of legal ownership and PO, and enduring ownership consumption and ABC. To explain the purpose of this study, it is important to make a clear distinction between the two concepts of ownership and the two modes of consumption. It is also essential to consider the limited conceptualisation of PO in ABC. This is the theoretical gap that this study aims to address – how PO manifests itself, acquires and influences users’ interactions with ABIs within ABC. The question is whether restructures to consumption practices can result in behaviour and attitudes similar to those experienced with actual owned items. The rise in attachment and attitudes is a typical consequence of actual ownership if accompanied by PO (Pierce and Peck 2018). PO theory informs perceptions of issues raised and assists with research decisions and understandings of the new reality in the context of ABC. Thus, this research sits at the intersection of PO (Pierce et al. 2001), liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) and PRs (McCracken 1986; Holt 1995). The questions raised are located in the field of consumer behaviour in broad terms, particularly in the field of ABC.

1.2 Research objectives and methodological approach

Defined research objectives undoubtedly help provide clear methodological direction and delineate the aim and scope of the investigation. All research objectives are exploratory in nature. The objectives guiding this research are as follows:

- 1- To investigate whether and how PO manifests in the context of ABIs.
- 2- To explore whether and how users attempt to achieve a sense of PO over ABIs.
- 3- To identify both positive and negative outcomes of PO in the context of ABIs.

Based on these objectives, the thesis has two aims: first, to study whether PO affects the user–item relationship and, if so, how, and to explore the psychological implications of ABC on consumer behaviour.

This study is located in the interpretive research paradigm. It employed a multimethod qualitative approach (i.e., netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography) to explore the broad research question: ‘Why and how does PO manifest itself in ABFC?’. This, in turn, makes it essential to use an abductive research strategy and an exploratory research design. Abductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) and the hermeneutic circle (Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1994) are used to interpret the data collected. Adopting an interpretive approach, this study explores how access-based users reflect on elements of PO and PRs during all stages of access to manifest feelings of ‘mine’. It aims to provide insights into different user perceptions when physically or digitally

possessing ABIs. The qualitative design of this research focuses on users participating in Access-Based Fashion Consumption (ABFC) via the platform “Rent the Runway (RTR)” that operates in the US.

The rationale for choosing ABFC as the study context and RTR users as the unit of analysis is a response to Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) observation regarding the need for further empirical research into ABC, in which identity and the hedonic value of the item are more salient – as in, for example, fashion. Most previous research explores user–item relationships in more utilitarian ABC contexts such as standardised car-sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Akbar et al. 2016; Gruen 2017; Paundra et al. 2017; Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2018). ABFC represents a shift from the linear economy to embrace circular economy principles (Dahlbo et al. 2017; Fogel et al. 2017; Niinimäki 2017), and has potential to be a significant trend in future consumption activities (Arrigo 2022). This context also offers promise in a number of areas (e.g., environmental) (Fogel et al. 2017). Global ABFC is predicted to achieve year-on-year growth of 25% from 2022 to 2026 (Technavio 2022).

As fashion items are unlike other consumption contexts, such items are more appropriate for exploring individual PO. However, acceptance of ABC faces an implementation challenge in fashion markets, and there is a general lack of research into ABC using psychological perspectives. ABFC is deemed somehow different because of the proximity of items to individuals' bodies, often linked to higher contamination effects (Argo et al. 2006; Armstrong et al. 2015). It has been highlighted that ABFC contradicts the dominant and well-established norm of fashion-enduring ownership (Becker-Leifhold and Iran, 2018) because fashion items are rooted in the extended self. Fashion items are in direct contact with the consumer and crucial in defining the self. Belk (1988 p.151) considered such items as a ‘second skin’. Self-identity is one of the roots of PO, relating to both the motives for and routes to PO (Arrigo 2022). Individuals tend to define themselves and others based on their possessions, and possessions are used as principal symbols for individual characters and interests. Material goods and services play a substantial role in individuals' daily lives (Kleine et al. 1995), facilitating uniqueness from others (Newholm and Hopkinson 2009). All kinds of fashion, including clothing, are considered means of self-expression (Piacentini and Mailer 2004). Clothing is identified as an important symbolic social tool for self-expression, especially for young adults. Ownership and self-definition play a principal role in fashion consumption, and the more someone is concerned about self-definition through clothes, the higher their intention to engage in ABFC (Becker-Leifhold 2018). Moreover, fashion plays a vital role in facilitating a robust social symbol that helps

create, maintain and reveal individual and group identities (Ahuvia 2005). Ahuvia (2005) asserts that individuals identify themselves with possessions with the most symbolic significance, which they ‘love’. Thus, individuals consume items that are meaningful to them (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Although this study context concentrates on ABFC, the findings contribute in several ways to understandings of PO, providing a basis for user–item relationships in ABC.

1.3 Contributions to consumer research

Although the topic of ABC has gained an increasing amount of attention from consumers, society and academia in recent years, limited research has addressed PO in ABC. Moreover, despite the potential of PRs in exploring the feeling of ownership, no previous research has examined this. This study therefore contributes to two streams of literature on ABC and PO. First, it contributes to existing ABC literature by exploring the different forms of PO that may exist in ABC during various stages of access. Specifically, it introduces two distinct manifestations of PO in ABC – temporary psychological ownership (TPO) and quasi-psychological ownership (QPO). Users experience TPO with physical ABIs and QPO with digital representations of these – for example, adding ABIs in the virtual closet. The findings reveal a more complex reality going beyond a black-and-white situation of feeling ownership or not (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017), showing that PO exists in these two more sophisticated forms. In particular, this study provides in-depth insight into the role of PO, contrasting with much previous research on the user–item relationship (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Akbar et al. 2016; Lawson et al. 2016; Singh and Giacosa 2019; Niklas and Gianneschi 2022). Users may not legally own ABIs, but PO may still emerge. It is hoped that this research will contribute to wider literature on PO, highlighting variations in how PO can be experienced.

Second, this work provides insights into the ways in which users actively attempt to create feelings of PO, similar to consumers’ PRs in ownership-based consumption (Belk 2014; Vohs et al. 2013; Amati and Pestana 2015). The fact that users engage in these PRs indicates an active desire to experience PO, even if only in temporary or quasi forms. This work contributes to emerging literature on ABC, suggesting that different ritualistic acts (i.e., digital and physical) can affect these PO forms. These PRs are closely connected to elements of PO that incorporate a narrative of control, intimate knowledge and self-investment, manifesting users’ PO over ABIs. Given the relative lack of empirical and theoretical research into PRs within ABC, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of

ritualistic acts at different stages of access and their relationship to manifestations and developments of TPO and QPO.

Next, the work contributes to emerging literature on the outcomes of PO (Baker et al. 2021; Rogers 2021), showing that feelings of ownership over ABIs can lead to some motivational, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes such as heightened satisfaction, enduring ownership reduction, loyalty, high responsibility, pride, lack of contamination and the accumulated extended self. For example, this research shows that all the different ritualistic acts examined similarly reflect enduring ownership reduction consistently – a more refined and magnified TPO and QPO than would be the case with owned items – resulting in users preferring ABIs over owned items. Finally, the implications indicate ways in which providers can elicit and empower the psychological force of feelings of ownership, which can be used instead of battling with the lack of legal ownership. The research thereby advances understandings of PO in ABC in general and ABFC in particular.

1.4 Overview of thesis chapters

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 offers insights from the three areas that form the basis of this thesis – ABC, PO and ABFC. First, the context of the study is explained, drawing upon extant literature to flesh out definitions of ABC, ABFC and the consequences of these for consumer behaviour, notably highlighting changes to ownership as a result of ABC. Second, it introduces psychological perspectives on the user–item relationship, bringing in different relevant theoretical perspectives and justifying PO theory as a theoretical foundation from which to address the research questions in this study. The chapter then moves to discuss the elements of PO, different outcomes, and the relevance of PRs to PO. Lastly, the chapter reviews PO in recent ABC and ABFC research. It concludes with the specific research questions this thesis aims to address.

Chapter 3 discusses the interpretivist research paradigm adopted for this thesis, the exploratory research design and strategy, and the decisions made relating to the multimethod qualitative approach (i.e., netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography). The data collection processes are explained, including how participants were recruited and how each method was conducted, including participant recruitment and the design and implementation of the netnographic study, interview guide and digital diaries protocol. The processes of coding, analysis and interpretation are discussed. The chapter justifies

borrowing from the principles of abductive reasoning and adopting a hermeneutics approach. Ethical considerations and methodological limitations are also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 briefly clarifies the form and nature of PO and the relevance of PRs in exploring PO in ABC. This chapter begins by explaining the purpose and scope of each of the research findings chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), outlining their construction based on ritualistic acts during the three stages of access. The chapter then focuses on documenting PRs as forming part of the pre-access stage, with users ultimately motivated by a desire to appropriate pre-acquisition of ABIs. This stage is divided into two phases: planning and accumulation. This chapter illustrates how participants might develop QPO before even physically possessing an item. It also shows the importance of early psychological appropriation for participants' feelings and their outcomes during the rest of the access stages.

Chapter 5 considers physical PRs during the access stage. This stage is divided into the appropriation and cherishing phases, which involve in-depth ritualistic acts resulting from sensory attributes, leading to clear language and reflection on elements relating to routes to and motives for PO. These PRs are carried out to make ABIs meaningful and cherished possessions to enable participants to experience and benefit from TPO. Moreover, in some cases, they feel TPO and try to make ABIs look like their own. Manifestations and outcomes of PO become evident in this stage. The chapter also shows that TPO can occur in this stage, paving the way for QPO post-access.

Chapter 6 describes how ritualised acts elicit QPO in the post-access stage. It outlines divesting but keeping PRs, where users physically rotate ABIs, exchange old for new and virtually keep ABIs to retain the feeling of ownership. It also shows how virtually accumulated ABIs as a transition ritual signal a sense of continuous possessiveness and how this QPO can sometimes be ended.

Chapter 7 summarises the study's findings and theoretical contributions to previously discussed theoretical gaps, before discussing the findings based on the research questions constructed in this thesis. The chapter proposes PO as a temporary and quasi status at different stages of access, theorising interaction between identified PRs and elements of PO, and highlighting the manifestations and development of the two statuses. It describes how conceptualisation of access through PO theory and PRs has led to new understandings of ABC, before underlining the role of TPO and QPO in users' motivations, attitudes and behaviours. It discusses how PO is found to influence user–item relationships, arguing that the feeling of ownership is highly relevant and impactful in ABC.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion to this thesis. It summarises the significant contributions made from three perspectives: theoretical, methodological and managerial. This chapter concludes by recognising the study's limitations and identifying possible directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter begins by defining ABC and observing its consequences for consumer behaviour, before discussing ABFC as the focal context for this research and offers justification for this choice. It then reviewing psychological perspectives on user–item relationships in ABC and identifying theories of psychological ownership (PO) as an important theoretical lens. The review concludes by presenting the study’s research questions.

2.1 Access-based consumption

In ownership-based consumption, legal ownership of an item is the norm; a transaction as part of such consumption aims to transfer legal ownership between the buyer and seller (Belk 2007; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). ABC has now changed this norm in certain sectors, creating a form of consumption that depends upon ‘access to’ rather than ‘ownership of’ a range of consumers’ products through different forms of access practices (Rogers and Botsman 2010; Kumar et al. 2017; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Eckhardt et al. 2019). Indeed, a broad spectrum of ABC, including swapping, bartering, trading, renting, sharing and exchanging, has also been labelled the ‘sharing economy’ (Botsman and Rogers 2011). This term has evolved in recent years and expanded to cover a broader range of modes of consumption activities, such as ABC (Habibi et al. 2016).

	ABC	Key hypotheses
Broad definition	‘Transactions that can be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place’ (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, p.881).	Access (vs ownership)
Narrow definition	‘[ABC] differs from traditional renting in that these market-mediated exchanges take place among consumers using intermediary firms’ (Lawson et al. 2016, p.1).	Focuses on peer-to-peer access

Table 2-1 Exemplary definition of ABC.

The definition of the ‘sharing economy’ has been inconsistent in the literature because it has been used to describe many different forms of consumption. One of the main definitional challenges can be attributed to the word ‘sharing’ (Belk 2014b). This is linked to ‘nonreciprocal pro-social behaviour’ (Benkler 2004). This is not the case in most sharing economy practices where such exchanges take place because payment and, thus, personal gain are involved, including accommodation (e.g., Airbnb and Onefinestay), clothing (e.g., RTR and Tulerie) and transportation (e.g., Zipcar and Autolib). Arnould and Rose (2016) argue for mutuality in sharing – instead of the exchange aspect, the term ‘sharing’ misrepresents the consumption status of these modes. This dispute can be overcome by

concentrating on sharing access to an asset itself, simultaneously or subsequently (item, time and space) (Rudmin 2016), rather than using Belk's (2010a) definition of sharing as a mode of exchange – instead adopting a broader definition of sharing. Similarly, Eckhardt and Bardhi (2016) assert that the so-called sharing economy is not about sharing because today's marketised economy is based on gaining access via economic exchange. Thus, all forms of the sharing economy based on either non-monetary or monetary benefits fall under the umbrella term of the sharing economy (Martin 2016).

In 2010, Botsman and Rogers popularised the term 'collaborative consumption' to describe how traditional sharing behaviour has evolved to include collaboration, cocreation and sharing. Sharing is undoubtedly a long-established concept – however, current sharing behaviour not only takes on novel forms but also occurs on a larger scale and between strangers (Schor and Fitzmaurice 2015), thus leading to an alternative market founded on 'What's mine is yours' (Botsman and Rogers 2010). Belk's (2014) definition of collaborative consumption demonstrates his view of this concept as coordinating the acquisition and distribution of an asset for a fee. His main criticisms of Botsman and Rogers' (2010) conceptualisation of 'collaborative consumption' arise because of their broad definition, which blends different marketplace exchanges with sharing. This is because they include bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping with sharing.

Habibi et al. (2016) argue that ABC involves wide-ranging applications taking on hybrid forms, which can take place along a continuum between 'true sharing' and 'pseudo-sharing'. Traditional consumption principally relies on economic exchange, whereas ABC can involve both social and economic exchanges (Lessig 2008). Lessig argues that coexistence of multiple modes of exchange leads to hybrid economies. Hybrid economies are defined by Lessig (2008, p.177) as 'either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy, or [...] a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims'. ABC research has recently been going through rapid development, making tracking research and concepts more complex (Acquier et al. 2017). Forms of ABC have been studied across a diverse range of disciplines, creating a substantial body of literature on the topic. Thus, all these conceptualisations come from different disciplines, drawing on a broad range of theoretical bases, including cultural and consumerist areas, as well as economics (e.g., Weber 2014), sociology (e.g., Mylan 2015; Schor et al. 2016) and law (e.g., Koopman et al. 2014; Ranchordás 2015). For example, Martin (2016) turned to the field of sustainability transitions to better understand discourses surrounding ABC, and Martin and Upham (2015) applied the theory of social and disruptive innovation. ABC

research is also mainly investigated through a sociological lens, meaning that sharing is conceptualised as a theoretical construct (Belk 2014b).

Mair and Reischauer (2017) emphasise the pluralism of ABC types, explained from an institutional complexity perspective, helping to rethink the concept of institutionalism itself. Cheng (2016) identified a theoretical background with five research streams: lifestyle and social movements, a sharing paradigm and consumption practice, all forming a strongly connected cluster, alongside the trust and innovation clusters, each stream helping to redefine ABC based on users' motivation. In arguing that motivation should be considered when studying this consumption mode, for example, evolving attitudes towards ownership emerges as a key motivation.

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) adopted the theory of liquid modernity, introducing a new notion of consumption based on liquidity. Defining solid consumption as the extent to which consumption is 'enduring, ownership-based and material', with liquid consumption described as 'ephemeral, access-based and dematerialised' (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017, p.582), they argued that difference between the two notions is apparent in how identity positions become fluid and changeable because users have affordable access to short-term assets that used to be expensive to maintain and own, such as fashion items or luxury cars. This definition and the comparison provided between solid and liquid consumption is important, bringing together previous literature about sharing (Belk 2010; Lamberton and Rose 2012), access-based consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Lawson et al. 2016) and collaborative consumption (Botsman 2013) in a common conceptualisation.

Term	Definition	Theory	Ownership
Sharing	Based on ideas from anthropology such as gift-giving and sharing. 'Sharing is an alternative to the private ownership that is emphasized in both marketplace exchange and gift-giving... Rather than distinguishing what is mine and yours, sharing defines something as ours' (Belk 2014a, p.10).	Sharing	Non-ownership Collective feeling of ownership
	'Sharing as the simultaneous or sequential use of goods (e.g. cars and books), spaces (e.g. living rooms and gardens) or intangibles (e.g. experiences and identities) by more than one individual' (Rudmin 2016, p.198).	Ownership theory, inventory management and competition theory	Some practices are non-ownership
Sharing economy	'[A] web of markets in which individuals use various forms of compensation to transact the redistribution of and access to resources, mediated by a digital platform operated by an organization' (Mair and Reischauer 2017, p.2).	Institutional theory	Some practices are non-ownership

	A consumption mode guided mainly by economics and not by putting the welfare of others before one's own (Milanova and Maas 2017).	Pure commercial sharing	–
Commercial sharing programmes	'Marketer-managed systems that provide customers with the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership' (Lamberton and Rose 2012, p.109).	Commercial sharing Ownership theory	Non-ownership
Collaborative consumption	'Those events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others' (Felson and Speath 1978, cited in Belk 2014, p.614).	Community	–
	Collaborative consumption is defined as 'people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation' (Belk 2014b, p.1597). Sharing and collaborative consumption is based on 'temporary access non-ownership models of utilizing consumer goods and services' (Belk 2014b, p.1595).	Sharing, coordinated transactions, relevant transactions to the economic model	Non-ownership
	'Traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping, redefined through technology and peer communities' (Botsman and Rogers 2011, p.xv).	Community microeconomics	Some practices are non-ownership
	'An economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading or renting products and services, enabling access over ownership. It is reinventing not just what we consume but how we consume' (Botsman 2013).	Microeconomics and cultural theory	Non-ownership
	'Collaborative consumption is an emerging socio-economic model based on sharing, renting, gifting, bartering, swapping, lending and borrowing' (Piscicelli et al. 2015, p.21).	Socio-economic system	Some practices are non-ownership
	'The peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving or sharing access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services' (Hamari et al. 2016, p.1).	Community and microeconomics	Non-ownership
Connected consumption	Connected consumption is based on optimising the use of assets among stranger peers, asserting its social and digital element that helps to exclude existing market actors and mediate exchange (Schor and Fitzmaurice 2015).	Cultural economy	-
Liquid consumption	Liquid consumption is defined as ephemeral, access based and dematerialised (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017).	Liquid modernity, non-ownership models	Non-ownership
Access-based consumption	ABC is defined as 'transactions that can be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place' (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, p.881).	Market-mediated transactions, non-ownership models	Non-ownership
	'Market-mediated transactions that provide customers with temporarily limited access to goods in return for an access fee, while the legal ownership remains with the service provider' (Schaefer et al. 2016, p.571).	Market-mediated transactions, non-ownership models	Non-ownership

Table 2-2 Simple illustration of the evolving concept of ABC, developed by the author.

It is difficult to draw a clear line around the definition of ABC because of some of its shared characteristics with older sharing practices. Schor and Fitzmaurice (2015) identify three characteristic distinguishing features of ABC. First, ABC takes place between strangers rather than within close communities, as was the practice with old sharing behaviour. Establishing trust among peers is the second characteristic upon which the online network paradigm relies because these online networks facilitate offline sharing. Lastly, embracing ABC requires complete dependence on digital technologies. The phenomenon of

ABC has come about because of a range of technological developments, especially those facilitating sharing of items and services through these advanced systems (Cohen and Kietzmann 2014).

Moreover, most scholars recognise ABC as a business model (Kathan et al. 2016), a consumption style (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) or a social movement (Rowe 2017; Laamanen et al. 2015). This has resulted in the lack of a universally accepted definition. However, ABC is based on the idea of access to rather than ownership of items, meaning that identifying and accounting for all changes in ownership is required. The matter of ownership is addressed in most arguments relating to the definition of ABC, as shown in Table 2-2. Ranjbari et al. (2018) offer a comprehensive systematic literature review of the definition of ABC. Of the 67 definitions analysed, 47.8 per cent have embraced temporary access/non-ownership. This ambiguity has started to fade because of recent deeper theoretical insights, shown in Table 2-2. Other previously mentioned terms are not included in the table because they lack theoretical foundation. Trenz et al. (2018) argued that definition of ABC is not essential for researchers, who are advised to examine an identified area of access and pay less attention to differences between definitions. This helps with focus on the unique characteristics of the access practices investigated. As definitions of ABC vary among scholars, it is essential to clarify how the practices involved in ABC are categorised to give a comprehensive overview. A synopsis of ABC spaces is set out in the next section.

2.1.1 Forms of ABC and ABFC

One challenge in developing a clear definition is the range of overlapping terms often used interchangeably and without precision, including collaborative consumption, circular economy, access-based consumption, collaborative economy, on-demand economy, peer-to-peer economy, crowd-based capitalism, gift economy and access economy (Pais and Provasi 2015; Dredge and Gyimóthy 2015; Selloni 2017). In all these concepts, digitalisation of the access process and acceleration of ABC are essential, with the platforms playing a fundamental role in offering mediation to access. Researchers and the media often use these terms to point to shifts in consumer behaviour, especially relating to the notion of ownership.

To better understand the mechanisms of ABC and how it is conceptualised, different researchers have come up with distinct vital propositions. One proposition concentrates on for-profit initiatives, which replace ownership with access (Stephany 2015; Eckhardt and Bardhi 2016). Cockayne (2016) argued that ABC is restricted to peer-to-peer platforms. This understanding differs from that of other researchers (Rogers and Botsman 2010; Stephany 2015; Schor and Fitzmaurice 2015; Muñoz and Cohen 2017), who include business-to-

business, business-to-customer, for-profit and non-profit initiatives as part of ABC. Both can be seen as ABC, as long as ownership is absent and they rely on technology. Finally, the proposition is that gift-giving and bartering are excluded from ABC (Belk 2014a; Eckhardt and Bardhi 2016), reflecting the contested nature of ABC in its innermost complicated forms. This can be attributed to different motivations linked to this alternative consumption mode. For example, Guttentag (2016) argues that these differences in ABC are based on users' motivations – including money-savers, collaborative consumers, pragmatic novelty-seekers and interactive novelty-seekers. Another common argument regarding ABC spaces is linked to how a platform relates to its three actors (provider, user and platform) and how different platforms describe their practices in terms of connecting peer to provider and peer to user, because these platforms often take on a variety of forms, such as consumer-to-consumer (C2C) and business-to-consumer (B2C) (Benoit et al. 2017; Parente et al. 2017). In peer-to-peer sharing communities, peer-users (e.g. Airbnb guest) can be peer-providers (e.g. Airbnb host) in different situations. Mutual benefits help harness the capacity to access items efficiently. ABC can therefore be seen as a way of maximising the utility of an ABI through a platform (Ertz et al. 2018).

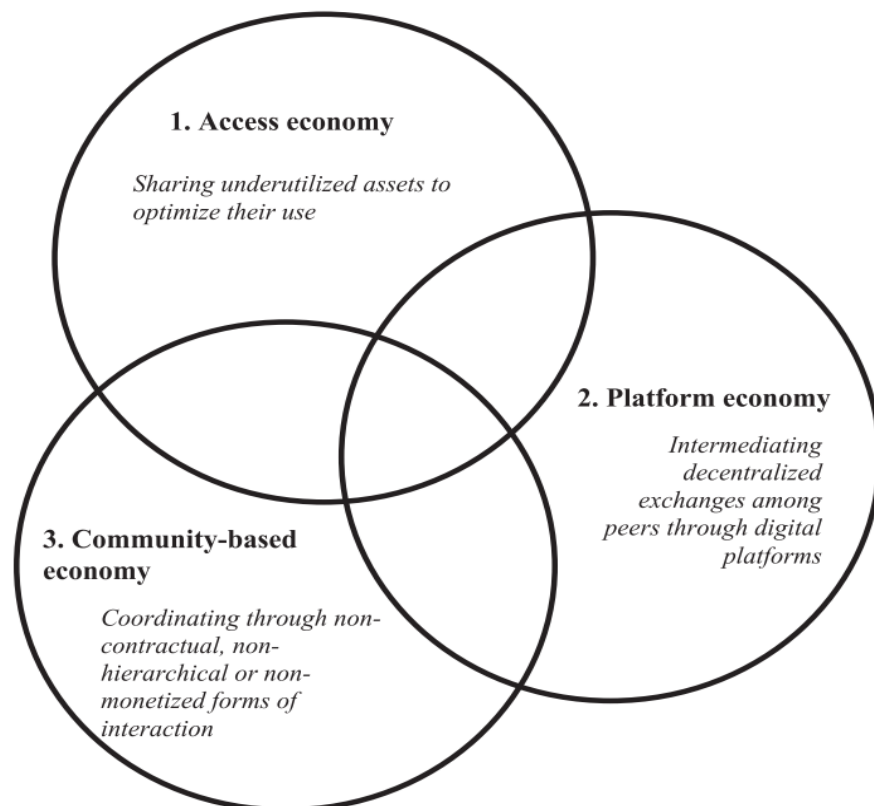


Figure 2-1 Three organising cores of ABC (adapted from Acquier et al. 2017).

Furthermore, Acquier et al. (2017) built an organising framework (Figure 2-1) that explains the complex nature of ABC, taking into account ideological disputes in the field. This helps to position ABC based on three foundational cores: the access economy, platform economy and community-based economy. Each of these core elements makes different promises and involves various contradictions. For example, the community-based economy’s promises are compatible with empowering communities, promoting set values and achieving social change. Similarly, de Rivera et al. (2017) attributed differences in ABC based on other classifications, clustered into networks, transactions and community-oriented platforms. For example, network-oriented platforms emphasise building extended networks where users can create online identities and build virtual reputation and social capital. Such platforms are mostly profit based (e.g. Airbnb). A sense of community is one of the main drivers of participation and an outcome of some post-consumption activities such as up-cycling, reusing and recycling (Albinsson and Yasanthi 2012). However, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) argue that ABC does not facilitate a sense of community, rather accelerating ‘the commodification of time and space’ and creating isolation within communities. The question is whether ABC replaces the need for personal relationships or reciprocity found in borrowing behaviours (Jenkins et al. 2014) and traditional sharing (Belk 2017), instead becoming more focused on reputation and a contractual relationship, meaning that ABIs are appreciated differently to owned and traditionally shared items.

Akbar and Hoffman (2022) distinguish eight subareas of different sharing categories defining the collaborative space. These eight subareas are grouped into four areas of the collaborative space: a sharing economy, a sharing ecology, redistribution markets and redistribution communities. As Table 2-3 depicts, three dimensions shape these areas – first, whether a platform includes non-profit (4) or for-profit (2) organisations, second, whether a provider of a resource is a company (C) or peer-user (P) and, finally, whether the type of transaction is access based (S-) or re-ownership (R-). These categories are based on the nature of consumption practices, which help to differentiate between these forms of consumption.

Collaborative space	Definition	Examples of research in similar areas	Examples	Transfer of ownership
Sharing economy (S-C2P and S-P2P)	Company-to-person for-profit organisations (S-C2P)	(Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012), (Niklas and Gianneschi 2022) and (Gruen 2017)	Rent the Runway	No
	Peer-to-peer for-profit organisations (S-P2P)	(Sun et al. 2016), (Lee et al. 2019), (Pino et al. 2022)	BlaBlaCar	No

		and (Neunhoeffer and Teubner 2018)		
Sharing economy (S-C4P and S-P4P)	Privately owned asset for non-profit organisations (S-C4P)	(Hartl et al. 2016) and (Guyader 2018)	Lift-share	No
	Company-owned asset for non-profit organisations (S-P4P)	(Eckhardt and Bardhi 2016) and (Arnould and Rose 2016)	Library of things	No
Redistribution markets (R-C2P and R-P2P)	Company-to-peer redistribution markets for profit (R-C2P)	(Chen 2009)		Yes
	Peer-to-peer redistribution markets for profit (R-P2P)	(Jenkins et al. 2014) and (Armstrong and Park 2017)	Poshmark	Yes
Redistribution communities (R-C4P and R-P4P)	Company-to-peer redistribution community for non-profit (R-C4P)	(Mazzucchelli et al. 2021)	Oxfam	Yes
	Peer-to-peer redistribution community for non-profit (R-P4P)	(Arnould and Rose 2016)	Nextdoor	Yes
To sum up, the eight subareas are: S-C2P, S-P2P, S-C4P, S-P4P, R-C2P, R-P2P, R-C4P, and R-P4P.				

Table 2-3 Categorisation of ABC based on Akbar and Hoffman’s (2022) work.

It is better to use classifications such as those offered by Acquier et al. (2017), Habibi et al. (2016), Akbar and Hoffman (2022) and Pais and Provasi (2015) rather than using basic definitions to identify ABC areas. These classifications move beyond definitional discord, giving a holistic overview of ABC spaces and helping researchers to locate their studies within these novel modes of consumption. For example, Akbar and Hoffman's (2022) classifications recognise the multiplicity of consumption spaces and their impact on research outputs, considering the role of users, providers, forms of transaction and transfer of ownership. Some studies have ignored the differences between various forms of ABC and, therefore, made contradictory claims (Habibi et al. 2016). For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) studied a specific space – company-to-person for-profit organisations (S-C2P) (Zipcar). Their results are therefore limited to this space.

Different spaces within ABC should be treated in varied ways, using different language and terminology – as not doing this would inevitably lead to more confusion. Thus, all context-specific attributes of each ABC space should be considered when choosing the language to refer to them. This thesis has adopted ‘access-based consumption’ in terms of accessing items where no ownership changes when referring to this context of consumption. This is because of the aim of the thesis focuses on exploring feelings of ownership from a user perspective in particular consumption spaces where no transfer of ownership occurs. Moreover, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) introduced the ABC term as an obvious practice for turning user–item relationships into empirical notions.

ABFC>>

ABFC is considered a novel consumption style (Loussaïef et al. 2019), expanded in many countries (Lee and Chow 2020), but user adoption has been slow in comparison to other ABC contexts (Peck and Luangrath 2018), and a systematic understanding of user–item relationships within ABFC is still lacking (Iran and Schrader 2017; Pedersen and Netter 2015). ABFC is a type of ABC that takes place when users access fashion items without legal ownership being transferred (Mukendi and Henninger 2020). Fashion consumption has grown steadily all over the world. In the US alone, 13 million tons of clothing and footwear were consumed in 2018 and Americans dumped 9 million tons of clothing and footwear in landfill in the same year (US EPA 2018). On average, for every five pieces of clothes produced, about three end up in landfill (Remy et al. 2016). In 2022, the apparel market in the US is forecast at \$479 billion, representing a growth rate of 7.2 per cent from 2021’s figures (CSA 2022).

Consumers are making efforts to change their consumption styles, specifically in fashion consumption. New modes of consumption have been introduced to facilitate sharing, access and exchange of fashion items (Armstrong et al. 2015), to maximise clothes utility after end-of-life through reuse, repair, up-cycling and down-cycling (Paras et al. 2018), stimulating acceptance of new fashion consumption styles. These include accessing special occasion dresses to lessen the negative environmental issues associated with fast fashion consumption (Armstrong et al. 2016). ABFC allows consumers to access high fashion at acceptable prices without owning the items. ABFC, as part of emerging ABC, transforms consumer behaviour, moving from enduring ownership to access (Park and Armstrong 2019) and highly relevant to PO (Lee and Chow 2020). Pierce et al. (2003) concluded that conditions and individual factors that promote PO are context driven. PO is likely to arise when an attachment develops with an item (Pierce et al. 2001). A need therefore exists to review certain factors associated with ABFC that help to explore the nature of PO. While PO theory informs the previous part of the literature review, the following sections are drawn from ABFC literature.

2.1.2 ABC and sustainability

It is essential to ask how ABC intersects with traditional consumption based on individual ownership. Interested parties contradictorily stigmatise ABC as a possible route to sustainability or as a terrible form of neo-liberal capitalism. Martin (2016) explains that both perspectives represent a shared vision of ABC, clashing with centralisation and well-established economic arrangements. Martin’s analysis of ABC discourse resulted in identifying narratives ranging from offering an economic opportunity for a sustainable form of consumption to decentralised markets and enhancing neo-liberal capitalism. ABC is

arguably positively related to disruption of unsustainable ownership-based consumption practices because it shifts consumer orientation from hyper-consumption to sharing access to assets (Botsman and Rogers 2011). Here, access is argued to be a means to sustainable consumption involving reducing overall production and the consequences of consumers' engagement with materials.

Early research into the garage sale, where second-hand items are exchanged, saw commodity exchange as an alternative consumption form embedded in the prevailing market system of advanced American capitalism (Herrmann 1997). Belk (2014) argues that consumption might reach the post-ownership economy, where temporary access to items is becoming the new trend. ABC is distinctly characterised as communal consumption when compared to ownership-based consumption (Rogers and Botsman 2010). This is because the reduction of ownership-based consumption and move toward ABC could lead to sustainability (Iran and Schrader 2017; Strähle and Erhardt 2017). The potential positive outcomes of ABC include extending product longevity (Armstrong and Park 2017), reducing enduring ownership (Fritze et al. 2020) and less materialism (Akbar et al. 2016; Li and Atkinson 2020). Thus, involvement in ABC can lead to a shift in an individual's life, consumption orientations and identity, but this shift might not always be positive (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017).

Indeed, a counterargument is that those involved in ABC could cause increased materialism than with enduring ownership because of the greater number of alternatives and smooth access arrangements (Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021). Sundararajan (2016) perceives ABC as crowd-based capitalism – an economic system recognised by the following features: it is mainly a market-based economy, has high-impact capital and a non-centralised (network), and lacks a clear divide between the personal and the professional. Orsi (2012) argues that ABC deviated from its initial path and is now ruled by private companies funded by capitalist investment, aiming to extend the inequalities associated with ownership. Debate remains around whether ABC will evolve positively in terms of access, consumer well-being (Davidson et al. 2018) and environmental impact (Suessenbach et al. 2018; Ana et al. 2021) and whether these practices will become just another type of greedy business model, representing a hidden path to hyper-capitalism (Martin 2016). Some research highlights that ABC does not, in all cases, lead to post-materialism because many users are driven by materialistic motives (Akbar et al. 2016; Davidson et al. 2018). This view is supported by several pieces of research, which found that simultaneous or sequential sharing does not result in minimal impact on the environment (Martin 2016). As the absence of ownership can lead to irresponsible consumption as a result of the freedom that this allows (Annarelli

et al. 2016), ABC has increased potential to cause the so-called ‘rebound effect’ (Frenken and Schor 2017). The environmental impact depends on the schemes, context and conditions of use (Acquier et al. 2017).

The principle practices of ABC were thought to be linked to a non-profit drive, but this movement has now grown into a social business model (Belk 2014; Habibi et al. 2016). Thus, ABC has been successfully reframed as an economic opportunity that encourages traditional businesses to use these disruptive technologies (Belk 2014b). If such views continue to dominate, the transition to sustainability is unlikely to happen (Martin 2016). ABC can also take the form of either a profit or non-profit organisation that includes or does not include sustainable consumption in its vision and practice. However, ABC represents the beginning of a new business philosophy in which ownership and hyper-consumption are no longer relevant (Bratianu 2017). To distinguish between sustainable and unsustainable platforms, the core services of an access-based platform and all practices that link to the access process should be analysed – for example, pursuing an increase in consumption and maximisation of profitability at the expense of the environment and society. The main point is that ABC can constitute an essential step towards a more sustainable method of consumption without accumulating material possessions because it resists market logic (i.e., ownership) (Albinsson and Perera 2018; Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021) or puts individual possessions into productive use (i.e., peer-to-peer access) (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021). Far too little attention has been paid to the impact of ownership on the sustainability of ABC (Suessenbach and Kamleitner 2018).

ABFC can present a more sustainable solution to the fashion industry, which is one of the world’s largest polluters (Iran and Schrader 2017). ABFC has potential to be significant in future consumption activities (Arrigo 2022). Although ABFC is not yet common in the fashion context (Vehmas et al. 2018), several reports have anticipated high acceptance and engagement in the near future (e.g., Westfield 2016; Allied Market Research 2019). One reason to focus on the PO of ABFC is that it is a more sustainable consumption alternative than owned items (Strähle and Erhardt 2017). The mainstream fashion industry is recognised for its short lifecycle products and high competitiveness (Gardetti and Torres 2017; Armstrong et al. 2015). Consumers are drawn to purchase the latest trends because of ‘fast fashion’, which has a cyclical and constantly changing nature (Nenni et al. 2013). However, unsustainable consumption is a crucial environmental dilemma and alternative forms of sustainable and environmental consumption plays a key role in tackling this issue (Niinimäki and Hassi 2011; Paras et al. 2018). ABFC is considered more sustainable than traditional enduring ownership (Fogel et al. 2017).

Many published studies have examined motivations to engage in ABFC. User attitudes toward ABIs or providers lead to favourable attitudes to ABFC (Lindblom and Lindblom 2017; Lang et al. 2019). The financial motive is commonly considered one of the main drivers of ABFC (Guiot and Roux 2010; Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Armstrong et al. 2016). For young consumers, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) found that the economic rationale is the key driver to engage in alternative fashion consumption modes rather than environmental attitudes. However, another motive is attributed to the anti-consumption movement (Edbring et al. 2016; Brace-Govan and Binay 2010). Ethics and ecology are essential motives in fashion consumption (Carrigan et al. 2013). Beard (2008) has examined the rise of ethical fashion and found that a steady increase in ABFC resulted from a political ideology that encourages environmentally friendly consumption in the fashion industry.

Harris et al. (2016) found that sustainability alone is not enough to promote necessary changes in consumer behaviour. However, ABC provides significant promise of sustainability and customer satisfaction, and removes ownership burdens (Park and Armstrong 2019). ABFC can meet sustainability goals and satisfy fashion-conscious consumers (Armstrong and Park 2017; Cassidy and Bennett 2012). For example, given that dresses are, on average, only worn 1.7 times (Sustainsister 2018), if a consumer replaces their enduring ownership fashion in favour of ABC, this could reduce the environmental impact of their overall consumption (Farrant et al. 2010; Armstrong and Park 2017) – ABFC promises to make positive environmental change (Becker-Leifhold and Iran 2018).

Current fashion consumption is rapidly accelerating as fast-fashion turnover rates increase (Niinimäki and Hassi 2011). The fashion industry is an obvious example of the extreme unsustainability of consumer desires where there is planned obsolescence and psychological obsolescence, demonstrated in the current system (Birtwistle and Moore 2007). Psychological obsolescence is similar to planned obsolescence, where an item, or an element of an item, is designed to be used only for a short time. Psychological obsolescence refers to ‘a product that is still sound in terms of quality or performance but becomes “worn out” in our minds because a styling or other change makes it seem less desirable’ (Packard 1960, p.51). Thus, psychological obsolescence works entirely on a psychological level and is attributed to accelerated fashion cycles and lifestyle changes (Cooper 2004). Indeed, this comes from fast fashion, with ever more frequent seasons being added to the traditional two collections per year (Birtwistle and Moore 2007). ABFC might overcome the issue of perceived obsolescence, providing the fashion industry with a mechanism to enhance product longevity (Armstrong et al. 2015; Niinimäki and Hassi 2011). Moreover, fashion trends, hedonic motivations, low costs and self-expression are other leading drivers of

excessive clothes shopping (Fisher et al. 2008). Consumers might be unwilling to enjoy the benefits of ABC, such as low cost, convenience and higher quality (Vezzoli et al. 2015; Armstrong et al. 2016). The fast-fashion system can be revolutionised in terms of how fashion is consumed – ABFC can extend the consumption process loop, essential for sustainable fashion consumption (Strähle and Erhardt 2017).

2.1.3 New questions for the concept of ownership in ABC

Consumer behaviour varies according to the nature of ownership. Ownership has long been of great interest in a wide range of fields, such as sociology (Rochberg-Halton 1984), economics (Thaler 1980), management (Pierce et al. 2001) and marketing (Peck and Shu 2009). For example, ownership has played a crucial role in explaining consumers' relationships with their possessions and how consumers form their identity through ownership and consumption (Belk 1988). The concept of ownership is central to the discipline of consumer research. Many researchers have studied the significance of owned items in conferring consumer identity and expressing meaning (McCracken 1986b; Belk 1988; Dittmar 1993). Sartre (2012) asserts that one of the most significant categories of human existence is 'to have'. Purchase of material goods can be allocated in an effort to satisfy psychological and social aspirations, instead of material ones, so that psychological needs play an essential role in what is consumed (Jackson and Marks 1999).

Most studies of user–item relationships have always assumed full ownership, and this assumption is the basis on which feelings of ownership and user–item relationships are built (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) argued that consumers perceive access and ownership differently, and the significance of enduring ownership has changed because of a shift in consumption styles (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Ownership is also used to signal status and wealth (O’Cass 2004; Wang and Griskevicius 2014). However, the shift in consumption to access has offered users the chance to define 'who they are' and 'what they like' without the need for legal ownership (Belk 2014b). Botsman and Rogers (2011) assert that the future of enduring ownership is questionable because of a shift in consumer preferences towards access and enduring ownership perception has been undergoing a phase of evolution.

2.1.3.1 Different user–item relationships

It is widely believed that ABC has caused long-term change in consumption habits at different levels, incorporating production, exchange and consumption of various types of products and services (Kathan et al. 2016) and in relation to the user–item relationship

(Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Hamari et al. (2016) assert that different ABC modes have transformed how consumers experience consumption. These modes facilitate reaching the core benefit of using items instead of owning them – most access-based platforms are based on temporarily accessing items where ownership is not relevant (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2010).

ABC induces the idea that access becomes more important than ownership because ‘access replaces ownership at the centre of consumers’ aspirational mindset’ (Smith 2016, p.385). The rise of ABC has the potential to radically change some concepts related to ownership (Botsman and Rogers 2011; Smith 2016). Legal ownership limits consumers to certain economic, physical, emotional and social boundaries (Lawson 2011), preventing fluidity in consumer lifestyles (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). In the context of these changes in consumer practice, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) applied the theory of modern liquidity to the nature of consumption itself, leading to the conceptualisation of a new dimension of consumption as liquid or solid, as shown in Table 2-4.

	Solid	Liquid
At product level		
Nature of attachment	Long-standing possession attachment/loyalty; stronger attachment to identity-related items.	Fluid possession attachment/lack of loyalty; attachment to fewer items; however, attachment may be greater to particular products if they provide access.
Benefits	Identity and linking assume greater importance.	User value assumes greater importance.
Level of possession	Emphasis on ownership and possession of material items: having more possessions is better.	Emphasis on access and intangible items: having fewer material possessions is better.
Meaning	Consumption meaning is stable across contexts.	Consumption meaning varies according to context.
At consumption practice level		
Consumer value	Centrality of ownership and possession.	Centrality of access, sharing and borrowing.
Benefits	Consumers value consumption for the identity and linking value it provides.	Consumers avoid emotional engagement and identification with the marketplace – however, this is not a form of consumer resistance or market alienation.
Nature of attachment	Emphasis on item attachment aspects of consumption (e.g. extending the self).	Emphasis on consumption practices, experiences and networks.

Table 2-4 Comparing solid and liquid consumption (adapted from Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017).

Ownership and access are still related because materialism is embedded in consumer behaviour (Shrum et al. 2013; Akbar et al. 2016). Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) argued that attachment is conceptually distinct from materialism. The reducing centrality of ownership can lead to exaggerated materialistic aims (Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021). Davidson et al. (2018) found that materialistic tendencies can lead to a desire for ABC rather than enduring ownership, with this applying to different motivations cross-culturally. They found that materialism is a positive predictor of willingness to participate in ABC. This goes against Belk’s argument (2007, 2010) that materialism and ABC contradict each other. Arguably, although a shift may have taken place away from enduring ownership, the

conceptualisation of solid and liquid consumption suggests that consumers will abandon enduring ownership but still have a feeling of ownership over items (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). However, Schaefer et al. (2018) investigated the different impact of owned items and ABIs and found that temporality directly affects consumers' perceptions of access-based services and their future decisions.

Rudmin (2016) highlights the simultaneous nature of ABC and uses the theory of property to explain that possessions are seen as an inventory, withholding costs and sharing forms of inventory management, advising researchers to explore ABC by focusing on ownership theories. In future, he claims more consumers will access items through ABC instead of owning them. This is because maintaining enduring ownership of a consumer inventory will be difficult in cases of decreased wealth.

There are many key benefits for the consumer in giving up enduring ownership. First, consumers are not required to pay for items outright, nor do they take on further burdens of ownership such as repair, maintenance and insurance (Schaefer et al. 2016, Lawson 2011). In an analysis of the base of pyramid consumers, Schaefer et al. (2018) found that such segments prefer ABIs over owned items because of affordability and financial risk. Moreover, if consumers give up individual ownership, they have a greater variety of options to access items, potentially leading to improved satisfaction of their needs. Consequently, user-item relationships might have a different reality in relation to psychological states. The study of ABC requires reconsideration of the notion of ownership, not only regarding tangible returns but also psychological aspects. As already apparent, absence of ownership is one of the main shifts to have taken place in individuals' consumption styles. This change is considered in the next section, which focuses on ownership. Watkins et al. (2016) note that little has been written about the relationship between ownership and possession in marketing literature. They argue that a new type of fragmented ownership is evolving with elements of both ownership and access. This view is supported by Hulland et al. (2015), who point out that the hybrid concept of legal ownership and access is critical to understanding aspects such as feelings of ownership in new consumer behaviour settings.

Fashionability takes place more easily as part of ABFC than with modes of consumption. Access-based fashion platforms often provide the latest fashion trends for users to access at the right time (Strähle and Erhardt 2017). ABC can satisfy users' desires because it meets their demand for everything here and now, although they cannot afford to own them all (Garcia 2013). ABFC represents a more sustainable, conscientious type of fashion than cheap fashion, which mirrors disposable fashion, with assumptions attributed to brand images of different fashion types, including cheap throwaway fashion (Carrigan et

al. 2013). Many users therefore engage only in luxury fashion items because they admire the quality of luxury items (Yang et al. 2017). Consumers can arguably obtain luxury experiences without the need to buy a new exclusive item, as they continue to attach meanings to luxury ABIs, particularly concerning the symbolic value and originality of items (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). Another study found that users prefer ABFC because it allows them to access a wide range of clothes and gives them more opportunities to keep up with fashion trends at a reasonable cost (Lang et al. 2016). In a study investigating positive and negative consumer perceptions on engagement in ABFC, Armstrong et al. (2015) reported that consumers have a strong desire for and interest in ABFC in hypothetical scenarios. Their results show that younger consumers in the 18–34 age group showed high interest in such consumption. The clear fee structure preference for all the different scenarios of collaborative consumption was for a one-time fee rather than an annual fee or monthly subscription.

Consumers always use marketplace ideologies and map their identities through consumption practices (Murray 2002). Exploring the expression of individuality and observing how identity impacts consumption styles is essential when studying shifts in the marketplace with potential to shape consumers' interests, tastes and behaviour (Ferraro et al. 2016). Consumers engage in other consumption modes to invest in their identities and maintain a strong commitment to their social circles (Arsel and Thompson 2011). Possessing an ABI to increase a collection can also create interrelated and overlapping identity meanings as ABFC creates never-ending possibilities of self-expression through access to a wide range of ABIs (Niklas and Gianneschi 2022). Individuals can evoke a mere-ownership feeling by just wearing an item, resulting in consumers adopting the item's traits (Weiss and Johar 2016). To sum up, the user–item relationship has evolved in the fashion industry, as this sector typically lacks technological investment (Warner and Wäger 2019). With ABFC, however, change has started. This could change the shape of the industry in the future.

2.1.3.2 PO without legal ownership

Three different relationships exist between individuals and materials – occupancy, possession and ownership (Litwinski 1913, 1942, 1947a, 1947b cited in Rudmin (2016)). Occupancy is the temporary holding or use of an item, often held by chance. Litwinski (1913, 1942, 1947a, 1947b) argues that possessions can be seen as inventory and that individuals possess items because they want to ensure social and legal protection for their future use of items, whereas ownership involves possession resulting from social approval or legal possession. Permanent transfer of goods is considered ownership, while temporary use is

regarded as possession (Jenkins et al. 2014). Comparison of the three concepts of occupancy, possession and ownership is essential in showing how ABC has changed the notion of enduring ownership. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) argue that the messy social lives of ABIs mean that items are not ‘nobody’s’ but instead are everyone’s to use, potentially reducing PO because users were found to avoid identification with items. However, they failed to consider different categories of ABC and their impact on user–item relationships.

In enduring ownership, commodities become private, personal possessions attached to their owners (Belk 1992), while shared items are owned by a group (Rudmin 2016). Legal ownership takes different forms within ABC and can be joint or transferable, or remain with the provider (Lawson et al. 2016; Schaefers et al. 2016). This typically depends on the nature of the sharing programme – for example, legal ownership often remains with the provider in ABC (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Schaefers et al. 2016). The objective functional side of ownership used to be the primary focus of research in many disciplines. However, the psychological aspect of ownership was recognised when Pierce et al. (1991) suggested the multidimensional nature of ownership and asserted that ownership can exist as an independent psychological component. The act of consumption has always been impacted by a sense of ownership and its psychological aspect (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Different components of ownership represent significant influences on every aspect of consumption. Nonetheless, several lines of evidence suggest that feelings of ownership have a more powerful impact on consumer behaviour than legal ownership. Legal ownership and feelings of ownership are two completely different concepts (Pierce et al. 2003; Reb and Connolly 2007).

Legal ownership is certainly a relevant element of the user–item relationship. Still, feelings of ownership can be formed symbolically and experientially regardless of legal ownership (Furby 1980; Shu and Peck 2011; Belk 2014; Watkins et al. 2016). Peck and Shu (2018) emphasise the importance of considering these different forms of ownership as distinct concepts, although often existing simultaneously. However, Dickert et al. (2018) argue that a two-way relationship between legal ownership and feelings of ownership exists, where each can impact or be impacted by the other. Ownership feelings, though, can occur merely by accessing or experiencing feelings of ownership (Reb and Connolly 2007). Lamberton and Rose (2012, p.109) assert that ABC aims to ‘provide customers with the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership’. Since the conceptualisation of ABC first emerged, it has expanded into a highly complex mode of exchange with differences in many of its details. However, a user’s psychological attitude towards ABIs should still be subject to further investigation (Peck and Luangrath 2018).

Both enduring ownership and access are socially constructed, reflecting traditional beliefs, cultural practices, relationships and human emotions (John 2013; Belk 2010; Cova 1997). Acts of access replace the need for owned items, in turn naturally triggering issues concerning different dimensions of ownership. Ownership rights facilitate the creation of a special relationship between an owner and an item, which is the norm in consumer societies (Belk 2007). Several researchers argue that a noticeable decline has taken place in the significance of enduring ownership (Matzler et al. 2015; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) but that ownership might be present in fragmented forms based on restricted ownership rights (Watkins et al. 2016). These rights are increasingly organised around ownership-based consumption and grant control, freedom and responsibility, helping consumers to differentiate themselves from others (Snare 1972). Ownership is therefore more complicated because consumers do not just own or not own an item, rather having some rights but not others, with implications for how they experience feelings of ownership (Watkins et al. 2016).

This change raises many questions about the generalisability of existing literature to ABC (Baumeister 2014; Chen 2009), particularly to the PO of ABIs (Peck and Luangrath 2018) at different stages of access (Fritze et al. 2020). ABC also has potential to permit consumers to establish other relationships with ABIs, thus decreasing the need for legal ownership (Chen 2009). Lovelock and Gummesson (2004, p.34) propose that ‘marketing transactions that do not involve a transfer of ownership are distinctively different from those that do’. Chen (2009) compared enduring ownership with access and found that various modes of consumption have different influences on consumers’ perceptions of value and satisfy different desires, leading to the establishment of other kinds of relationships with the items. He asserts the existence of a different user–item relationship in ABC than in enduring ownership relationships. Thus, thriving ABC offers the potential to explore new and other dimensions of feelings of ownership. Consumers have increasingly shown less willingness to own items that could instead be accessed (Belk 2014b). However, consumer attachment to items is an integral part of the consumption process regardless of whether the consumption style is based on ownership or access (Belk 1988; 2014b). The key reasoning for this explanation is that absence of legal ownership does not restrict consumer attachment – a user might feel the need for a greater feeling of ownership because of the fragmentation of ownership (Peck and Luangrath 2018).

Becker-Leifhold and Iran (2018) identified the main barriers from a user perspective: hygiene and health issues, lack of trust and information, consumption habits and lack of ownership. Previous research into ABFC has identified challenges in abandoning enduring

ownership. This concern is especially notable in the context of clothing (Armstrong et al. 2015). Evidence suggests that lack of enduring ownership is among the most critical barriers to adopting ABFC (Catulli 2012; Tukker and Tischner 2006). It is common for fashion consumers to become attached to frequent consumption, which might prevent habit transformation to ABC (Hirschl et al. 2003). However, Armstrong et al. (2015) found that ABC can act as a substitute for the need for legal ownership. One criticism of much of the literature on ABFC relates to its focus on legal ownership and lack of attention to PO.

The current trend towards ABC is seen as a significant shift on various levels, including the user–item relationship (Lamberton and Rose 2012). The critical inhibitors of consumer acceptance of ABC are legal ownership, possessiveness and materialism, but this fades away with high desire for unique consumer products (Akbar et al. 2016). On the other hand, it is still unclear how feelings of ownership affect consumer adoption of ABC. Focus on ABC’s transformation of enduring ownership to access makes it interesting to turn attention to PO, where physical ABIs or their digital representation can bring about complex feelings. According to Paundra et al. (2017), the notion of feelings of ownership should be considered when studying the promises of ABC because such feelings influence individuals’ intentions to engage in ABC, and their results provide the first evidence of the importance of PO in ABC. Accordingly, academics and practitioners require in-depth understanding of different aspects of feelings of ownership in new consumption contexts.

2.1.4 Conclusion

This section highlights several aspects of ABC, especially discourses around the term ‘sharing’. Differences in its definition reveal the promises, tensions and paradoxes of ABC. Thus, researchers might never agree on a definition because access-based practices incorporate many overlapping concepts (Belk 2014a; Habibi et al. 2016). The definition of ABC is context-specific in terms of platform type, consumer motivations and nature of access space.

Consumption style has evolved, making enduring ownership no longer the ultimate expression of consumer desire (Chen 2009; Rogers and Botsman 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Users favour accessibility over enduring ownership, disrupting traditional consumption modes and challenging well-established concepts of consumer behaviour. ABC undoubtedly revolutionises the user–item relationship, overcoming the need for enduring legal ownership. Such ownership paradoxes in ABC raise many questions. Feelings of ownership might be the only aspect able to be triggered in the ABC context because of

the absence of legal ownership. The following section sheds light on PO theory and its potential to provide a new theorisation of the user–item relationship in ABC.

2.2 Psychological ownership

The previous sections examined ABC and its role in developing a new user–item relationship, making enduring ownership no longer desired. The advent of post-ownership consumption, moving from ownership to access, has raised some questions about the effect of this de-materialisation on feelings of ownership. There are several theoretical explanations for how a sense of ownership can develop. It has been established that such feelings over legally owned items can be explained by the endowment effect, possession attachment, egocentric categorisation theory or the theory of PO. The theory of PO will be discussed, incorporating the core elements of PO, including its motives, routes and outcomes, and the role of time. This section discusses other theories such as outcomes of PO, before reviewing how PO is discussed in recent ABC research, considering justifications for using the theory of PO as a lens through which to conduct this research.

2.2.1 Theories on feelings of ownership

There are four main streams of theories on the measurable effects of ownership on consumer behaviour (Table 2-5): endowment effect, possession attachment, egocentric categorisation theory and the theory of PO (Kamleitner 2014; Weiss and Johar 2018). Endowment effects and egocentric categorisation theory are streams that look at the consequences of ownership. For example, egocentric categorisation theory suggests that owning or merely feeling ownership of an item impacts a consumer’s response, modifying how they mentally position the target item in relation to themselves (Weiss and Johar 2018). In other words, consumers tend to mentally sort owned items into the category of self, while consumers mentally recognise unowned items as outside that category, leading to different judgements and decisions about identical items based on these categorisation principles (Johar and Weiss 2013).

In contrast, research into PO and attachment theories has focused on the user–item relationship. The latter two research streams are more concerned with the experience of ownership and how the user–item relationship could be influenced in response to ownership. PO and attachment also cover wider notions of ownership, considering the experience of ownership itself as an effect with potential to generate other effects. The roots of the theories behind these measurable effects are blended around the extended self, and the concept of the extended self is used to enhance these. Consumers form an extended self when possessions

become part of themselves, resulting in the notion that ‘we are what we possess’ (Belk 1988). Each of these streams sheds light on different aspects of the user–item relationship. However, PO offers an interesting lens through which to better understand the user–item relationship (Jussila et al. 2015; Morewedge 2021; Li and Atkinson 2020) and is considered as a comprehensive theory where, for example, the endowment effect, self-extension and attachment are potential outcomes of PO (Gawronski et al. 2007; Kamleitner 2014; Hillenbrand and Money 2015; Morewedge and Gliblin 2015). Thus, this section focuses on reviewing PO theory and its core elements. Other theories are discussed as outcomes of PO.

Theory	Definition	Focus of theory	Main effects
Endowment effect	A situation in which owners give an item a high valuation because they own it (Thaler 1980).	Valuation	- Monetary valuation
Egocentric categorisation	Looking at the link between item traits and consumer traits (Weiss and Johar 2018).	Self-definition	- Attitude
Possession attachment	Multifaceted, emotionally complex relationship between a specific individual and a specific material item that an individual has psychologically appropriated develops over time based on the individual–item interaction (Kleine and Baker 2004).	Interaction	- Affective reactions - Feelings of ‘me-ness’
PO	‘The state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is “theirs”’ (Pierce et al. 2003, p.86).	Motives, routes and outcomes	- Feelings of ‘my- ness’ - Attachment - Behaviour - Attitude

Table 2-5 Theories on feelings of ownership.

▪ **Theory of psychological ownership (PO)**

PO is an essential component in consumer behaviour research because it plays a crucial role in understanding how consumers feel psychologically attached to items, regardless of legal ownership (Jussila et al. 2015). According to Pierce et al. (2003, p.86), PO is ‘the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is “theirs”’. A consumer-perceived relationship between the self and the actual item is the basis of this construct (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). Thus, the psychological perspective is based on what consumers consider to be theirs, which is the mirror of the self (Porteous 1976; Weil 1952). Table 2-6 shows features of PO investigated in the literature.

Features	Reference
‘The sense of ownership ... associated with my or mine and our’	(Porteous 1976; Weil 1952)
‘Psychological ownership reflects a relationship between an individual and object becoming part of the extended self’	(Isaacs 1933; Furby 1978; Furby 1980; Belk 1988)
‘The state of psychological ownership is complex ... cognitive and affective core’	(Furby 1978; Etzioni 1991; Beggan 1992)

Table 2-6 Features of PO from Pierce et al. (2001, 2003).

According to Pierce et al. (2001, 2003), PO can be reached with an unlimited number of items, and experiences with an item can accelerate, reaching a similar psychological state. Etzioni (1991) may have initiated the focus on the psychological aspect of ownership, noting that ownership is a ‘dual creation, part attitude, part object, part in the mind, part “real”’ (Etzioni 1991, p.466). Similarly, Pierce et al. (2001, 2003) trace the development of PO literature, highlighting that it contains both affective and cognitive elements. The complex phenomenon of PO first takes place in early childhood (Isaacs 1933; Furby 1980) and keeps developing as consumers interact with their surrounding environments.

Psychological appropriation is a path to PO, which occurs when an individual feels that an item does belong to them (Dittmar 1992; Pierce et al. 2003) through consumption and as consumers perform PRs that help extract and give meaning to items, claiming them as theirs (McCracken 1986b) (further discussed in Section 2.2.2.2: PRs and PO). PO also appears when individuals treat items as social entities, leading to formation of a psychological association between item and owner (Beggan 1992). It reflects the intensity of the relationship between an individual’s material possessions and their consumer identity. The state of PO exists when an individual senses psychological attachment to an item (Pierce and Jussila 2011). Although such items are not tied to the individual’s physical self, consumers reach a state where items become part of the extended self. This is evident when meaningful possessions become part of consumers’ extended selves (Pierce et al. 2001). The work of Belk (1988) and Dittmar (1992) further suggests that the psychology of ownership is well rooted in humans. Previous research into consumer PO has adapted knowledge from diverse disciplines, such as psychology and organisational management. The theory of PO originates from organisational research (Jon L Pierce et al. 2001). Indeed, organisational research has explored both individual and collective PO (Pierce et al. 2003; Shropshire and Kadlec 2010; Pierce and Jussila 2010; Van Dyne and Pierce 2004), forming the theoretical underpinnings of this research. It has been successfully applied in other disciplines, including engineering design (e.g. Baxter et al. 2015), education (e.g. Yoo et al. 2018), entrepreneurship (e.g. Townsend et al. 2009) and sustainability (e.g. Cooper et al. 2015).

Recently, researchers have started to make determined efforts to deal with the concept of PO in marketing literature (Jussila et al. 2015; Karahanna et al. 2015; Hulland et al. 2015; Hillenbrand and Money 2015). For example, PO is proven as a powerful mechanism for developing psychological attachment among consumers, leading to loyalty for services and products (Hillenbrand and Money 2015; Jussila et al. 2015). A growing body of literature recognises the importance of different aspects of ownership. Still, the power of ownership lies in the experience of PO rather than legal ownership (Baxter and

Auriscchio 2018). Baxter and Auriscchio (2018) argues that certain object affordances can lead to PO. PO occurs through enduring ownership and experiential purchases, but the latter are arguably more closely linked to the self (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003; Carter and Gilovich 2012). Belk (2014) proposes that dematerialised possession and other forms of access influence the consumer's extended self and self-image, as with e-books, meaning that the psychological aspect is also significant in a digital context. Feuchtl and Kamleitner (2009) use 'mental ownership' to refer to an imaginary feeling of ownership of a factually non-owned item. This definition of mental ownership is helpful because it is devoid of factual ownership. Mental ownership reflects just imagining a situation of ownership – not reaching this state is considered a loss. Mental ownership is a type of PO, thus, The question is whether PO can also occur when imagining ownership of ABIs. Atasoy and Morewedge (2017) found that digital items were less valued than physical versions of the same items. Most of these studies focus on non-physical entities. However, users might have relationships with physical items and their digital counterparts in ABC contexts.

PO occurs at individual level in two forms: first, when an individual feels exclusive ownership, and, second, when an individual experiences a feeling of ownership of an item. Each is considered an individual PO because each takes place at individual level (Pierce et al. 2003). In contrast, collective PO is the joint feeling that the target item psychologically belongs to the group – this feeling is experienced at group level (Pierce and Jussila 2011). The term 'collective PO' refers to 'a collective sense of ownership – a socially constructed, shared mental model reflecting common beliefs about a group's possessive relationship with a target of ownership' (Pierce et al. 2017, p.3) – e.g., a sense of PO over an access-based platform (Lee et al. 2019). Collective PO is one possible outcome in joint ownership consumption (Kamleitner and Rabinovich 2010). Taking this into account, ABC has caused rapid development in collective ownership, legally and psychologically. Some studies attempt to provide an understanding of the complexity surrounding collective PO (Lamberton and Rose 2012; Scaraboto 2015). Baker et al. (2021) argued that collective PO in ABC can precede positive outcomes such as community-oriented platforms. Different practice of ABC implies a sense of collective ownership and belonging. Research is required in this area to investigate whether users' sense of PO occurs at individual or collective level. However, it is necessary to limit the focus to individual PO, because of the scope of the research. Users are also inclined to share but might lack a sense of collective PO in ABC (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Having defined what is meant by PO, the following subsection reviews the core elements of PO theory.

2.2.2 Core elements of PO theory

This section moves to demonstrate the comprehensive theory that proposes an intra-individual perspective of PO, developed by Pierce et al. (2003). This theory includes motives, routes and different types of consequences (Figure 2-2). The section continues by discussing the relevance of PRs to elements of PO and how PO theory could help investigate the user–item relationship in ABC.

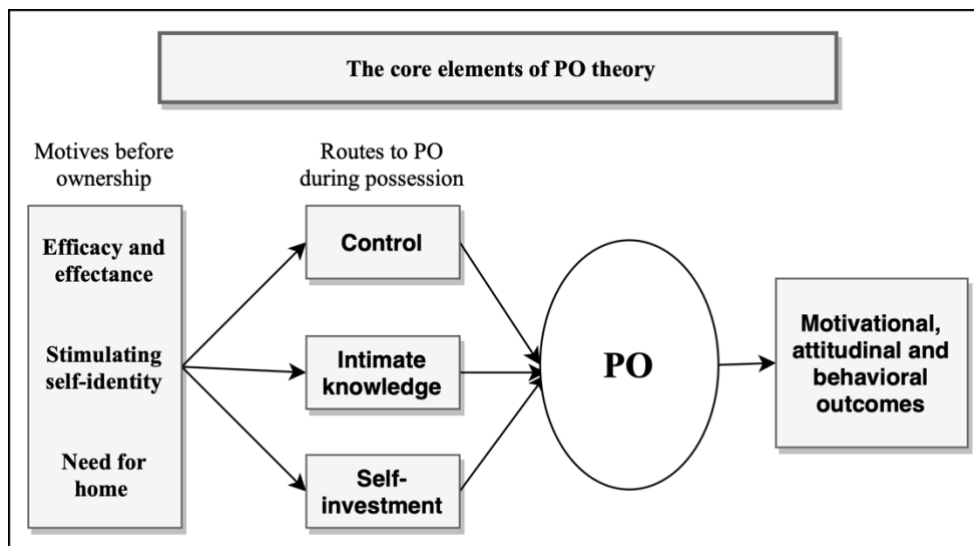


Figure 2-2 Motives and routes to psychological ownership and its outcomes, adjusted from Jussila et al. (2015).

2.1.1.1 PO motives

The roots of PO are not clearly defined (Pierce et al. 2003). Drawing from over a hundred years of research, two schools of thought consider the origins of PO – namely the biological and sociobiological perspectives. Researchers in the first group argue that the impulse to possess results comes from an innate need (McDougall 1921; Weil 1952; Porteous 1976). Those in the second group take the social constructionist view in which socialisation practices lead to a need for PO (Seligman 1972; Furby 1978; McCracken 1986a). In her interesting analysis of the public and private meanings of possessions, Richins (1994) suggested several motives for valuing possessions gathered from empirical and conceptual work: utilitarian, enjoyment, showing and facilitating interpersonal ties, self-expression, financial and appearance-related. Products carry public meaning, enhance social status and appearance, and show how individuals comply with reference groups. Pierce et al. (2003) argue that the roots of PO can be explained through three human motives – efficacy and effectance, stimulating self-identity and the need for home. Notably, it is not necessary for these motivations behind PO to be experienced simultaneously (Pierce et al. 2003). It is crucial to recognise that these motives can lead to PO even in the absence of legal ownership (Jussila et al. 2015).

The first motive is effectance, or having some type of control over one's environment, which helps in reaching desired outcomes that result in enjoyment because of the creation of those outcomes (White 1959). Similarly, Dittmar (1992) asserts that powerful motives behind PO involve obtaining control of the individual environment to reach a specific end through possession. Possession also helps consumers to experience power and achieves the purpose of effectance and a sense of competence. The most salient evidence of ownership involves a sense of control over an item (Furby 1978). A limited degree of control might affect how consumers experience PO (Rogers 2021), raising an important question about the nature and type of control required to reach PO in ABC, because control over ABIs might be limited and temporary (Halme et al. 2006).

Second, self-identity can be reflected through items and PO of experiences and items can express self-identity and maintain such links with the self over time (Mead 1934; Dittmar 1992). The self-identity motive is explained by the fundamental belief that individuals identify themselves through their possessions. Consumer behaviour is also shaped by others' views of individual identities. These identities can be facilitated through public and private meanings of particular possessions (Richins 1994). Individuals therefore express themselves via items, with the aim of being associated with the symbolic meanings of these items through a sense of ownership (Weiss and Johar 2016). Belk (2014, p.1599) assumed that the self not only extends through owned items but also through ABIs, in a new era characterised as 'the post-ownership economy'. Pierce et al. (2003) state that PO theory explains how consumers use ownership to express themselves, define their self-identity and help to remain self-consistent over time. Weiss and Johar (2016) found that, as ownership feeling levels over an item rise, assimilation into the extended self takes place. Feeling a lack of ownership, meanwhile, might prevent assimilative effects. Users might therefore be more willing to access items that match themselves (assimilation) and less inclined to access items they feel do not reflect themselves (contrast). Thus, the influence of PO on outcomes also depends on the relationship between items and consumer identities.

PO and self-concept are closely related (Hillenbrand and Money 2015). Higgins (1987) classified domains of the self into three basic types: first, 'the actual self' involves individual attributes that reflect who they actually are; second, 'the ideal self' represents what individuals are hoping to become; and the 'ought-self' reflects others' and individuals' beliefs about their own responsibilities or obligations. These selves are elements of self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), interested in emotional states linked with discrepancies between actual self, ideal self and ought-self. To determine the effects of layers of self on feelings of PO, Hillenbrand and Money (2015) present a dynamic model of identity

development containing different layers of self, including perceived self, lived self, learned self and core self. For example, PO can manifest itself at the level of perceived self through fulfilling individual identity congruence needs that allow people to be seen for who they are. Connections between any of these selves and ABIs should enhance the appeal of the ABI as a target of PO. The nature of the relationship between different layers of self for users' identities is still unexplored in ABC, as is how these multifaceted person–possession ties affect access behaviour and intentions.

The third motive is home – a place for the self to settle – leading to a sense of comfort, security and familiarity (Heidegger, 1967). The motive of a sense of home is achieved through PO targets (Pierce et al. 2003). The ability to control and arrange a personal territory is the central driving force behind this motivation because personalising and defending this area grants individuals security, stimulation and identity (Porteous 1976). The psychological state is critical because it concentrates only on motives that can be fulfilled with PO, unlike motivations fulfilled through legal ownership, such as utilitarian functions. In addition to the three motivations mentioned, accountability and territoriality are discussed (Avey et al. 2009). PO can have promotive or preventative motives (Pierce et al. 2003). Promotive motives focus on fulfilling hopes or aspirations (e.g., effectance) while preventative motives involve reducing punishment, performing duties and meeting obligations (e.g., territoriality), both found to be distinct (Avey et al. 2009). The rationale for territoriality is to maintain levels of PO and communicate it to potential threats, excluding others from using an item (Kirk et al. 2017). However, other researchers have suggested that territoriality should be considered an outcome rather than a motive of PO (Brown et al. 2014).

Still, research to date has tended to focus on motives of PO for legally owned items rather than ABIs. As Pierce and Peck (2018) have noted, items that meet the underlying motives of PO, such as effectance, self-identity and sense of place or home, are more likely to promote a sense of ownership than items that do not provide these aspects. ABIs that meet one or more of these motives might therefore lead to the development of PO. Negative features of an item do not prevent the formation of PO, and owners demonstrate higher levels of PO regardless of any undesirable features (Nayakankuppam and Mishra 2005; Shu and Peck 2011). Most studies of negative features of products and their consequences for PO have been carried out on privately owned items. However, the influence of the negative features of ABIs on PO remains unclear. The result of those three motives might differ by context and the nature of items involved. A need therefore exists for more understanding of types of targets and their impact on PO in ABC.

2.2.2.1 PO routes

In addition to the above motives, three routes to PO include: controlling the ownership target, investing the self in the target, and coming to know the target intimately (Pierce and Jussila 2011; Pierce et al. 2003). These three routes have long been the subject of much interest in literature on the psychology of possessions and other fields.

A consumer should have a high level of attractiveness to the ownership target to trigger these routes and form a PO. Consumers might therefore not go through these routes if they do not feel an attachment to the target. A high degree of exposure to an unwanted item will not necessarily lead to feelings of ownership (Peck and Shu 2009). A sense of ownership might also be prevented as a result of contamination (McCracken 1986b; Argo et al. 2006; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Signs of pre-use therefore play a role in delaying PO and associating PO with someone else (Jenkins et al. 2014). ABFC allows consumers to share ownership targets in ways that call for reconsideration of what Belk refers to as 'contamination' (Belk 1988). Contamination occurs through a distinct process of self-extension. In such processes, the favourable and undesirable aspects of items are perceived to attach to consumers through physical touch and proximity (Belk 1988). A perception of contamination from used clothing is a critical psychographic factor in ABFC (Clube and Tennant 2020). Individuals tend to remove any evidence of other users from items to claim personal possession (McCracken 1986a). Jenkins et al. (2014) studied relationships between lenders and their possessions and between lenders and borrowers, using the term 're-sacralisation' to refer to ways of handing something back in a state of sacredness. They explain that re-sacralisation occurs when borrowers clean and remove marks from use before returning items to the lender.

These behaviours are also manifestations of how users reveal connection and trust when sharing ABIs. A consumer might therefore feel that an item belongs to someone else until contamination is removed by cleaning the item. Argo et al. (2006) have found that the closer an item comes into contact with a consumer's body, the higher the contamination effects. Their research findings demonstrate that shoppers are much less likely to purchase clothing that other shoppers have touched in the retail context. Their experiments also showed that although consumers enjoy feeling items when shopping, they often react negatively when other consumers touch or try on clothes. Yan et al. (2015) reported that consumers who considered used clothing disgusting were less willing to engage in alternative consumption modes. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found that contagion concerns can deter users from participating in ABC. The term 'contagion' refers to disgust felt when consumers know that someone else has physically touched the target item (Argo et al. 2006).

They argued that pre-owned items would suffer from contagion effects when consumers question the quality of such target items. A scenario-based experiment showed that ABIs characterised as physically close to users' bodies elicit more significant feelings of contamination (Seuling 2017). For this reason, consumers might be less interested in engaging in ABFC because of sensitivity around cleanliness and who has used the items beforehand.

However, both positive and negative responses take place towards items that others have touched. Belk (1988) cited Lurie and Sales (1981) to give an example of positive contamination, which adolescent girls experienced when sharing clothes to become spiritually closer to each other. Positive contamination effects emerge because of positive associations with a particular item – for example, where items are used or are loved by others (Nemeroff and Rozin 1994). Perceptions of contagion and contamination can occur when an unknown individual has worn clothing. In contrast, consumers are unlikely to show any fear of either when sharing takes place among family members because of trust and open self-boundaries (Belk and Llamas 2012). Argo et al. (2006) found that, when consumers know someone else has proved a specific item – the last item in stock – they tended to decrease their purchase intention even though contamination was not observed. It can be assumed that contamination is an additional psychological barrier that can inhibit consumers from engaging in ABFC, preventing development of PO over ABIs. Real traces left by previous owners on used items widened the PO distance, meaning that such items are evaluated less positively (Kim 2017). Bratianu (2017) concludes that ABC has developed a distinct culture where sharing, privacy and ownership have new meanings. However, consumers reach the state of PO through one or more of these three routes.

First, control is a feature of ownership and the route to achieve it (Snare 1972). Feelings of control over an item represent an antecedent to enhancing PO. Halme et al. (2006) assumed that ownership-based consumption continues to be the prevalent culture because of the lack of control over items in the novel method of consumption. A feeling of ownership helps individuals define themselves, and such a feeling is stimulated when individuals have control over the ownership target (Pierce et al. 2001). The amount of control that individuals have over items plays a significant role in how they psychologically attach items to themselves (Furby 1978).

For instance, in the context of ABC, users might access an item to demonstrate their control over it, because the motivation behind an action in controlling an item leads to experiencing PO. The nature of the target can affect which routes towards PO are most effective – this kind of influence varies, taking into account the nature of the ABI and

perceived control over and personal investment into it. Peck and Shu (2009) found that, for consumers, merely touching ABIs leads them to incorporate them into their extended selves. Remembering an experience was found to help reduce negative feelings linked with the end of the experience (Chu and Shu 2018).

Other research found that using, physically touching or imagining touching an item influenced perceived ownership and the valuation of items (Peck and Shu 2009; Belk 1988; Wolf et al. 2008). This phenomenon has been explained in terms of the mere-ownership effect. The mere-ownership effect refers to an individual's tendency to be biased in favour of items they own over other items (Beggan 1992). The mere-ownership effect is assumed to occur only because of the feeling of ownership, regardless of physical contact. Such effect was found to be even more important than legal ownership in causing PO (Pierce et al. 2003; Reb and Connolly 2007). Lack of physical control over digital items prevents the development of PO for such items (Atasoy and Morewedge 2017). Other forms of control can also facilitate PO such as selecting an item and deciding when and how to consume or use it (Huang et al. 2009). ABC is associated with short access time but requires digital and physical involvement before, during and after access, raising questions about the role of PO in how individuals reconstruct their sense of self and temporary control over ABIs. High involvement with possession generates more feelings of ownership (Saqib et al. 2010)

The second principal route to PO is the psychological energy that enables the individual to 'com[e] to intimately know the target' (Pierce et al. 2003, p.92). When individuals have intimate knowledge of an item, they are more likely to develop PO. Intimately knowing items occurs through a 'living relationship' with them (James 1890; Pierce et al. 2001). Pierce et al. (2003) also argued that a sense of ownership could be elicited to happen almost immediately. Closer interactions between individual and item, allowing individuals to come closer to items, lead to attachment of items to the individual self (Pierce et al. 2001; Pierce et al. 2003). Product attachment is multifaceted, emotionally complex and develops over time based on individual-item history (Kleine and Baker 2004). Experiences are a powerful mechanism for attachment alongside consistent cognitive focus and affective state (Feeney and Noller 2009). Information about an item might not be enough for a feeling of ownership – rather, strength of association, such as the frequency of the user-item relationship (Pierce et al. 2001). Furthermore, consumers might have a sense of PO because of their intimate knowledge of ABIs, potentially encouraging consumers to collect more information about ABIs to develop a strong sense of PO (Belk 1988).

Finally, self-investment takes place when individuals invest time, money, physical effort and/or psychological energy into items, which they then view as more unique and

genuine than other items (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981; Pierce et al. 2001; Pierce et al. 2003), making the item in question part of the individual's extended self (Belk 1988). Consumers might invest in their identity through ABIs (Belk 2013). Looking at the link between item traits and consumer traits, Dittmar (1992) traces the social psychology of material possessions by examining different aspects of self-definition. Self-definition is linked with people's possessions because they reflectively categorise themselves based on how they want to be seen. Csikszentmihalyi and Halton (1981) argue that investing the self in the target leads to the extension of personality, consequently creating feelings of ownership. Their research into the most appreciated owned household items found that these are not valued based on their functional or utilitarian purposes but on how these reflect ideal identity and personal achievement. Pierce et al. (2001) argues that individuals have a more robust sense of PO if they invest themselves further into a target. For instance, the more regularly consumers have access to an item, the better they get to know it, therefore triggering PO by investing themselves into it. Regardless of form of ownership, Belk (1988; 2014b) believes that consumers desire strong self-expression with their possessions.

Furthermore, the importance of time dimensions in the formulation of PO is now well established in various studies (Jussila et al. 2015). Pierce and Jussila (2011) argue that, when individuals move through time, they come across substantial potential targets of PO. Jacoby et al. (1977) found that consumers keep items when they have high levels of emotional involvement. Attachment takes place over time and is recognised through different interactions with items where such interactions lead to the creation of meanings and emotions (Ball and Tasaki 1992). Accordingly, owned items tend to be more attractive and valuable than similar items over time (Thaler 1980). Researchers looked at different perspectives of time and its consequences for ownership, as well as the effect of items' histories on their valuation (Strahilevitz and Loewenstein 1998) and the lifecycle of PO (Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018). This lifecycle has a functional classification because it considers all interactions between a user and an item that lead to PO. These range from acquisition and usage until disposal. Public and private meanings of possessions are subject to change over time (Richins 1994). Ariely and Simonson (2003) provided a detailed examination of the effects of timing on PO, which can be reached even before an item is acquired.

However, Pierce and Jussila (2011) point out that PO takes time to develop. Time can be significant when looking at routes to PO, meaning that long user-item relationships result in feelings of ownership – for example, an association between self and item over time (Pierce et al. 2001). Feelings of PO, though, might not be stable over time where 'mine-me'

sensitivity fluctuates between extreme and non-ownership feelings (Weiss and Johar 2016). Strahilevitz and Loewenstein (1998) found that valuation and sense of attachment increase with duration of ownership, and appropriation practices follow. Their work on the length-of-ownership effect highlighted that the impact of ownership starts instantly upon possessing an item and strengthens with duration of ownership, with no significant difference found between short-duration ownership and no-ownership conditions on subjects' attractiveness rankings. Similarly, Reb and Connolly (2007) assert the positive relationship between duration of ownership and PO. It is possible that, during long-term access or long possession (digitally), users can develop a perceived sense of ownership over items, encouraging positive outcomes.

The time factor is very important in ABC. This is particularly clear with significant contextual shifts from ownership to access, time-dependent ownership (access-based) and shared ownership (Peck and Luangrath 2018). One question that needs to be asked is whether time dimensions are related to the PO of ABIs because users tend to have temporary access to ABIs. However, uncertainty remains about whether waiting to access an item can impact the development of PO and when the peak point in the lifecycle of PO is reached (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018). Previous theorising on PO has not focused on the time required for this feeling to emerge (Jussila et al. 2015) during any stage of access (Fritze et al. 2020).

To sum up, when individuals exercise more control over, come to know intimately, and invest themselves in an item, they become more attached to that item (Pierce and Jussila 2011). Each of these routes can lead to the development of PO of ABIs, and consumers can develop strong feelings of PO by one or more of these routes. However, ownership feelings are much stronger when elicited via all three routes at once (Pierce et al. 2003). Most consumer research has examined how control over items can lead to PO, whereas the other two routes still need much more research (Jussila et al. 2015). All three routes represent a critical mechanism for ABC and are important to explore. This is because of the high relevance of all these routes, other than a lack of absolute control in ABC contexts resulting from fragmentation of ownership rights. Indeed, Peck and Luangrath (2018) argued that decreasing levels of routes to PO could reduce individuals' sense of ownership.

2.2.2.2 Possession rituals and psychological ownership

'The process of psychological ownership is also further facilitated by the 'possession rituals' in which people engage' (Pierce et al. 2003, p.96).

Regarding the role of PRs in aiding PO, most researchers believe that PO can be intentionally created by consumers through deliberate acts that consumers use to appropriate them as 'mine' and cultivate their meanings. This is fairly common in consumer culture theory research, with the focus on how to make an item 'mine' through PRs (McCracken 1986b; Pierce et al. 2003). A ritual is a meaningful and habitual sequence of practices used to establish the meaning of a new situation or event (McCracken 1986). Such PRs of actions and interactions often have a symbolic dimension (Belk et al. 1989). PRs are deeply linked to consumer culture and are socially accepted (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). PRs arguably stimulates the feeling of PO (Pierce et al. 2003). Belk (2014) shows that certain PRs need to be performed for a feeling of ownership to develop. PRs such as displaying, using and personalising possessions help to pass on the meaning of items to individual self-identity (Holt 1995a; McCracken 1986). PRs are known to increase involvement and have a causal impact on the experience of consumption (Amati and Pestana 2015). Thus, an individual needs to interact with an ABI in specific ways to acquire these feelings. PRs are well-established in exploring relationships between consumer and items (Rook 1985; Vohs et al. 2013).

There are two approaches to analysing PRs. McCracken's framework for the structure and movement of cultural meaning through PRs of items incorporates activities such as 'cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off and even photographing' (1986, p.79), while Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices is also used. McCracken's approach embraces the notion of the creation of meaning, considering critical elements of consumption, including associated PRs, individuals and items. Holt's approach examines patterns of consumption according to the structure and purpose of actions (i.e., item actions, interpersonal actions, autotelic actions and instrumental actions) and how hedonic (i.e., experiencing and playing) and utilitarian (i.e., integrating and classifying) meanings are transferred. For example, personalisation can lead to high PO levels (Holt 1995; Pierce et al. 2003; Norton et al. 2012). Personalisation refers to a high degree of appropriation of possessions, reflecting an owner's intimate relationship with an item, and is used to signal control (Pierce et al. 2003). Conversely, a high degree of personalisation can also increase PO. Personalising possessions can be done through PRs that help make an item 'mine' (Holt 1995a; McCracken 1986). A personalised relationship can also be obtained through an item's previous biography (Zonneveld and Biggemann 2014). These two approaches are helpful to interpret symbolic-expressive behaviour and better understand the user-item relationship in ABC.

Consumption practices in ABC consist of a different purchase decision to solid consumption, involving additional appropriation practices during access (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). One of the habitual ways of acquiring a psychological appropriation in the ABC are PRs. PRs are carried out to make individuals feel more like new possessions belong to 'us' (Denegri-Knott et al. 2012). Belk (1988) argued that appropriating or controlling an item for an individual's personal use is primarily a way to regard an item as part of the individual self. PRs are seen as an intentional way to present how users achieve a sense of PO by frequently 'claiming' an item as theirs. These claims are an 'assertion of territoriality through ownership' (McCracken 1986, p.79). This includes different actions through which participants incorporate and use ABIs in their daily lives. Mifsud et al. (2015) found that service appropriation depends on seven dimensions: service knowledge, self-adaptation, service control, service creation and PO. They indicated that appropriation is the result of these dimensions, including PO. Consumers of virtual goods perform PRs to make the goods feel more like theirs (Denegri-Knott et al. 2012). So far, however, little discussion has taken place about necessary antecedent digital and physical ritualised acts and their association with routes to PO, particularly for ABIs. Appropriation refers to acts through which individuals make something theirs, including items (Belk 1988) and services (Mifsud et al. 2015).

Additionally, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), feelings of ownership relate to the fulfilment of three basic human motives: efficacy and effectance, self-identity and having a place (home) (Pierce et al. 2003). Each of these are reasons for engaging in the reported PRs, either simultaneously or separately. The combination of PRs related to such motives could facilitate development of PO. Thus, emphasis is placed on PRs that lead to the emergence of this psychological state. This thesis demonstrates that participants vary in the extent to which they have these motives. They also vary in how they reflect on PRs related to these motives. Thus, ways of engaging in PRs that satisfy these motives are diverse and explain how PRs might aid the existence of PO.

As well as possession, consumption and disposition processes help with expression of self and identity transformation (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The theory of the extended self strongly suggests that items to which an individual becomes very attached are not easily disposed of (Belk 1988). Disposition decision taxonomy formed the central focus of a study by Jacoby et al. (1977), in which they found that consumers retain items when they have a strong sentimental or emotional involvement with them. Herrmann (1997) explored the disposition of possessions and found that commodity exchange is more than just recommodification of personal possessions. For a second-hand item seller, finding

suitable recipients for possessions can be more valuable than the economic return from selling items. Possessions have public and private meanings – if seller and buyer share a common identity, the seller feels sure that the meaning of the possession will be transferred to the stranger (buyer) (Richins 1994). Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) suggest that possession disposition plays a role in facilitating the transitions and processes of identity reconstruction. Permanent and temporary disposition occurs in different forms of ABC, implying different identity formulations for users.

2.2.2.3 Outcomes of PO

Having discussed why and how PO emerges, this section addresses why PO matters, focusing on its consequences. PO theory is rooted around the extended self (Kamleitner 2014), but the conceptual distinctiveness of PO is evident based on its theoretical and managerial implications, such as outcomes of PO (Pierce et al. 2001; Jussila et al. 2015). The outcomes of PO have become a central issue because consumers treat and become attached to items differently based on their user–item relationships (Shu and Peck 2011). Outcomes are a significant area of interest when researching PO, and many have been identified, ranging from motivational and attitudinal to behavioural effects (Pierce and Jussila 2011). As Pierce et al. (2001, p.299) have noted: ‘feelings of ownership have important behavioural, emotional, and psychological consequences.’ PO can therefore be recognised as a significant psychological predictor of consumer motives, attitudes and behaviour (Jussila et al. 2015).

Pierce et al. (2003) argued that PO can have positive and negative outcomes. Positive outcomes of PO involve taking responsibility, protection and stewardship. As part of Davis et al.'s (1997) stewardship theory, the term ‘stewardship’ refers to situations in which individuals feel as though they are stewards, resulting in their behaving in the best interest of the principals, not based on their narrow interests. From a consumer research perspective, an increase in PO levels results in feelings of satisfaction and greater willingness to pay, enhancing the probability of protecting the target of ownership, long-term loyalty, positive citizenship behaviours and word-of-mouth (Jussila et al. 2015; Asatryan and Oh 2008; Shu and Peck 2011; Achabou and Aimé 2022). The concepts of attachment and attitude are different constructs (Thomson et al. 2005; Whan Park et al. 2010). PO evokes favourable attitudes and positive behavioural consumer responses (Peck and Shu 2009; Reb and Connolly 2007). Li and Atkinson (2020) found that satisfaction increases when individuals have higher levels of PO over items after consumption.

Responsibility is a positive outcome where the PO of an item increases feelings of responsibility (Pierce et al. 2003). In contrast to Pierce et al. (2001), others have proposed that a sense of responsibility for an item could lead to PO. Parker et al. (1997) argue that an individual's sense of ownership could increase when they perceive a high responsibility for an item. However, this conceptualisation is not consistent with Pierce et al. (2001), who perceive that responsibility arises as a result of PO, meaning that a sense of responsibility is not a component of PO but an outcome. Research investigating the consequences of PO has focused on valuation, but little attention has been paid to the implications of valuation on consumer behaviour (Peck and Luangrath 2018). For example, a low valuation of an item could result in low PO, and consequently low responsibility.

Although extensive marketing and economics research has been carried out into valuation, most studies explore this through the theoretical lens of the endowment effect (Thaler 1980), which is a potential outcome of PO. The 'endowment effect' refers to owners giving an item a high valuation because they own it (Thaler 1980). Richins (1994) reveals a strong positive relationship between high valuation of an item and its social and personal meaning. Feelings of ownership were found to be significant to the monetary valuation of items, with valuations increasing if an item is physically touched (Reb and Connolly 2007). In the second of Reb and Connolly's (2007) experiments, feelings of ownership were shown to increase valuations based on physical possession of an item – feelings similar to those who hold legal ownership. This study supports the hypothesis that physical possession can have a greater effect on feelings of ownership and valuations than legal ownership. This demonstrates the significant impact of possession on the endowment effect regardless of factual ownership. Additionally, Ariely and Simonson (2003) found that, in online auctions, legal ownership might not be necessary to lead to the endowment effect, as a psychological effect identical to legal ownership can be reached as a result of anticipatory possession or pseudo-endowment, meaning that attachment can take place before owning an item. An experimental study by Nayakankuppam and Mishra (2005) highlighted that owners tend to focus more on the positive aspects of owned items and less on negative aspects relative to non-owners. However, uncertainty remains about whether users might evaluate ABIs better if they feel a temporary sense of ownership.

Consumer behaviour research into PO tends to view it as positive with a willingness to increase for better outcomes, such as loyalty, responsibility and extra attention for items (Jussila et al. 2015; Peck and Luangrath 2018). However, negative outcomes could range from alienation or frustration to stress. Further, Pierce et al. (2001) debated whether damage or profound change to items over which consumers hold a strong sense of ownership could

lead to negative consequences such as adverse health effects, decreased self-concept and feelings of failure or weakness.

Much theoretical work explains the irresponsible and unsustainable outcome of shared ownership, such as the tragedy of the commons (Hardin 1968) and game theory (Rapoport and Chammah 1965). Both theoretical assumptions suggest that it is in the interests of individuals not to collaborate, which is the logical choice for them to make. Recent research has found that PO is an important element that contributes to successful and sustainable management of shared resources (Ambuehl et al. 2022). The novelty of ABC novelty brings the opportunity to counter previous assumptions about sharing behaviour. For example, when PO exists, it can lead to different and positive outcomes (Baker et al. 2021; Rogers 2021). ABC can also result in collective identifications and intentionality based on shared beliefs, meanings, behaviour and social practices (Belk 2014a; Morewedge 2021). Belk (2010) argues that sharing and access represent a potential alternative to self-ownership involving collective behaviour, potentially affecting feelings of ownership. This indicates a need to understand the various implications and perceptions of a sense of ownership in ABC.

Lee and Suh (2015) show how virtual community members develop the PO of their community, revealing that PO increases satisfaction (an attitude outcome), self-esteem (a self-concept outcome) and contribution quality (behavioural outcome). Consumer attachment to platforms can lead to a sense of PO over items offered through the platforms in question. A consumer might therefore perceive collective PO over a platform, affecting consumers' feelings about accessing items through the platform. Researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of consumers' feelings of collective PO of intangible targets such as 'the organisation', finding that this ownership possibly took place at a collective level (Brown et al. 2014; Wiggins 2018). This was subject to feelings of identification among consumers within a group and the organisation associated with this group.

Wiggins (2018) concluded that consumers perceive collective PO of an organisation when they can show their identities. This was evident, for example, in non-profit and hedonic organisations. In an organisational context, Pierce and Jussila (2010) have asserted that collective PO can lead to positive effects on outcomes at individual level, including affective commitment, in addition to high-quality cooperation and two-way positive group learning behaviour. However, a social identity motive is significant for the development of collective PO, although this is not notable in individual PO (Dawkins et al. 2017). Lee et al. (2019) found that attachment to an ABC platform is significant in developing a sense of PO, leading to positive organisational citizenship behaviours. Users might also accept a merging of identities with other peers like themselves (Albinsson and Yasanthi 2012). One of the more

neglected aspects of ABC is closer exploration of the impact and outcomes of PO (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Thus, a primary concern of ABC is dependent on PO outcomes – a foundation stone of this study.

This section discussed and critically evaluated the theoretical foundations of PO. It offered an overview of the literature around core elements of PO theory: motives, routes, the role of PRs and different types of outcomes. PO theory has important implications, which can explain the user-item relationship, and is an appropriate lens through which research questions can be abductively explored. The next section reviews recent PO research into ABC.

2.2.3 PO in ABC

This section aims to review how PO is discussed in recent ABC research. As shown in Table 2-7, conceptual and empirical work on PO has provided different conclusions because the theory of PO is immature in ABC. Conceptual research describes the role of PO as a critical behavioural driver (Singh and Giacosa 2019; Rogers 2021; Baker et al. 2021; Morewedge 2021), providing a deeper understanding of the user–item relationship and stimulating sustainable behaviours (Suessenbach et al. 2018). ABC influences the user–item relationship and collective belonging among users because of the psychological connection between users and ABIs (Belk 2014b) – a shift from ‘having’ to the importance of ‘being with’ (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021). Belk (2010) labels sharing when it extends outside the family as either ‘sharing out’ or ‘sharing in’. ‘Sharing out’ does not involve expanding the sphere of the extended self or any feeling of mutuality or sense of community. In contrast, ‘sharing in’ can result in users experiencing the feeling of having and an aggregated extended self through their participation in such sharing. Others have argued that ABC does not fulfil the psychological needs of users, in turn leading to barriers to diffusion (Singh and Giacosa 2019).

Empirical research has started using PO theory to investigate ABC and describe the user–item relationship – some examples are summarised in Table 2-7. Such research, though, has not explored how PO manifests itself or how users achieve a sense of PO. It is of particular interest to closely examine how ABIs differ in their potential as targets of PO. PO might be experienced differently in ABC because of changes in, for example, the user–item relationship and consumption. If PO has positive potential outcomes in such contexts, it will be valuable for ABC platforms to learn how to foster PO. Recent research has reached different outcomes regarding the role of PO in ABC (Park and Joyner Armstrong 2019; Lee and Chow 2020; Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021; Pino et al. 2022). For example,

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) reported that ‘the work of consumption’ is missed in ABC where PRs with ABIs do not take place. They found that PO was not felt, and ABIs might not affect extended self-formulation because of the short time spent with the item. However, Gruen (2017) examined the role of design in restoring the relationship between users and ABIs in car-sharing systems and found that design of the access system can affect PO of ABIs when an item is designed to recognise all user settings. Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) found that ABC platforms need to establish a mechanism of attachment and PO over the platform, leading to positive organisational citizenship behaviours.

Type	Study	Context/type of platform	Findings on PO
Conceptual	(Belk 2014b)	Sharing and ABC	Sharing indicates a feeling of collective belonging among users.
	(Suessenbach et al. 2018)	Sustainability	PO can stimulate sustainable behaviours in ABC.
	(Singh and Giacosa 2019)	Barriers in transition to ABC	PO is likely to influence users to avoid ABC.
	(Baker et al. 2021)	Synthesises PO theory and engagement theory	Individual and collective PO are antecedents of positive outcomes in ABC.
	(Morewedge 2021)	Antecedents of PO	Shows how implicit and explicit PO manifests itself over ABIs.
	(Rogers 2021)	Linking PO to ABC	PO conceptually applied to ABC generally, highlighting potential frustrations to PO development.
Empirical	(Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012)	Access-based automobile, (Zipcar)	There is no user–item relationship in ABC because the focus was on user values – although this can be overcome in some contexts.
	(Akbar et al. 2016)	Access-based automobile	Possessiveness materialism is the key inhibitor for consumer acceptance of ABC but the study overlooked distinguishing between legal ownership and PO.
	(Edbring et al. 2016)	Access-based furniture	Desire to own is an obstacle for ABS but the study only focused on legal ownership – their data, though, shows a clear narrative of PO.
	(Lawson et al. 2016)	ABC adoption	Consumers keen in developing feelings of ownership are not as inclined to participate in ABC.
	(Gruen 2017)	Access-based automobile, (Autolib)	Found that design of ABC can affect the user–item relationship and that users can achieve PO of ABIs (i.e., car) when a design project is embedded in the core of ABC.
	(Paundra et al. 2017)	Access-based automobile	PO is significant when comparing different forms of consumption. Consumers evaluate car attributes differently depending on high or low PO levels.
	(Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2018)	Access-based automobile	Feelings of ownership can develop without long-lasting relationships with a target in the car-sharing context.
	(Lee et al. 2019)	Airbnb hosts	Looks at how a peer provider develops PO for a platform as an organisation, finding that PO of the platform leads to positive organisational citizenship behaviours.
	(Park and Joyner Armstrong 2019)	ABFC	PO is important for ABFC, and lack of it hinders access intentions.

	(Fritze et al. 2020)	Scenario-based online experiment about car-sharing	PO can be felt, acting as a psychological substitute for legal ownership and increasing usage intention.
	(Lee and Chow 2020)	ABFC	Users who sought a strong PO over owned items found to have negative attitudes towards ABFC.
	(Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021)	Various ABIs	PO gave a new 'custodian' role to users of ABC.
	(Niklas and Gianneschi 2022)	ABFC	PO was difficult to feel or avoided in ABFC, failing to distinguish between legal and psychological ownership.
	(Pino et al. 2022)	Airbnb users	Identification with providers evokes PO of service settings, leading to users' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

Table 2-7 Literature overview on PO in ABC.

PO might have negative impacts, and can hinder cooperation between individuals (Pierce et al. 2001). This might be the case for ABC, where a decrease in individual PO can bring more benefits for all users (Singh and Giacosa 2019). For example, a user with a high PO level might prefer to keep an item for a long time, potentially affecting the sustainability of any sharing scheme. Such users might also be overprotective of an item, in turn leading to disruption of sharing activities (i.e. keeping ABIs for longer than necessary or not sharing products when they are no longer needed, preventing access at the end of their use). Individuals might become obsessed with enhancing their ownership at the expense of others. For example, misbehaviour increased among peer-users the more anonymous other users were (Schaeffers et al. 2016). Hulland et al. (2015) argue that PO has the potential to explain how and why users engage in misbehaviours. Piscicelli et al. (2015) report that material attachment could substantially hinder ABC engagement. However, consumers prefer ABC over ownership based-ownership because of its flexibility and freedom from difficulties such as emotional obligations rooted in ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) and other traditional ownership burdens (Schaeffers et al. 2016, Lawson 2011). An experimental study found that feelings of ownership over access-based providers satisfy users' need for ownership, representing a substitute for material ownership (Fritze et al. 2020). Users define themselves according to items regardless of ownership state, and express themselves with the symbolic meaning of ABIs through their ownership feeling (Paundra et al. 2017; Morewedge 2021).

A recent study by Lang and Armstrong (2018) applied the theory of planned behaviour to examine consumer intentions to adopt ABFC and found a significant influence of fashion leadership on consumers' intentions to engage in such modes of consumption. Awareness of a need for ABFC is not recent in clothing consumption. Niinimäki and Hassi (2011) opened up the discussion on the need for a radical new mindset and shift in clothing design, manufacturing, business and consumption. They found that consumers have a notable interest in using ABIs. However, ABFC has not been proven viable to continue

successfully (Armstrong et al. 2015). This might be attributed to use of an unfit structure for its business model (Adam et al. 2018). To push the use of ABFC, a provider's development strategies need to add focus on sustainability and community alongside other notions such as practicality, functionality, cost-effectiveness and individual benefits (Habibi et al. 2016) and, more importantly, feelings of ownership (Harding and Schenkel 2017). Lack of PO obstructs consumer inclination towards ABFC (Park and Armstrong 2019). ABFC platforms that facilitate accessing are arguably 'pseudo-sharing' because they do little to overthrow models of ownership (Belk 2014a; Habibi et al. 2016). However, such consumption could promote PO over the same ABIs, with the presumed implication of reducing demand for overall fashion consumption. Thus, acts of consumption through access lead to shifting ownership cultures, although not an absolute post-ownership stage (Richardson 2015).

The main challenge to ABFC is its contradiction with the dominant and well-established norm of enduring ownership (Belk 2007). Very little is currently known about the psychological element of ownership in ABFC. Fashion is a context with straightforward self-item associations because consumers psychologically associate themselves with their outfits. Sense of ownership is shaped and strengthened through identification with accessed items. The nature of the ideal self, the ability of fashion users to form self-item psychological attachments and previous endearing ownership experience of clothes create a path with high potential for the development of PO in ABFC. Ownership-based consumption is becoming increasingly problematic in terms of the environmental impact of the fashion industry. Reducing ownership-based consumption and the consequent waste of resources can be done through switching to ABFC. This is a fundamental reason for choosing fashion as the focus of the research context. In addition, solid theoretical foundations for ABFC research are needed to extend the empirical knowledge base across PO theory.

Collectively, these studies outline a critical role for PO in ABC, but none has addressed the study research questions (Section 2.3). However, no valuable exploratory study has taken place into forms of PO over ABIs, user-item relationships and how user interactions at different stages of access lead to particular outcomes and manifestations of PO.

2.2.4 Conclusion

For several reasons, the theory of PO (Sinclair and Tinson 2017; Baxter 2017; Morewedge 2021) is a useful framework for understanding psychological aspects of ABC. PO theory can be a valuable conceptual lens for studying the user-item relationship in ABC (Sinclair and Tinson 2017; Baxter 2017). Applying PO to ABC helps shed new light on this phenomenon,

providing a useful account to comprehensively examine underlying antecedents, routes and different types of consequences expected to determine the user–item relationship. It is now well established that PO can significantly influence consumer behaviour and attitude, yet the ways in which PO manifests itself and how users achieve a sense of PO over accessed items have not yet been fully explored.

As ABC covers various consumption contexts, this study approaches the study through the fashion context. First, the review also showed that ABFC is a natural context for exploring PO because several aspects of its practices are linked to elements of PO. Second, the development of new initiatives within this context represents an apparent change from traditional consumption (e.g., access and sharing clothes). Third, there are limited investigations into ABFC, as most research into ABFC has been conducted through a lens of sustainability with implications for sustainable fashion consumption, shifts in consumer preferences and motivations for and barriers to ABFC. It is also a context offering promise in a number of areas (e.g., environmental) (Fogel et al. 2017).

2.3 Summary and research questions

This review of the literature has presented the background to the important purposes of this study. It reviews the widespread adoption of ABC and the importance of psychosocial implications affecting the basic meaning, nature and dynamics of the user–item relationship. The review began by defining ABC, its spaces, its relevance to sustainability and new questions related to ownership. Different theories on feelings of ownership were then discussed along with their significance for ABC. The theoretical section details how PO develops for ABIs and the challenges presented by the development of ABC. The core elements of PO theory are also outlined, before a review of research in PO in ABC is presented.

Applying PO theory to ABC offers significant new questions for the theory itself and has potential to lead to an extended theory of ownership that explains the psychological aspects of the ABC phenomenon. PO theory has been applied to consumer behaviour because it provides a solid and valuable conceptual lens through which these topics can be studied (Hulland et al. 2015; Jussila et al. 2015), particularly regarding ABC (Sinclair and Tinson 2017; Peck and Luangrath 2018; Morewedge et al. 2021). Although some research has been carried out into the role and outcomes of PO in ABC, the mechanism by which these outcomes can be formulated has not been investigated in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Baker et al. 2021).

First, current understandings of whether and how consumers experience PO towards ABIs is limited as prior research has produced inconsistent and contradictory findings that PO can either be felt or not felt at all (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, Fritze et al. 2020). This study responds to calls to further explore PO in new forms of ABC (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012, 2017; Peck and Luangrath 2018; Fritze et al. 2020) and clarifies the role of PO for ABIs at different stages of access (Fritze et al. 2020). Second, there is a need to explore certain behaviours and attitudes that influence the increase or decrease of PO and how the intensity affects users in achieving a sense of PO. Most attention has focused on practices during access, only during holding of the physical ABI, ignoring forms of PO and the development of PO before and after access (Pham 2013; Peck and Luangrath 2018). Little is currently known about how users come to achieve a sense of PO at all stages of access – for example, how a digital representation of a physical ABI on a digital ABC platform might affect PO. ABC typically involves a digital platform with virtual representations of accessible items that can be viewed prior to access. On a more granular level, PO might be perceived differently in such a context, highlighting the importance of exploratory studies. Managers, policymakers and science benefit from exploring the user–item relationship and possible ways to manage PO and its outcomes.

Overall, this chapter provides an overview of ABC’s practices and characteristics and its ability to motivate PO, revealing that much uncertainty still exists about the user–item relationship (particularly PO) and indicating the need for research into PO in ABC. The following research questions were formulated to address these research gaps:

RQ 1: How does psychological ownership manifest itself in access-based consumption? The answer to this question helps to understand the nature of PO and adds valuable insights to the theory itself, addressing any confusion regarding its forms and roles on ABC. Eckhardt and Bardhi (2016) and Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) assumed the absence of ‘emotional attachments’ but lacked the substance for this claim.

RQ 2: How do users achieve a sense of psychological ownership over accessed items? Does ABC as a form of consumption combining both acts imply elements of PO through users’ actions? Some researchers argue that ABC could be a source for user engagement with elements of PO (e.g., Morewedge et al. 2021). PO frequently manifests itself in different forms of items, tangible and intangible, in consumption. Once again, researchers focused only on the access stage (i.e., physical stage), often

neglecting the importance of the pre- and post-access stages (i.e., digital stage). It is also unknown whether users intentionally seek to achieve a sense of PO over ABIs.

RQ 3: How do feelings of psychological ownership influence users' interactions with accessed items? The answer to this question helps to expand on the nature of PO in terms of the benefits and drawbacks of ABC because the critical aspect of Pierce et al.'s (2001) work relates to the inclusion of positive and negative effects of PO.

The following chapter presents the research methodology for these research questions. It first presents the scientific research paradigm before presenting the research design and strategy and discussing data collection and analysis decisions

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This thesis adopts an interpretivist research approach, which follows an exploratory design to obtain in-depth insights into users' perspectives. This chapter begins with a detailed explanation of the philosophical background of the study and demonstrates how the interpretive paradigm is appropriate for accomplishing the research objectives and addressing the phenomenon under investigation. This is followed by a discussion of the applied research strategy (abductive) and the research design (exploratory) in Section 3.2, before a justification of the research unit of analysis in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 outlines the research methods used: netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography. It also describes the selected participants, the nature of the data collected, how participants engaged in the study and the analysis undertaken, and addresses the limitations of each method. Lastly, Sections 3.5 and 3.6 outline the decisions relating to data analysis and the ethical considerations for each method.

3.1 Research paradigm

Methodology choice is more complex than just a choice between methods. Researchers rely on different philosophical assumptions when addressing research questions and phenomena under investigation and deciding on methods and processes of investigation (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). A paradigm is a general framework or viewpoint that indicates a common way of thinking (Burrell and Morgan 2006). It is based on assumptions about reality, and represents the way to conduct scientific research (Lincoln et al. 2011). Knowledge claims brought to different studies need to be evaluated, taking into account the assumptions of philosophical approaches: 'Philosophically, researchers make claims about what is knowledge (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), what values go into it (axiology), how we write about it (rhetoric), and the process for studying it (methodology)' (Creswell 2013, p.6). These fundamental viewpoints guide research practice, shape researchers' observations and influence how they draw conclusions from facts, usually providing different answers (Lincoln et al. 2011). Philosophical assumptions, and their methodologies, therefore represent framework of the research.

Positivism and interpretivism are the most used sets of assumptions relating to knowledge claims (Saunders et al. 2016). Positivist research emphasises causal explanation rather than understanding (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). It also involves value-free, measurable, objective and generalisable knowledge, without considering the importance of social and context-sensitive aspects of consumer research (May 2011; Rod 2009). Objects

of inquiry must thus be measurable when examined and studied by looking at cause-and-effect relationships between hypothesised variables (Gilbert 2016). Predicting consumer actions where the ultimate goal is to provide an explanation (Hirschman 1986; Hudson and Ozanne 1988) segregates reality in this way. Positivist research has been criticised for neglecting social development, eliminating the complex nature of the external world. Meanwhile, researchers have established hypotheses to either prove or disprove assumptions under cautiously controlled conditions. However, this philosophical stance explains rather than pursuing a deeper understanding (Bryman and Bell 2011; Saunders et al. 2016). Unlike positivism, for example, critical realism admits the effects of the social world and the importance of social practices in generating knowledge (May 2011). Critical realism argues that social reality is real, but independent from human perceptions (Sismondo 1993). Positivism and critical realism aim to observe things the way they are perceived.

Next, interpretivism is a relativistic philosophical stance that is a radical departure from positivism. The goal of knowledge is to develop an understanding of multiple realities and discover how people naturally construct meaning justified through different qualitative methods (Hirschman 1986). Although various versions of positivism have dominated consumer research and positivism was considered the traditional paradigm for consumer research from the 1950s to the 1980s (Buttle 1998; Goulding 1999; Easton 2002), most ongoing qualitative consumer research is based on a number of different epistemological perspectives. These include interpretivism, hermeneutics, critical inquiry, feminism, post-structuralism and post-modernism (Hogg and MacLaran 2008). Indeed, many well-established fields of consumer research embrace interpretivism. For example, research conducted on consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) adds great value to consumer behaviour studies. The paradigmatic and epistemological structure of knowledge creation has undergone many changes within consumer research (Shankar and Patterson 2001). There has been an increase in consumer research, which has adopted a wide range of qualitative approaches and humanistic perspectives (Hanson and Grimmer 2007; Rod 2009).

The foundations and theoretical perspective for this thesis came from literature on consumer behaviour, organisational behaviour and psychology. This thesis is guided by the interpretivist paradigm, employing different qualitative methods with a view to interpreting individual worlds, where reality can be multifaceted and perceived differently by individuals, generated through a search for meaning, beliefs and values, and through recognising the whole within its part and building research representations (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Intertextual interpretations also provide useful understandings of sociocultural meanings and beliefs (Thompson et al. 1994), attitudes and behaviour, which

are highly subjective (Thompson 1997). Thus, the multiple realities naturally constructed by individuals and irregular perceptions based on situational context (Berger and Luckmann 1991) are fundamental to claiming knowledge in consumer research (Rod 2009). Creating and increasing existing knowledge are key motives for conducting research in all paradigms (Saunders et al. 2016). However, as with all paradigms, interpretivism also suffers from some weaknesses – interpretivist findings cannot be generalised, there is a lack of distinction between content and process, and interpreting participants’ feelings and thoughts leads to questions about reliability and validity (Jenkins 2001). However, interpretivism is advantageous in understanding the reality of consumers’ feelings, experiences and actions, and explores the complexities of social phenomena rather than external forces (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Shankar and Patterson 2001).

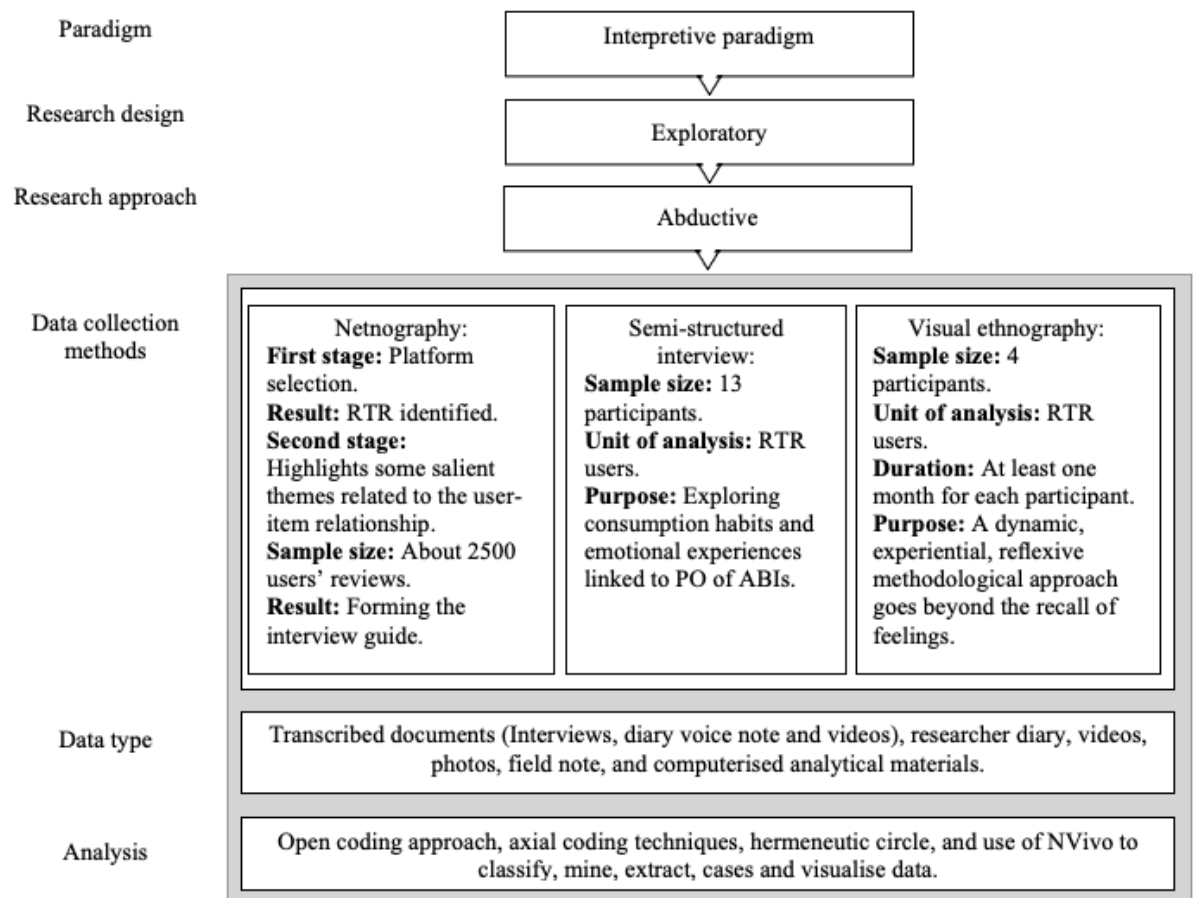


Figure 3-1 Research flow.

The interpretive paradigm has been employed in this thesis to interpret the meanings of the user–item relationship in ABC by exploring a wider narrative context of well-established PRs. With each access fashion transaction, platform users actively construct meanings about their access behaviour and the experiences of user–item interaction, leading to multiple meanings of their actions. Looking at access through a PO lens, we also explore

changes in the user–item relationship. This enriches our understandings not only of changes in fashion consumer mindsets and realities, but also the growing range of ABC. Moreover, many studies of PO (e.g. Karahanna et al. 2015) and PO in ABC (e.g. Lee et al. 2019) are positivist and thus treat PO as something to be measured and linked to various variables. Adopting an interpretivist perspective provides an opportunity to understand how consumers understand and experience PO. Finally, a major decision of this research strategy is to determine particular methods of data collection and analysis. As explained in the research flow (Figure 3-1), this study has pursued an interpretivist approach and used qualitative methods to extend understandings of the user–item relationship in ABC.

3.2 Research design and strategy

This section aims to describe the important decisions relating to research design and research strategy. To address the research questions in this research, an interpretivism paradigm was assumed to undertake an abductive approach, in line with an exploratory research design. The exploratory research design and abductive research strategy are explained and justified in this section. The state of existing theoretical and empirical research, the aims of the research conducted and the research questions have a major influence on the entire research process. These three elements thus have crucial weight in the preparation stage (Edmondson and McManus 2017).

3.2.1 Type of research design

The first concern of the research design relates to the approach taken. The research aim determines whether the research is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory, and has extra impact on decisions concerning methodology and data collection

(Miles et al. 2014). An exploratory research design is often used to identify a problem more precisely, and facilitate conceptual development and design of instruments, also providing new knowledge about a certain phenomenon (Miles et al. 2014; Saunders et al. 2016). In contrast, descriptive research, known as statistical research, is concerned with discovering the essential features of a phenomenon, and with categorising and classifying findings (Churchill and Iacobucci 2006). Descriptive studies assume prior knowledge of phenomena under research and one or more defined hypotheses direct the research, which represents a radical difference from exploratory research. Explanatory research, also known as causal research, is conducted in order to examine the degree and nature of the cause-and-effect relationship (Saunders et al. 2016). Explanatory research examines the relationship

between variables using various statistical tests. Different types of research design are shown in Figure 3-2.

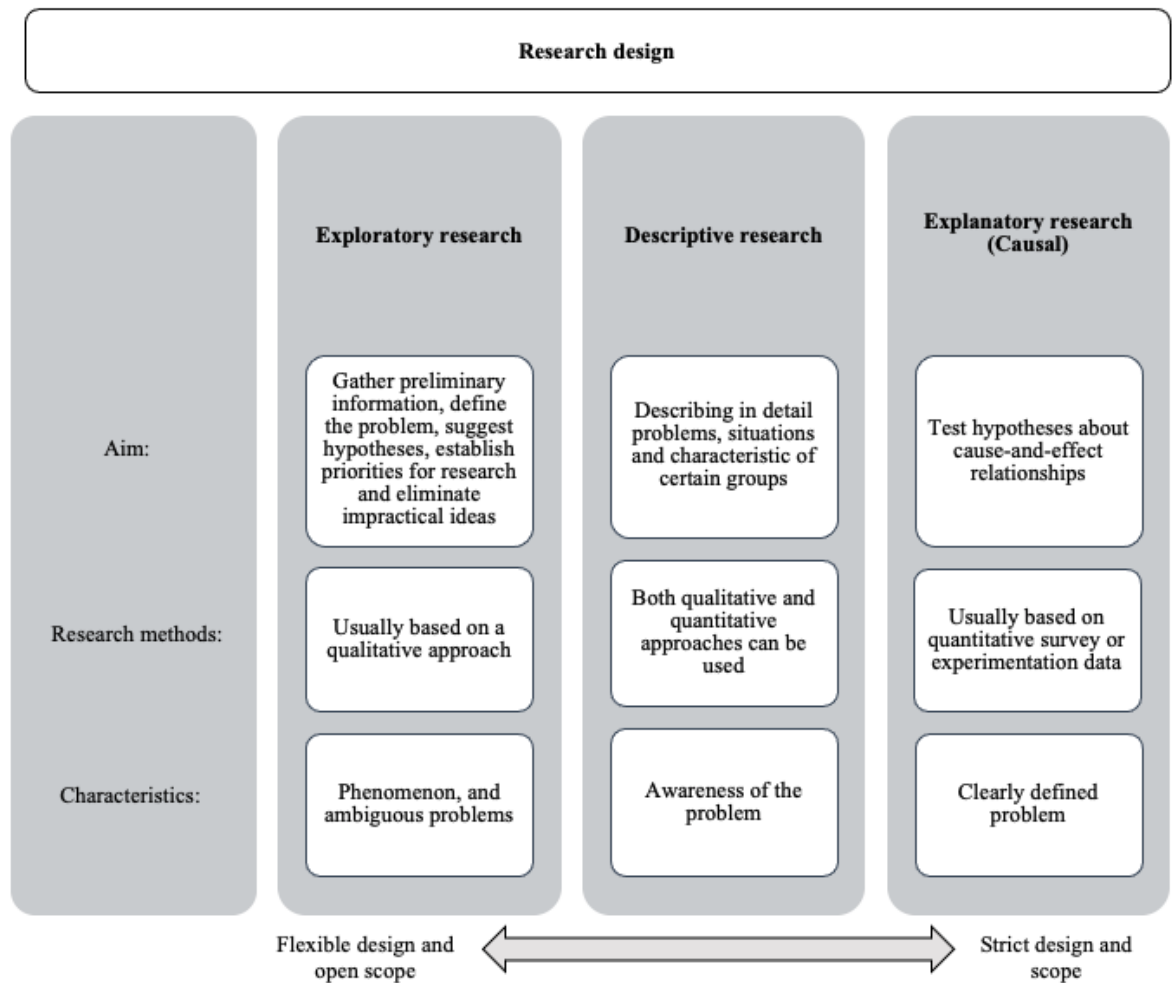


Figure 3-2 Types of research design (adapted from Churchill and Iacobucci 2006).

As outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), existing knowledge of the mechanisms that underpin PO in ABC is not fully understood. Additionally, the review also helped obtain an understanding of the philosophical and methodological approaches, and assumptions adopted in empirical studies. They vary between tested or theorised causal models of PO’s impact or generate knowledge within consumer culture theory’s subjectivist, interpretive tradition. This study takes the latter approach and explores a set of research questions that aim to establish, in depth, how users themselves interpret user–item relationship and assess its impact. The changes brought by ABC styles to the user–item relationship have renewed interest in exploring different motives, antecedents and consequences of PO of ABIs, in turn affecting consumer behaviour (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Morewedge et al. 2021). Existing empirical studies often neglect to consider how PO manifests itself and how users attempt to achieve a sense of PO over ABIs. The exploratory

approach is therefore deemed the most suitable research design over a descriptive or explanatory classification.

Furthermore, researchers should use a phenomena-driven approach, using exploratory research, when investigating a phenomenon at an intermediate stage of theory development (Bryman and Bell 2011). Taking into account the intermediate state of prior theory (PO theory) as well as changes in ownership mindset in liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Peck and Luangrath 2018), qualitative data thus helps elaborate phenomena, allowing openness to unexpected insights. Indeed, adopting an exploratory research design enables the use of PO theory as a lens through which to investigate the user–item relationship in ABC. This helps to challenge or modify previous work into PO (Edmondson and McManus 2017), located within a mature stream of research that assumes full ownership.

3.2.2 Research strategy

The second concern relates to research strategy, and whether theory or data comes first. Considering the significant role of theory when conducting research, not all research is established with theory at the beginning (Creswell 2014). Three different approaches towards theory can be used: deductive, inductive or abductive reasoning (Bryman and Bell 2011), as shown in Figure 3-3.

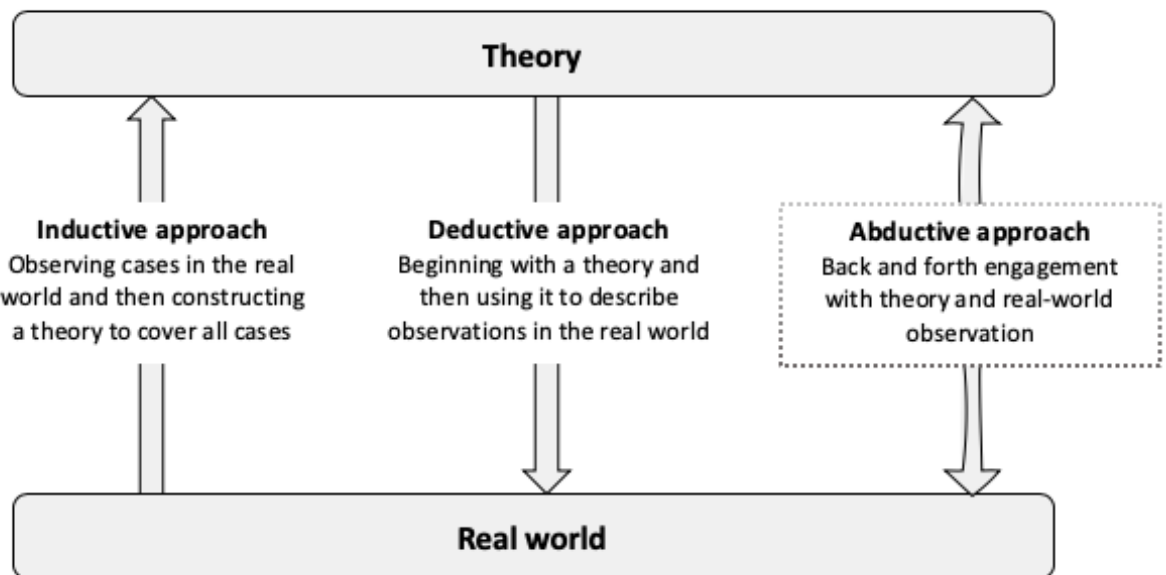


Figure 3-3 Research strategy, three different approaches towards theory (adapted from Wilkins et al. 2019).

Deductive reasoning is a top-down approach, embedded in theory and involving building and testing hypotheses and, finally, deducing what results should be when the hypothesis is correct (Bryman and Bell 2011). In the inductive approach, known as a bottom-up approach,

research begins with observations, before developing patterns and finishing with developing a theory or provisional theory (Saunders et al. 2016). Finally, the abductive approach involves back and forth engagement with theory and data, which is helpful in discovering other new variables and relationships (Dubois and Gadde 2002; Ketokivi and Mantere 2010). The main aim is therefore to generate new concepts and develop theoretical models, instead of confirming an existing theory (Dubois and Gadde 2002).

The choice was influenced by Edmondson and McManus's (2017) suggestion that, when studying a phenomenon, the researcher needs to engage back and forth with theory and data using abductive reasoning, looking for unusual evidence with a research focus on the best explanations for events. Most researchers use deductive and inductive approaches at various points in their studies, strengthening their theoretical foundation. However, the abductive approach is considered different from a hybrid of deductive and inductive approaches because it focuses on theory development rather than developing propositions or generating theories (Dubois and Gadde 2002; Bamberger 2018). This research therefore applies an abductive approach to a logic of iterative exploration between theory and empirical observations.

This research examines the theoretical underpinnings of PO within the under-researched context of ABC. It does this in two stages: first, concepts are identified by looking for themes generated from prior research and the theoretical background. Second, the collected materials are analysed by identifying diverse and distinct themes and classifications. Use of an abductive approach enables flexibility and rich engagement with materials to make the most of data collected. Thus, the data analysis involves the use of abductive research to reveal themes for meaningful interpretation, taking into consideration the specific characteristics of the study context. Reflexivity is important to enhance the quality of research because it is necessary to continue questioning researchers' positions, as their background does matter (Creswell and Clark 2011). Reflexivity pertains to the 'process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (Berger 2015, p.220). Consequently, researchers who follow such ontological, epistemological and axiological stances need to be self-aware of their values and committed to high levels of consciousness with attention to their biases, beliefs and personal experiences of their research, and they need to recognise, examine and understand how these aspects of their social background affect their research practice (Pink 2001; Haynes 2012). This will be further discussed in the data analysis (Section 4.5).

3.2.3 Research methods

Researchers have different reasons for deciding to engage in a branch of knowledge usually clarified by answering ‘what’ questions. Other questions, such as ‘how’ and ‘why’, need extensive philosophical thought because they are linked to deciding the most suited methodology when approaching issues under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Kozinets 2015). Qualitative methods typically aim to address such questions (Patton 2005) and provide answers from the viewpoints of participants (Spiggle 1994). Research methodology needs to be fit for purpose and thus philosophically informed and contextually suitable. Qualitative methods are needed for research that focuses on exploring novel aspects of the social world because such methods usually facilitate intensive descriptive accounts of individuals’ attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, views and feelings (Miles et al. 2014; Giesler and Thompson 2016). Qualitative data relies on participants’ lived experience, which enhances its usefulness in investigating consumption phenomena such as the feeling of ownership in ABC.

Qualitative methods can, according to Miles et al. (2014), empower the exploration of issues that can be complicated to study through quantitative means. Other scholars have critically reviewed instruments that measure PO and concluded that a need existed for multiple methods, including a qualitative component (Dawkins et al. 2017; Olckers and van Zyl 2017). A quantitative approach might be possible if the research objectives seek common definitive findings, but this research aims to explore distinct and unique individual experiences that are situated and contextual. Previous research has demonstrated that underlying psychological needs fulfilled by feelings of PO are multifaceted and their influence on behaviour can be complex (as reviewed in Chapter 2). Thus, using qualitative methods is justifiable because of the thesis objectives, and to obtain different understandings about existing phenomena (Stern 1980).

Taking into account the limited research devoted to PO in ABC, multiple qualitative methods were considered because of the exploratory nature of this research, with the aim of discovery rather than justification (Goulding 2002), taking into account the need for data and method triangulation (Brown et al. 2010; Flick 2018). Using qualitative data can assist in proposing new constructs, recognising important process variables, exploring new relationships among variables and reconceptualising explanatory structures (Peck and Luangrath 2018). The flexible nature of qualitative methods is useful for obtaining further insights in an exploratory study of this type (Edmondson and McManus 2017). Knowledge claim and strategies of inquiry influence approaches to research and research design processes (Creswell 2003). This study has adopted an exploratory research design, whereby

data is collected using multiple qualitative methods (i.e., netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography). The next sections describe and justify the specific research context for this thesis, before discussing each method separately.

3.3 Research context

RTR was one of the first sites to allow users to access fashion and is considered the largest access-based fashion platform in the US (Johnston 2019; Little 2019). RTR was founded in 2009 by two students and was valued at \$1 billion in 2019 (Maheshwari 2019). It began as a C2C initiative, connecting owners of expensive and rarely used fashion items to other users for a fraction of the items' retail cost, before shifting its operations and moving to a B2C model in 2013 (BOF 2018). The RTR platform has since acquired over 10 million members (Boorstin 2019). This platform makes the top ten of the CNBC Disrupter 50 list of companies, whose innovations are changing the business world, alongside Airbnb and Uber (CNBC 2018), moving up to fifth place in 2019 (CNBC 2019). The platform is still the main player within this market (Liu et al. 2022). Such a platform not only affects established business models, but changes the rules of consumption and calls many related consumption theories into question. This is apparent through radical changes in users' behaviour with the shift from solid to liquid consumption and the powerful forces brought by this change to user-item relationships (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017).

The research regarded access-based fashion users as the main unit of analysis. Thus, users of RTR is the unit of analysis in all utilised methods, with the aim of exploring their access behaviour as a function of users' PO. The object of PO is thus ABIs accessed through RTR. The researcher recruited participants who were current users of RTR. Choosing users of such a large and well-established ABC platform enabled exploration of users' norms, attitudes and behaviours. RTR is also the market leader within ABFC, with all the features of ABC. The platform gives users access to remarkable experiences, completely changing methods of consumption. It provides different outfits and accessories and users can use a single-access option or choose between available subscriptions. Currently, RTR offers three subscriptions (monthly pick-me-up, outfit updates and weekly newness) (RTR 2022). Each subscription comes with a different benefit, such as a particular number of shipments or items per month. For example, users can access four items in one shipment with a 'monthly pick-me-up' subscription. With 'outfit updates', users can access eight items in two shipments per month. The 'weekly newness subscription' lets users swap out sixteen items in up to four shipments a month. Users can renew access to an item for as long as they like in all subscriptions. The platform has a high level of engagement. It has elements of Muniz

and O’Guinn’s (2001) three signs of community: shared consciousness, PRs/traditions and a sense of moral responsibility (reported in Chapters 4–6). Conducting research with a focus on the lifestyle consumption community is arguably fruitful because this community has more extensive influence over consumer behaviour (Närvänen et al. 2013). Relations with communities are often disconnected because of consumption activities (Rogers and Botsman 2010), except for ABC, where consumers usually need to engage within an online community. RTR matched the platform identification and selection criteria which is part the netnography process (Section 3.3.1.2). Users of RTR share their experiences and enthusiasm and fit the sampling frame criteria for the study, discussed in Section 3.4.3.

3.4 Data collection methods

The aim of this thesis is not only to examine whether individuals have feelings of ownership, but also how they are achieving this state and its outcomes. One difficulty relates to how to elicit data to provide a credible and convincing story about forming such feelings in this context. Thus, the thesis adopts a multimethod qualitative approach: netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography on the research unit of analysis.

The initial phase involved the use of netnographic observation (Kozinets 2020) of communication among users of ABFC. The aim of this phase is to identify the target online community, immerse the researcher in the community, become familiar with the RTR platform and help with formulation of the interview guide. Netnographic enquiry was used as an initial scoping exercise for larger quantitative studies. For example, Chan and Li (2010) used netnography to provide preliminary understandings of the practice, incorporating potential drivers and impacts of reciprocity among consumer-to-consumer interactions in virtual communities, followed up by an online survey with their targeted community to validate their observations. In another example, Brodie et al. (2013) used interviews in addition to netnography to gain a more in-depth examination of the meanings that participants ascribe to their online narratives. Based on Heinonen and Medberg’s (2018) systematic literature review, netnography has been successfully combined with other methods, triangulating findings, ensuring study trustworthiness, refining research questions in initial steps, and developing other research stages – for example, collecting interview data or formulating experiments. They concluded that consumer research would benefit greatly from including a netnographic dimension in multimethod research, particularly for consumption experiences that involve a high level of digitalisation where offline and online activities cannot be separated. The adaptable and flexible nature of the netnography has been found useful in different research settings (Kozinets 2015). Thus, netnography is more

compatible with other methods such as interviews (Brodie et al. 2013; Walther and Sandlin 2013), experiments (Keinan and Kivetz 2011) and surveys (Ekpo et al. 2015).

The first method granted more attention to naturally occurring interactions and communications in natural settings (i.e., netnography). It did not allow for interaction but provided width of data and coverage, harnessed in interviews, as well as visual ethnography (digital diaries, content created by participants) for more in-depth data (Hine 2000). Visual ethnography can establish an etic level of understanding. This is very specific but from a smaller sample. Additional methods to collect data can overcome the limitations of the single non-participant method (Bryman and Bell 2007; Kozinets 2002). Thus, the main phase involved use of both semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography. Both methods explore individual perceived feelings of PO. This helps to examine meanings of ownership by looking at participants' own experiences in all stages of access. The sequential data collection of the main phase and the iterative flow between data collection and analysis enables better understandings of the key identified themes (Patton 2005).

The multimethod qualitative approach makes it possible to identify elements structuring the feeling of ownership in a detailed fashion. Such methods were used together, for example, to analyse how symbolism can emerge through material, forming individuals' attitudes and behaviours (McGrath et al. 2013). The overall research design exposed this relationship in more meaningful ways than a single-method approach (Pink 2004; Kozinets 2015). Visual, non-visual, participatory and non-participatory methods are required to make sense of the user-item relationship. Each method therefore addressed the limitations of others, allowing data and method triangulation, and each method complemented those that followed. The sections that follow explain and justify the use of these methods.

3.4.1 Initial phase (Netnography)

Netnography was used in the initial phase of data collection. Kozinets was first to use the term 'netnography' in the late 1990s, combining the words 'internet' and 'ethnography' (Kozinets 1997, 1998). Netnography can be defined as a qualitative research methodology that uses the procedures of ethnographic research in the study of online communities through looking at archival, elicited and fieldnote data (Kozinets 1997). The method is about understanding communities' experiences of individuals and groups based on online social interaction and content to obtain a scientific understanding of communities (Kozinets 2020). Hine (2000) uses the term 'virtual ethnography', which refers to using the ethnographic tradition in the social space of the internet. Some researchers often use the terms online ethnography, virtual ethnography and netnography interchangeably and without precision.

Others acknowledge the similarity but realise that netnography is a well-established term (Costello et al. 2017). Netnography incorporates a specific set of online ethnographic procedures defined by a particular methodology, providing an epistemological background, analytical approaches and guidelines for a research plan, entrée (Entrée refer to choose the most relevant online communities for particular research interests (Kozinets 2020)), data collection, data analysis and presentation. These processes are applicable across a spectrum of online involvement, with more attention given to obtaining access to an online community (Kozinets 1997, 2002, 2015, 2020).

Consumer research has adopted a netnographic methodology to investigate consumers' online discussions in many different marketing topics, including consumer identity (Mair and Reischauer 2017), brand community (Hemetsberger 2003; Kozinets 2015) and service-related research (Muniz and O'guinn 2001). Although most netnographic research has focused on aspects of consumer culture and behaviour, this method constitutes a useful tool for exploring various consumer research topics (Medberg and Heinonen 2014), also giving many opportunities for netnographic research into consumer psychology (Kozinets 2015). Indeed, consumer researchers have found netnography to be a significant tool for accessing consumer data and making sense of it. Netnography is more useful for identifying and unfolding what surrounds this research problem.

When there is a need to explore novel consumption behaviours, netnography helps researchers to become immersed in the target community to obtain insightful data. For example, the method helps to explore factors that influence the strength of PO over ABIs, reflected by users' online communication engagement. This method enables focus on patterns of community action, prioritising understanding activities, practices and perspectives through online communication that naturally occurs (Kozinets 2010). Such a naturalistic inquiry is important in illuminating the complexities of the user-item relationship and the psychological state that occurs in ABC, revealed by users' symbolic interactionism. The netnographic method was most suitable because of its ability to reach a diversity of viewpoints within the community in this initial phase. Kozinets (2002, 1998) found that online comments are significant sources of data and places where online consumers can engage in activities or discussions that reflect their interests. Netnography is a reliable method in this elected area of specialism, enabling researchers to gain crucial information about consumer behaviour (Chan and Li 2010; Närvänen et al. 2013). Online user interactions have enabled the development of online communication reflecting consumer cultures in this context, leading to the need for ethnographic methods that 'can

therefore be used to develop an enriched sense of the meanings of the technology and the cultures which enable it and are enabled by it' (Hine 2000, p.8).

Netnography has several other advantages over other research methods for the initial phase of research. Netnographic data is collected from a naturalistic setting that provides a view in action rather than a view of action as in other traditional methods. Netnographic data can accurately represent the lived realities of the targeted unit of analysis (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Netnography facilitates reaching different levels of data access, where members of the targeted community are communicating more passionately. Such online interaction can provide intensive data that cannot be gained through physical approaches. Netnographic-based methods provide means of excelling at telling a story and providing rounded, detailed illustrations of complex social phenomena, assisting in developing themes from respondents' points of view (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Another major advantage of netnography is that it has the best reflective quality and continuity in the analysis of online narratives where users tend to provide solid and convincing arguments, and netnography also facilitates researchers to reach a view of customers' everyday lives (Rokka 2010; Kozinets 2015). The social meanings of ABC can be reflected on and emerge through related activities. Kozinets (2010) argues that such activities should be perceived as cultural communicators.

The number of access fashion users involved in online social communities is currently increasing, whether from platform communities or non-communities. To better understand and observe the behaviour of users within online communities, Kozinets (2015) argued that netnography can improve consumer research to understand individuals' self-representation and systems of meaning. Online communities also serve as translocal sites of cultural practice (Rokka 2010). This inevitably imposes an option in such empirical research to explore any exposure of the user-item relationship in the online community. As fashion platforms have unique online communities with special tools for articulating emotion and experiences with ABIs, there is a tendency among a wide range of users to use different social media sites and have an active-oriented nature to reflect on their access-based experiences. The benefit of netnography is that it enables exploration of new areas of social life and can provide in-depth understandings of digital-related social interactions that would be challenging to access through other methods. For example, the intervention of research using traditional methods influences participants' responses and might not reflect normal practices in everyday life (Heinonen and Medberg 2018). Moreover, users of some access-based platforms usually write their reviews after completing their access, so their reflections on their experiences are not influenced by observation (Kozinets 2015). The natural, normal

practices of users' engagement with fashion access platforms and their online communities guide this empirical research.

Netnography has been used to understand the culture of users with both online and offline PRs. Online consumer engagement is part of the consumption process in many ABC practices. Users of ABC tend to share their experiences in online communities, aiming to establish their own reputation and become part of the communities in question (Keinan and Kivetz 2011). For example, most access-based communities interact with various online materials involving textual and visual elements and rating systems. However, access-based fashion users are more active than other access users because of the nature of the accessed fashion items, and the link between fashion and identity. The more consumers engage in online activities within their community, the more researchers will need to employ internet-based methods and adapt qualitative methods to take into account such interaction and communication (Teubner et al. 2016; Cheng et al. 2019). Netnography is one relevant method that offers several benefits over other research methods mainly because part of the ABC style inevitably takes place on the online platform, which is one of the prominent features of ABC (Adjei et al. 2010).

3.4.1.1 Data collection (netnography process)

There are five crucial steps to conducting a well-organised netnography: research plan, entrée, data collection, data analysis and presentation and discussion of the findings (Kozinets 2015), as shown in Figure 3-4. These five steps are explained in detail in this section.

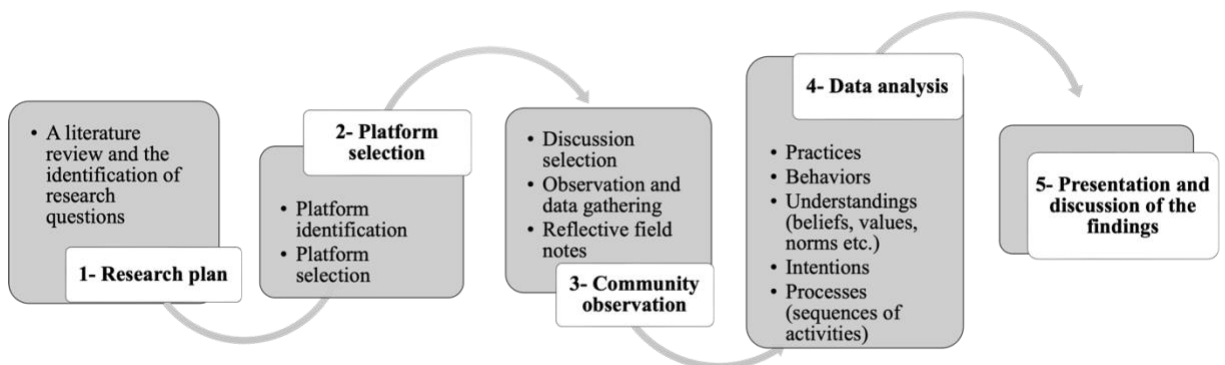


Figure 3-4 Netnography process (author's illustration adapted from Kozinets 2015).

In relation to the type of data collected, the researcher needs to harness three broad types of netnographic data: archival data, co-created data and fieldnote data (Keeling et al. 2013;

Kozinets 2015; Heinonen and Medberg 2018). First, archival data includes all online social experience-related data produced by the members of the community that can be found and collected. Second, co-created data is based on online social interaction between the researcher and members of the community under analysis (Kozinets 2015). Third, fieldnote data is created from reflexive fieldnotes taken during the research, reflecting upon the experiences of the researcher in the social field. Fieldnote data is gathered as a result of the researcher's immersion within the cultural data of multiple online data sources (Gatson 2011; Kozinets 2015, 2002).

Netnography, and any type of ethnographic research, is based on the broader methods of passive (i.e., non-participatory) or active (i.e., participatory) observation, resulting in establishing a participant role among consumers observed (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Kozinets 2015). Based on their work, non-participation occurs when the researcher merely observes and does not become involved in direct contact with participants, relying on archival data and fieldnote data. Participatory netnography requires active participation between these related parties, whereby the researcher attempts to elicit data and co-create it. In that sense, the difference between the two types is limited to direct engagement between the researcher and observed participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The data was collected based on a non-participatory netnography. Non-participatory netnography was chosen in the initial phase to ensure that the researcher had no effect on initial data generation. As Alavi et al. (2010, p.88) pointed out, passively monitoring a community ensures that 'the analysis is conducted in the natural context of the community and thus is free from the bias which may arise through the involvement of the researcher or experimental research setting.' Thus, no elicited data was collected in the initial phase.

- **Platform identification and selection**

Following a similar process to that advocated by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), this thesis tracked and searched for rich textual discourse and identified access-based fashion platforms using a language coming from its users. This required exploration of everything related to platform users, incorporating reflection on the personal connections that users establish in cyberspace and how relationships occur between related parties, such as users, items and platforms (Kozinets 2015). These well-known platforms were identified based on numbers of followers on social media sites and how active these users are within these online social accounts. The initial phase of netnography was not limited to RTR. The focus was on user-generated content, such as posts on discussion boards, reviews on rating sites, discussions and comments on social networking sites, blogs and other means. These multiple

archival sources of data helped to gain a holistic view of the user–item relationship in access-based fashion communities, as shown in Table 3-1.

Community selection process	
The domain of data collection	Online discussion forum Review sites Social networking sites Non-commercial websites Comments on news articles Fieldnote data
Target community	Previous and current users of ABFC
Data types	Text Pictures Videos
Outcome	a) Different narratives between users and non-users of ABFC identified. b) Led to community identification. c) Led to focus on specific access-based fashion community. d) New directions derived.

Table 3-1 Overview of community selection process.

Table 3-2 shows the different dimensions used to reveal the formation of observation patterns within the collected data. These coding dimensions were used to systematically identify the most relevant access-based fashion platform and also assisted in identifying patterns within a specific context in ABC. For example, it is important to know whether the user narrative is related to B2C or C2C platforms or the source of data, and whether it is an access-based community or sustainability-concerned community. These dimensions were used to guide platform selection. Users of such platforms need to reflect on specific access experiences and provide in-depth information about their attitudes and feelings.

Coding dimensions for background research into ABFC		
Coding dimension (cases)	Description	Examples
Type of platform	This refers to the business model of the platform, whether B2C and C2C. This provided a clear background of how the user narrative might differ. Most data came from B2C platforms, which dominated the market at that time.	Platform type B2C Platform type C2C

Platform name	Data was coded based on different platforms, which helps to understand business models and user narrative.	Fitzroyrentals, Girl meets dress, Le Tote, Rent the Runway, Stitchfix, Style Theory, WearTheWalk or general discussion, no specific platform.
Type of organisation	This refers to the purpose of a platform to provide a better understanding of ABFC and how it differs from this aspect.	For-profit Non-profit
Type of source	This refers to the type of source – whether from users, providers or news.	News article and its comments, Organic comments, and related to a platform online content marketing.
Timeline	Observed data mainly falls between 2018-2019.	Old–2010, 2010–2013, 2013–2016, or 2016–present.
Community	Community dimensions to find out who reveals feelings of ownership within their narratives.	Access-based community, Fashion community, or Sustainability-concerned community.

Table 3-2 Practical coding dimensions used during different cycles of data analysis.

The decision to select users from a single platform as the unit of analysis is important for a multimethod qualitative approach not only to keep data collection at manageable and reasonable levels, but because different practices within ABC might reveal conflicting data (Belk 2014; de Rivera et al. 2017). Targeting a single online community is one of the main netnographic principles to enable valid findings to be reached (Kozinets 2010). The purpose of identification and selection process was to identify the most suitable platform for this research, resulting in use of an access-based fashion platform (RTR) to explore PO among its users. The official RTR site and community meet most of the site selection guidelines suggested by Kozinets (2015, 2020) – relevance, activity, interactivity, substantiality, heterogeneity, and richness. As RTR users interact and develop their presence through online means in the community, its culture and PRs are dynamically alive online, on social media sites and the official RTR site. RTR users engage with textual and visual elements and rating systems. Indeed, RTR users are more active than other platforms’ users because of the platform design and the type of business model. For example, RTR facilitates its users to provide important reviews on what users are wearing, what they like about it, what they do not like about items, users’ ages, ratings, sizes, features, dates, body types and occasions. Other platforms do not facilitate its users to share such data. Other reasons include but are not limited to many users (discussed in Section 3.3), the volume of access, and the variety of ABIs.

- **Targeted community observation**

Then, observing RTR took place which is the third step of netnography process. Users of RTR were chosen because they are the most meaningful participants in how they use their platform, reflect on their use, and share their experiences online. Purposive sampling was undertaken to ensure a range of reviews from different user age groups, item types, images and occasions. Indeed, Kozinets (2015) acknowledged that netnographic sampling tend to be purposive rather than representative to include hard-to-reach narratives or groups. These users' reviews are also linked to the contextual environment and users always refer to an actual item or experience within their reviews, giving greater importance to the data collected from such platforms. Figure 3-5 shows an example of these reviews. The researcher scanned and analysed a substantial number of users' reviews (approximately 2,500), which enabled familiarisation with RTR's online culture and cultivated a list of keywords, key phrases and language specific to identified themes

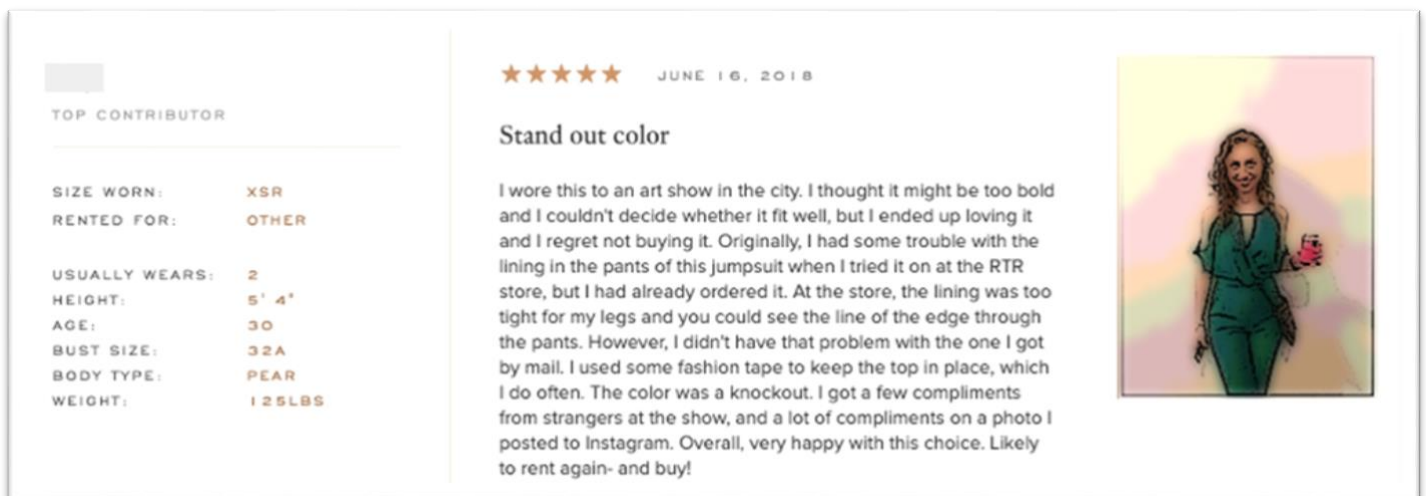


Figure 3-5 Example of observed RTR review.

Consumer reviews are considered important domains of data collection for netnographers because consumers' reviews provide a great deal of information that connect to real-life experiences (Sandlin 2007; Ordenes et al. 2017). In agreement with Hamilton and Wagner (2011) and Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2012), who used reviews as their main data source, it is acknowledged that reviews do not necessarily represent all access-based fashion users, but are reflective of RTR's users, who tend to be open in their opinions, rating their experiences. This platform was found to be viable because it provides the most relevant achievable data to research questions and has a large active number of participants and an abundance of descriptive data.


Dress tag: Nha Khanh Not available any more	Details	Comments collected based on age	Number of review by group.	Aggregate number of coding references
	Number of review and rating: (1685) Rating: 4.5/5 Platform: Rent The Runway	20-29	-	Attachment: 8 Identity: 5 Route coming to know: 4 Complimented: 4 Pleasure/fun: 3 Behavioral consequences/word of mouth: 2 Other...
		30-39	-	Complimented: 3 Identity: 3 Behavioral consequences/word of mouth: 2 Behavioral consequences/re-renting in the future: 1 Attachment: 2 Newness: 1 Other...
		40-49	-	Identity: 9 Attachment: 7 Complimented: 6 Behavioral consequences/re-renting in the future: 6 APC-Fit: 3 Route coming to know: 2 Pleasure/fun: 2 Other...
		50-59	-	-

Figure 3-6 Analysing a review about a dress in RTR and identify aggregate number of coding in each review.

Following a similar procedure in the first cycle (finding community), which adopted from Kozinets and Handelman (2004) and Kozinets (2015) to identify relevant sources of textual discourse and historically established cultural meaning within the targeted community official platform (i.e., Rent the Runway). During the second cycle (finding reviews) these procedures can be divided into two steps: first step concerned with identifying an ABI to analysis user's interaction and review with regard to a specific ABI, however, thousand of items are available for access, which in turn necessitates the adoption of procedures to select a variety of products that can represent a wide range of individual access options to avoid any bias and obtain a comprehensive perception. These procedures involves using various features that available within the RTR platform such as filters research based on recommendations (either positive or negative), price (e.g., low to high and high to low), trends (e.g., new arrival, most popular and designer spotlight), type of transactions (e.g., one-time rental, unlimited rentals, and monthly shipment), type of occasions (e.g., wedding, work and everyday), type of outfits (e.g., dress and accessories) and other important features. All these filters were used to ensure various ABIs, and their reviews and related information is picked, and to identify rich reviews of RTR users, rather than relying on Rent the Runway

platform rankings of reviews and results. Because of these filters were not used by the researcher, rankings of products and reviews will be ordered based on an algorithm that brings specific results up.

It is worth to mention that after selecting a specific object from these searching procedures, another group of filters were used to pick reviews for analysis. This second step concerned with reordering reviews on selected ABIs based on users ages, rating, sizes, featured, date, reason to access and body type for the same previous reason. These sort features were used to capture several of users' reviews and to avoid any bias or relying on Rent the Runway platform rankings. For example, RTR review has the tool where user can see the highest, lowest, recent and featured rating. The collected rating was based on the highest, lowest rating which can provide more information about both happy and unhappy experience and how these are reflected in identified themes from the first wave of netnographic data collection.

There are evident differences between positive and negative reviews or type of ABIs. For example, there is a high potential to find relevant information to routes, motives, consequences of PO in highest rating reviews, as users are happier about their experience and reflect on feeling with the accessed experience to items. However, for lowest rating reviews, most of the users' comments are on unmatched expectations with the material and size of the accessed items; thus, not enough data related to the focus of the research can be found on lowest rating reviews. But there is some great deal of data related to attachment to an online closet, and expectation themes.

Exploring and interpreting moments within these reviews requires consideration of the internal and external relations of these texts – for example, looking at type of subscription, photos, type of fashion items, user age, kinds of occasions and other available information. This helps to provide an overview of interactions and experiences, as well as connecting these reviews to a wide range of meanings. In netnography, the context of collected data is particularly important at the different stages of sorting, categorising and classifying. Kozinets (2015) emphasised the importance of recognising the singularity of individuals, interactions, experiences and moments, helping to identify relevant sources of textual discourse and historically established cultural meanings within the targeted community official platform (i.e., RTR). The analysis process is discussed in Section 3.5.

- **Researcher involvement and ethical considerations**

Discussions around major ethical issues surrounding netnographic methods tend to relate to the active but covert research position, raising a number of important considerations in respect of ethics, described by Kozinets (2015, p.134) as follows: ‘Are online social interactions private or public?’; (2) ‘How do we gain the informed consent of the online other?’; and (3) ‘Whose consent do we need to gain in netnography?’. For participatory and action netnographic research, Kozinets (2015, p.135) argues for a need to obey guidelines, beginning with disclosure of the identity of the researcher. The researcher should take a cautious position on the private-versus-public nature of materials, ask for informed consent and ensure that confidentiality and anonymity of participants are kept.

Kozinets’ guidelines make sense in participatory netnography where direct and private online communication is conducted. These are similar to the techniques used in traditional ethnography. Several researchers, however, including Kozinets, have argued that these ethical guidelines are not necessary for the publicly accessible route conducted through non-participatory netnography (Walther 2002; Haggerty 2004; Kozinets 2015). It is essential to consider that data collected from open sites (not requiring a login), with no human interaction, is gathered in a publicly accessible way. The research is therefore considered as data text rather than a private individual exchange according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and its public task definition. This study utilised a passive, covert position (non-participatory), bringing with it some ethical implications. The main justification for this position is that all data collected in both cycles was widely available to the public, and therefore considered public communication media, open to everyone and consequently obtainable for research (Langer and Beckman 2005).

There are other reasons to take this position: first, the position helps to capture naturally ongoing discourse because the researcher’s intervention can result in leading questions. Thus, data collection is conducted in the natural context of the community, making it free from bias, which can take place through researcher involvement or any experimental setting (Alavi et al. 2010; Heinonen and Medberg 2018). However, all collected netnographic data from all sources is public, and these websites are established as public forums of communication. The researcher avoids revealing any identities, and the findings are reported in a general way, with all data anonymised. The study poses no risk to those observed and used Kozinets’ ethics guidance (2010). Participants’ online and offline identities were concealed, and cloaking procedures were followed to increase anonymisation levels and limit risk (Kozinets 2020). Most researchers who have conducted studies using a

non-participant netnographic method do not seek informed consent (e.g., Janta et al. 2012; Xun and Reynolds 2010; Ekpo et al. 2015). However, ethical approval was obtained to use this method. Potential ethical concerns around netnographic techniques should be overcome because of the wider benefits of such methods in consumer research (Bengry-Howell et al. 2011). Social media and online data have undoubtedly blended public and private into a unique hybrid form – the researcher considers the issues of risk and privacy to individuals and communities.

3.4.1.2 Results – RTR Netnography

The netnographic results helped to understand how the user–item relationship is revealed within a specific access-based fashion platform because different community practices and access-based platform design arguably affects the user narrative with regard to perceptions of ABIs. The explicit and implicit language, meanings and practices of different access-based fashion communities have helped to reform the focus of the research questions, emphasising the need to look at a specific community. The initial phase (netnography) was also designed as an exploratory study to explore behavioural, affectional and intentional aspects of RTR’s online community and the user–item relationship. This initial phase also allowed the researcher to identify areas for further exploration in the main phase – for example, Table 3-3 shows a number of themes. As expected, it highlights some salient aspects related to the development and outcomes of PO. Appendix I provides snapshots of the abductive thematic analysis for netnographic data. No direct data was found to explain how PO manifests nor how users attempt to achieve this feeling. Further data therefore needed to be collected to explain complexities in the user–item relationship and look into identified indicators of PO. Thus, these netnographic results informing the main phase of the research, and, in particular, forming the interview guide. PO manifests in the context of ABIs

Semantic theme 1		how these led to the interview questions
Lack of contamination		
Category 1: Role of user reviews in ABFC	Subcategory 1: Positive identity contamination Subcategory 2: Signals of feelings of ownership by sharing reviews and photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does ABFC produce positive contamination, pride and lack of embarrassment. - What is the role of users’ reviews in ABFC
Category 2: Pride	Subcategory 1: Pride and receiving compliments	
Category 3: Positive online and offline WOM	-	
Category 4: Real contamination	-	
Category 5: Imagined contamination	-	
Category 5: No contamination	-	
Semantic theme 2		

Indexical meaning		
Category 1: High attachment but with negative indexicality	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether and how feeling of pride link to the sense of PO. - Focus on issues around antecedents that strength PO and its outcomes
Category 2: High attachment with positive indexicality	-	
Category 3: Attachment and control over ABIs	Subcategory 1: Taking photos Subcategory 2: Ability to re-access	
Semantic theme 3 Temporary extended self		
Category 1: Self-expression		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can ABI lead to temporary extended-self and self-transformation. - Identify factors known to shape psychological ownership (control, self-relevance, customization).
Category 2: Temporary extended self over expensive items	Subcategory 1: Want to have feeling of ownership over designer clothing	
Category 3: Imagining a loss of self	-	
Category 4: Role of virtual closet	-	
Semantic theme 4 Attachment		
Category 1: Attachment anxiety	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How ABIs might impact a sense of ownership of an object even before it is received.
Category 2: Attachment avoidance	-	
Category 3: Less attachment to owned clothes	-	
Semantic theme 5 User-item relationship		
Category 1: Well-being	Subcategory 1: Happiness Subcategory 2: Sadness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could it be because it is publically consumed there is more opportunity for positive feedback, which positively reinforces users decision to access? - Is the community element important in normalising ABFC? - Is it important that they are luxury items? - Would there be more embarrassment in access-based fashion from low-end brands like New Look, H&M and Primark?
Category 2: Loyalty to provider	-	
Category 3: Users behaviour	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where users store ABIs, whether they are extra careful with them, whether they are more conscious about taking photographs when wearing them

Table 3-3 Themes and codes emerging from netnographic data analysis.

The netnography method is about finding meaningful online moments, interactions and experiences within the target community, bringing members together into theoretical storytelling. Difficulties were apparent in elaborating on relevant data to address core research questions within the adopted non-participant netnographic method because users do not tend to express their feelings – comments are limited to specific topics. The focus of data collection was historical archival communication around the research topic, potentially limiting the quality and authenticity of collected data (Costello et al. 2017). Another limitation of data collection was the absence of interaction with participants. Kurikko and Tuominen (2012, p.13) assert that ‘some of the most important standards of quality in netnography are immersive depth, prolonged engagement, researcher identification, and

persistent conversations.’ Costello et al. (2017) argue that adopting a non-participatory netnography method can lead to missing chances to co-create knowledge in online communities.

Many researchers who have used the netnographic method do not follow these characteristics (Heinonen and Medberg 2018), thus choosing not to label their work as netnographic (e.g., Keeling et al. 2013) because their levels of interaction with their participants was less than Kozinets (2015) recommended for a reliable netnography. A non-participatory netnography method was conducted because of difficulty communicating with users on the RTR platform. However, combining multiple methods and empirical materials helped to overcome the intrinsic biases, weaknesses and problems arising from a single method. The next section thus discusses the main phase methods – interviews and visual ethnography – enabling collection of further data from RTR users.

3.4.2 Main phase (Interviews and visual ethnography)

The initial phase of this qualitative research involved non-participant netnography, which has its limitations. Semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography were selected to further illuminate elements of PO, allowing for a more in-depth examination of the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences within ABFC. As both methods seek to enrich understandings of the initial identified key themes, this was done by examining users’ perspectives in ABC of the same unit of analysis (users of the RTR platform). The central aim was to validate and further explore important themes from the initial phase (netnographic study) and answer the research questions. For example, the interview guide was shaped after conducting the netnographic study and having carried out a broad review of the literature that help to identify key areas of interest

3.4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

This is the first method in the main phase, which seeks to collect in-depth data by examining user perspectives. This second method involves the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews with targeted participants. A semi-structured interview refers to a method in which the interviewer combines a pre-determined set of open questions (i.e. interview guide) with the ability to change the sequence of questions to explore particular themes or responses further (Bryman and Burgess 2002). Burgess (2002) writes that a semi-structured interview is a ‘conversation with a purpose’. The semi-structured interviews for this research focused on eliciting consumption habits and emotional experiences connected to feelings of

ownership of ABIs. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to ensure reliability of findings and to maintain consistency across interviews (Yin 2011; Miles et al. 2014). This is a commonly used method in ABC research (Chen 2009; Lawson 2011; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012).

Semi-structured interviews allow for examination of the meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences and feelings evoked with ABIs. Such qualitative methods enable collection of first-hand accounts of interactions with and attitudes towards ABIs. The interviews explore questions arising from the theoretical framework of PO and the netnographic study, emphasising issues around antecedents that strengthen PO and its outcomes. Consequently, these specific topic areas were identified as critical. The researcher was aware of the need for reflection and reflexivity, encouraging participant self-reflexivity to gain deeper insight into participant cogitation and collection of more in-depth interpretive data.

3.4.2.2 Interview guide

The interview guide (Appendix A) was based on a semi-structured framework of emergent themes in the netnographic study. This semi-structured interview stimulated flexible conversations while still maintaining that all the related issues concerning the research questions were covered with all interviewees (Miles et al. 2014). This guide was followed in the interviews, but, in addition, the researcher pursued any relevant tangential lines of inquiry in the conversation. The interview guide contained two parts. The first part started with general questions related to user experiences in ABFC, intended to elicit a first-person narrative of participants' experiences.

In the second part, the aim was to explore combinations of antecedents eliciting different strengths of PO. These questions included a biographical narrative of how user interest in ABFC developed, how users feel about items accessed, how ABIs interact with users' selves, what type of attachment users have had with ABIs, and how users participate in access-based fashion-related communities. All questions explored participant perceptions and experiences related to use of ABC and incorporated relevant prompts and follow-ups.

The last part asks for reflection on what the interviewee thinks about the user-item relationship in ABFC. As a result of the exploratory design, the content of interviews can evolve throughout the data collection and analysis process. As the semi-structured interviews employ a variety of open-ended questions revolving around particular pre-defined themes, however, these were adjustable throughout the research process. The way the questions were worded was significant in keeping interviewees on topic and gaining the desired information (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Churchill and Iacobucci (2006) noted that many researchers face a

‘vocabulary problem’ for different reasons, including education level and cultural differences. Thus, the interview guide was designed to ask suitable questions as part of iterative processes, with the supervisory team avoiding any of these issues. The researcher phrased vocabulary in a simple and comprehensible manner, avoiding leading questions (Kvale 2012). This helped to ensure that questions were ordered broadly enough to encourage informants to express their thinking and to use familiar terminology to improve data quality (Marshall and Rossman 2015). Terminology usage was framed based on how interviewees framed and understood issues related to ABFC (e.g., rent vs. access and consumers and users) as found in the netnographic data. Two pilot interviews were conducted to examine the semi-structured framework of the topic areas and ensure the clarity of the questions and language.

One area of the main section that proved fruitful was that questions related to user behaviour, stimulating participants to reflect on ritualistic acts. The outcome of the second method informed and guided the rest of the research. However, a need existed for visual ethnography as an additional method to provide supplementary understanding of the key themes based on participant behaviour and perspectives through self-reporting and research observation. Some interviews were followed by visual ethnography whereby those participants chose and narrated scenes to document their user–item relationships, with limited input from the researcher. Combining visual with non-visual research methods enabled a more rounded understanding to develop of the feelings of ownership generated. The third data collection method is explained in the next section.

3.4.2.3 Visual ethnography – digital diaries

Methodologically, the first two methods were carried out with no real-time interaction between participants and ABIs. The third method (visual ethnography) addressed this matter, incorporating the addition of a further interrogative mechanism, revealing more about user–item relationships in such contexts. The first two conducted methods were useful in capturing many themes related to the research questions. However, visual ethnography was able to develop comprehensive understandings of the phenomena in question and to validate our findings through data and method triangulation (Brown et al. 2010). Participants’ subjective input revealed meanings about the user–item relationship, helping with exploration of issues around how these can influence the PO process and manifestation and its outcomes.

Ethnography is not just concerned with observational methods, but also involves a particular way of engaging in unique, analytical reasoning by looking, listening and thinking

about social phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Ethnographic methods look at the subject of study through a holistic approach where the role of the ethnographer is to observe the whole social setting (Fetterman 2009), leading to the construction of a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973). Visual ethnography produces knowledge based on versions of participant experiences grounded in context and common sense. This approach considers various aspects of an ethnographic site as the equivalent of being read as a text (Pink 2013). ‘Visual ethnography’ is a term frequently used in the literature, but it refers to different practices. First, it describes the process of doing ethnographic research in digital environments (Kozinets 2015), such as the initial data collection in this research (netnography). Second, visual ethnography also refers to conducting ethnographic research mediated by digital technologies (Pink 2013). Thus, visual ethnography involves digitally mediated data collection and participant involvement through tools such as recording digital diaries, including videos, photos, diary voice notes, mobile screen recordings and written text. Pink (2007, p.1) points out that: ‘Photography, video, and hypermedia are increasingly becoming incorporated into the work of ethnographers – as cultural texts, as representations of ethnographic knowledge, and as sites of cultural production, social interaction, and individual experience that themselves constitute ethnographic fieldwork locales.’ In this thesis, the terms ‘visual ethnography’ and ‘digital diaries’ are used interchangeably to refer to the third qualitative method of data collection in this research.

Digital diaries assist with cocreation of understanding, giving control to participants and providing rich data to researchers (Brown et al. 2010; Pink 2013). To reveal the manifestation and nature of PO in the context of ABC, such a dynamic, experiential, reflexive methodological approach is needed to go beyond recall of feelings. Such a method explores practices, processes, thoughts and feelings in all stages of this consumption style, with an emphasis on issues relating to how these can influence PO and its outcomes. Digital diaries, including videos, photos, diary voice notes, mobile screen recordings and written text were adopted in this research to reach more in-depth understandings of this phenomenon, through innovative approaches to data collection and analysis of actual practices in participants’ lives, incorporating two principal aims. First, the purpose of this method was to elicit data to explore access-based users’ reflective feelings and their perceptions and experiences of the user–item relationship. This method is a more practical way of giving a voice to users, allowing participants to narrate their consumption behaviour using their own expression and to decide relevant aspects that need to be reported (Brown et al. 2010). Second, Brown et al. (2010) argue that digital diaries are suitable when there is a need to study aspects of a participant’s life as it is performed – for example, those difficult

to verbalise. Thus, a digital diaries method helps to make sense of the unknown, uncovering more about unfamiliar practices and feelings users have with ABIs in real-time access ‘consumption’ and examining how these experiences shape users’ feelings of ownership.

3.4.2.4 How digital diaries are conducted

The researcher collected digital diaries by asking participants to share them via a mobile ethnography platform (Evernote). Evernote is an application software designed for note-taking, organising, making task lists and archiving. This platform was chosen because it gives participants a better mechanism to create their diary. Table 3-4 illustrates the structures, procedures and objectives of the digital diaries. Appendix E shows the digital diaries protocol whereby participants are given a semi-designed diary to complete. The semi-designed diary contains customised questions and actions based on the initial interview.

This semi-designed diary prompted participants to reflect on specific points in their access journey – for example, placing their order, visiting the RTR physical shop, receiving their items, trying on the item, storing the item, how they wear the item, while wearing the item, after wearing the item and returning the item. For each of these specific points, participants were asked to include at least two types of data (e.g., a video, voice note, photo, written text or a combination of these) to document their interactions with ABIs. These guided reflections (notes) were also designed according to user type (i.e., unlimited users) and based on analysed data from each participant’s first interview. The reflections asked participants to consider the following: how/what do you feel about wearing this item? Recorded video to capture the arrival of your order? Video to explain what you are doing while you are about to send items back? Take a photo or video to capture what makes you feel (un)comfortable and what makes you uncomfortable? Record voice note to explain how this RTR item feels compared with other items bought? The aim is to encourage reflection on participants’ understandings of their relationships with items accessed via the platform.

Digital diary instructions were provided, and participants were given flexibility as to what they wished to capture and how they wished to capture it (e.g., in what format). Participants were given a rough idea of the researcher’s expectations. Visual ethnography requires researchers to pass more control to participants (Pink 2013). Thus, participants have more control over the timing, depth and extent of their involvement in producing their digital diaries. Such control in visual ethnography is defined by Brown et al (2010, p.422) as ‘a participant’s self-definition of their lives conveyed through their own direction, narration, and expression’. This allows for deeper insight because participants were given more control to create data than with traditional methods. For example, participants were given an

additional notebook for unguided reflection notes, to create their own diaries and share their experiences of accessing fashion. These unguided reflections could be used for any additional thoughts, actions and feelings not reported in the guided reflections.

	Unlimited access
Duration	At least three weeks.
Journey requirement	Take a snapshot of a month in the life of a renter (looking at multiple items).
Expected time to be spent on diaries	60 to 120 minutes in total.
Number of diary entries	As many as they can: - Before, during and after access. - Recording any feelings or thoughts. - Documenting all activities related to items accessed.
Stages expected to be covered in the diary	- Placing your order, visiting the RTR physical shop, receiving items, trying on items, storing items, how you wear the item, while wearing the item, after wearing the item, returning the item, reviewing items. - Feelings about rented items before, during and after access.
Participant diary data types	Mixture of videos, photos, diary voice notes, mobile screen recordings and/or text. Submitted via Evernote mobile app.
Guided reflection	<u>Aim</u> : Open guided reflections were created to stimulate anecdotal experiences from participants. <u>Reflections</u> : Some standardised reflections and other customised reflections, based on participants' initial interviews. <u>Reflections examples</u> : Take video to explain what you are doing while you are about to send items back. Take a photo or video to capture what makes you feel comfortable and what makes you uncomfortable.

Table 3-4 Aim, procedures and objectives of the digital diaries.

Digital diaries were conducted with four interviewees who were interested in taking their participation in this research further. Participants were required to engage over an extended period, contributing photo and video data and answering researchers' questions. They were asked to keep their digital diaries for at least three weeks. The digital diaries collected will help ABC researchers expand their understandings of PO. Indeed, visual ethnography has added significantly to consumer research because it covers new perspectives, rooted within the tradition of consumer research that seeks to understand complex experiences (Belk et al. 2018). Following the initial and main phases of data collection, the data analysis process was conducted in a further two phases, though the findings were interdependent throughout the analysis process. However, this methodological and data triangulation process increased the credibility of the results (Suter 2012). For example, participants who generated data from digital diaries were asked to give further

explanation to their input in the interviews (e.g., ‘How did you feel when it was delivered?’ and ‘Did you experience any different feelings with this item than with your own clothes in your closet?’).

3.4.3 Main phase sample and recruitment method

It is impossible to rely on the standard statistical logic of sampling in qualitative research because of its dependence on small samples and the need to gain a rich and complex understanding of what is being studied (Lee and Lings 2008). In the development of this research sample, maximum diversity among participants was sought to capture different views of the user–item relationship while ensuring that participants belong to the same targeted community, facilitating different storylines and comparisons of results. Thus, the study participants were recruited by means of a purposive sampling approach to ensure that they fit the suitability of the research question (Creswell 2014). Maxwell (2012) further defined this as a type of sampling in which ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices’ (p.234). Thus, such a nonprobability sampling technique was adopted whereby participants were selected because of their particular experiences for specific purposes. Sampling in qualitative studies usually requires defining aspects of the case directly related to the research questions that need to be explored within the limits of the time (Miles et al. 2014). Purposive sampling was used to obtain a representation of two types of user transactions within RTR: one-time access and unlimited access. Participants needed to use or previously have used RTR.

All the participants were thus members of RTR and US-based RTR users because this is where the platform operates. The selection decision was also made according to the following sampling frame criterion. It was intentional, though, that participants differed in terms of sampling frame criteria, such as user type, nature of user subscription, level of engagement with the platform and user status. However, it was purely coincidental that these participants differed in demographic characteristics, including age, income level, marital status, occupation, type of fashion involvement and duration of usage. Figure 3-7 shows the recruitment and data collection process adopted.

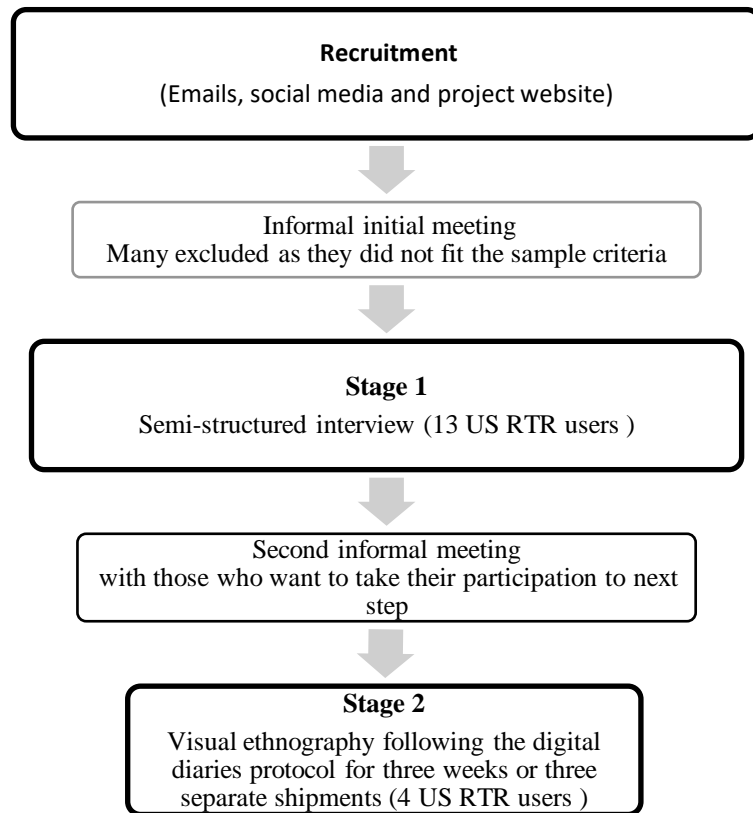


Figure 3-7 Recruitment and data collection process.

The researcher ensured that the selected sample frame fit the study objectives and comprised a variety of participants. For both the interview and visual ethnography, participants were selected based on their self-identification as RTR users, with a view to mirror the target community as closely as possible. A small sample size (ten to fifteen participants) was deemed appropriate because of the exploratory nature of the research and the targeted population, with a view to gaining an in-depth understanding of complex user–item relationships and observing the dynamics of such interaction in line with earlier interpretivist research (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The use of smaller sample sizes is a successful approach in studying consumer practices and experiences (Thompson 1996; Bonsu and Belk 2003) and ABC (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Gruen 2017).

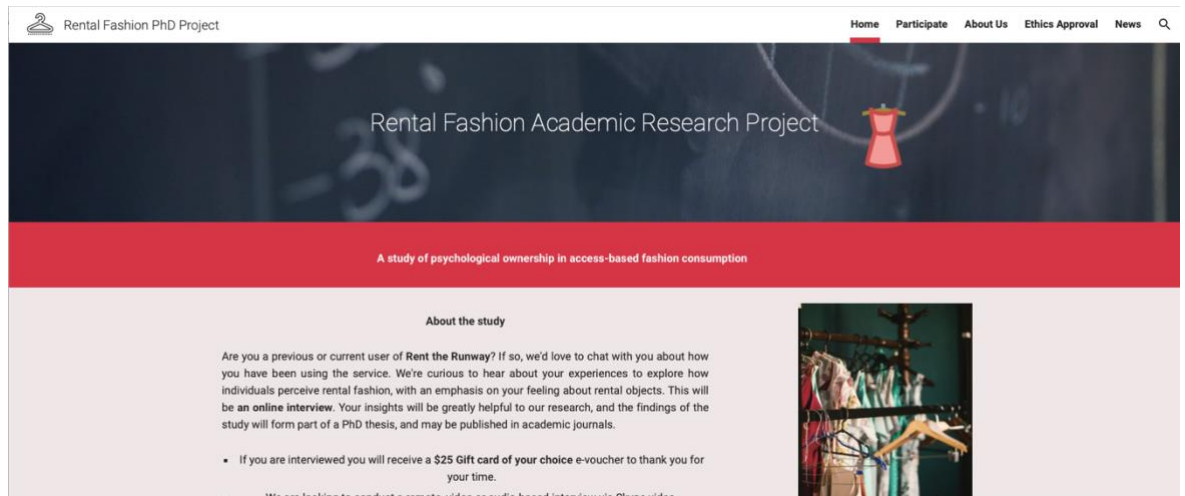


Figure 3-8 Screenshot of the project website.

A project website (as shown in Figure 3-8) was created to direct all interested participants for more information about participation in the project, including ethical considerations, supervisory team information, researcher news and incentives. More than 180 participants were contacted, and the response rate was approximately 20%. Participants were directly recruited from social media sites using instant messaging, comment features and community forums. More specifically, users of Facebook and Instagram involved in activities or groups related to RTR were reached using instant messaging and targeted advertisements. For private groups, permission was sought in advance to contact members from admins to contact members. They were also contacted directly by email for recruitment using publicly available contact details on their online profiles (such as bloggers and YouTubers). Participants were also recruited using a snowball technique (Yin 2011). The first wave of participants was asked to recommend other users of RTR fitting sample specifications who might want to participate in the study. Informal communication (e.g. video calls or emails) took place before the main interviews and visual ethnography. Participants in the interviews and visual ethnography received incentives for their participation.

Pseudonym	Age	Type of user	Income	Location	Household	Job	Length of experience with RTR	First heard about RTR	Interview	Digital diaries
Julia	30	Unlimited	\$100–120K	California (San Francisco)	Single household	Marketing manager	2 years, 7 months unlimited	2017	Yes	-
Zoey	25	Unlimited	-	North Carolina	Couple	-	2 years	2018	Yes	Yes
Amy	26	Unlimited	-	NY	Single household	Administrative	2–3 years	2017	Yes	Yes
Natalie	30	Unlimited	\$97K	NY	Couple	Librarian	11 months	2018	Yes	Yes
Amanda	28	Unlimited	-	Maryland	Couple	Shop assistant	2 months	2018	Yes	-
Abigail	26	Unlimited	\$135K	NY	Couple	Consultant	2–3 years	2014	Yes	Yes
Emelia	47	Single but used to have unlimited	-	Saint Paul, Minnesota	Couple and two children	Work from home (unknown)	5 years	Several years ago,	Yes	-
Jessica	46	Single	\$90K Household	Los Angeles	Couple and two children	Grant writer	2 years	2016	Yes	-
Naomi	24	Single	-	Syracuse, NY	Couple	-	4 years	2013	Yes	-
Lisa	38	Unlimited	\$150–220K Household	Long Island, NY	Couple and two children	Marketing director	3 years	2017	Yes	-
Sophie	40	Single	Low income	Washington DC	Couple, and three children	-	2 years	2018	Yes	-
Megan	22	Unlimited	\$45–60K	Chicago	Single household	Musician and polearity teacher	2 years	2017	Yes	-
Lucy ¹	27	Unlimited	-	California	Single household	Teacher	8 months	2017	Yes	-

Table 3-5 List of participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen participants. The list of participants is shown in Table 3-5. Interviews were conducted online because the target sample location was in the US. Participants chose the interview timing and means of communication (e.g., Skype). The interviews were conducted between July 2019 and February 2020. All the interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours each and data was recorded using fieldnotes and an audio recorder or screen recorder with the interviewees' permission. The interviews were fully transcribed before being coded and analysed.

3.5 Data analysis

The aim of the data analysis was to use the theoretical foundation base of PO theory as a framework to explore PO in this context. The analysis set out to generate insights from all

¹ The participant did not give consent to record. Researcher took notes during the interview.

the methods used. The focus here was to investigate the research questions, taking into account all collected data and research fieldnotes. Rather than relying on a single method, the main themes therefore emerged as a result of cross-method investigation. However, each source of data (method) was first separately analysed using a discovery-oriented, thematic analytic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). This took place through an iterative process of reading, evaluating and identifying emerging themes and categories, which were data driven and not based on the researcher's theoretical perspective. However, it was impossible for the researcher to conduct completely objective research and separate their own epistemological views. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.84) argue that producing codes and meanings does not happen in an 'epistemological vacuum'.

It was essential to start conducting each method with an overarching theory in mind to explore the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998), in line with the adopted abductive approach. This open coding phase (Fischer 2015) emphasised connecting the collected data to the core research questions identified from the literature. Thus, one of the processes involved in open coding was intensive examination of the data, enabling the researcher to develop a greater understanding of feelings of ownership in the context and start the list of codes. The creation of new codes continued as the data collection proceeded as shown in Figure 3-9. The main aim of the open coding approach was to identify patterns within the collected data and finding themes not acknowledged before the coding process (Gioia et al. 2013). Enforced ignorance of the literature and the priori method meant that final research questions were not shaped at this stage (Miles and Huberman 1994). Rather, the research objectives guided the analysis, looking in depth at how themes emerged and giving more consideration to the relationships and context between the subthemes.

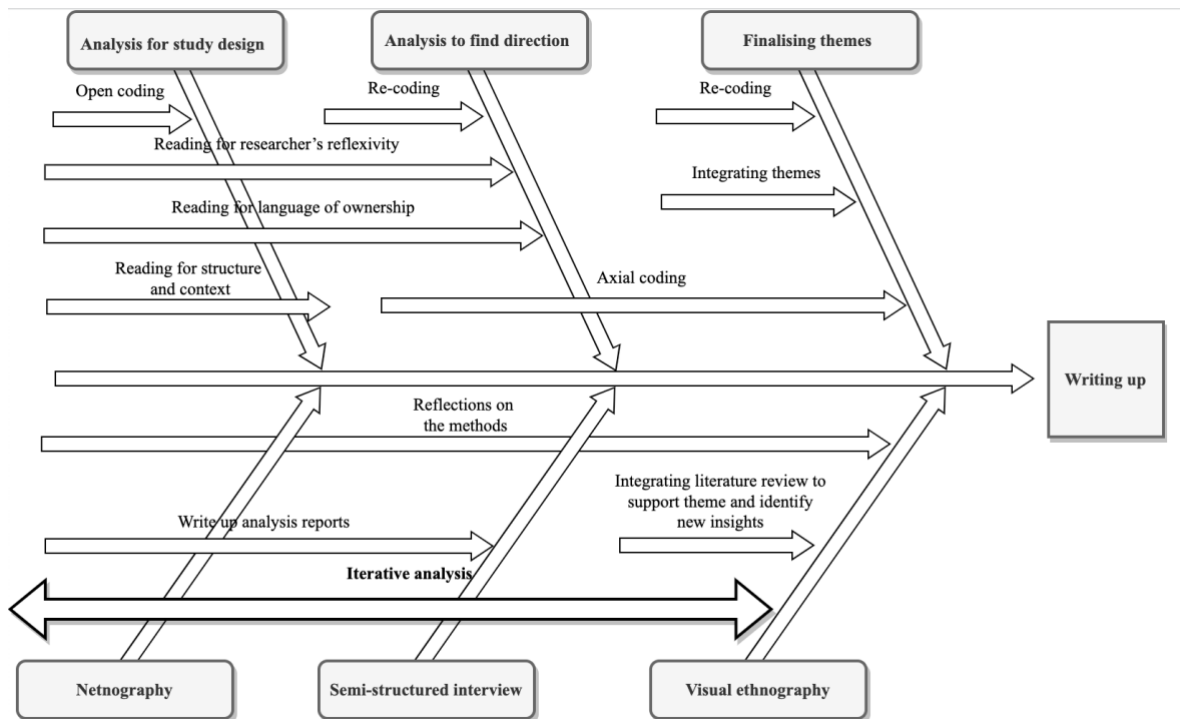


Figure 3-9 Detailed stage of data analysis.

Second, axial coding techniques were used to compare and contrast themes, enabling analytical identification of patterns between the first set of coding (Miles and Huberman 1994). The final stage of the coding process moved beyond these categories to identify themes, using selective coding to set out concepts in order to offer an explanation of the phenomenon (Kozinets 2015). The final selected coding ensured theoretical significance as each theme was illustrated repeatedly in the transcripts (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Thus, the researcher not only described the identified categories, but also generated themes, offering interpretations of the phenomenon. All thematic coding, classifying, mining and visualising was carried out using NVivo 12 software to add rigour to the qualitative research (Welsh 2002; Kozinets 2015). All data, in the form of reviews, pictures, videos and textual comments from the three methods, were systematically collected and coded using NVivo software. This computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software helped to review the subthemes, and assisted in running different queries on coded data to examine codes after their development.

In the final stage of analysis, iterative analysis relating to the themes and tensions that appeared in the data was conducted. The hermeneutics approach revealed significant themes, practices and ritualistic acts. Hermeneutics is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as 'an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process'. At this stage of interpretation, pre-understanding

and pre-judgement are considered fundamental in hermeneutics research (Arnold and Fischer 1994). There is no final or correct interpretation and it is not simply discovered, but meaning is negotiated and comes through integration with the process. Data analysis followed an iterative process of interpretation, aiming to address new questions through continuously looking for new data (Spiggle 1994). These processes helped to eliminate, verify and refine initial interpretation until theoretical saturation is reached. Thus, generation of final themes involved both process and product. The hermeneutics approach seeks phenomenological insight rather than attempting to build on positivistic science (Holden and Lynch 2004).

It enables consumer researchers to draw more on their own pre-understandings of everyday phenomena, including written and unwritten sources, human practices, events and situations (Denzin 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Hermeneutic is different from other approaches because of its mixture of interpretative and psychological components (Packer and Addison 1989; Sandage et al. 2008). Integrating themes from different methods was carried out through a process of identifying relevant themes and reducing unimportant dissimilarities with a view to combining relevant interpretations (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thus, data analysis was conducted using a traditional qualitative approach involving continuing thematic exploration while engaging in an iterative writing process (hermeneutics). The researcher follows the steps of "qualitative research circle" (McCracken 1988, p.29), which include a review of the researcher's personal experience as it relates to the matter of investigation. All the researcher's previous assumptions were specified, recognised and used as an inquiry tool. Moreover, the supervisory team was constantly involved in questioning and challenging the data representation and its link to relevant concepts in existing literature. The aim was to ensure the confirmability and trustworthiness of the interpretation (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

The hermeneutic circle is the most well-known aspect of hermeneutics, with the main aim of understanding 'the whole through grasping its parts, and comprehending the meaning of the parts divining the whole' (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson et al. 1994). Patterns and propositions identified during the ongoing interactive process across all methods were always challenged, called into question and compared between different sources of data. To summarise, the data analysis process began with open coding in parallel with analysis of the fieldwork findings, with a commitment to an iterative process throughout the analysis (Spiggle 1994). Developing a sense of the whole came as a result of applying a hermeneutic analysis, leading to a greater understanding of the embodied processes and ritualistic acts access-based fashion users go through to develop feelings of ownership.

3.5.1 Analysing the initial phase of data collection (netnography)

Three analysis aspects should be considered when conducting netnography: the role of the computer assistant, the role of researcher interpretation and the role of humanist netnography in data representation (Sinclair and Tinson 2017). This initial phase used different methods of NVivo to classify, mine, extract, pre-code and visualise data. Data collection had to continue until sufficient interpretive convergence took place and theoretical saturation was reached (Goulding 2002). Thus, the netnographic data phase stopped when no new initial themes emerged relating to the initial research questions. To deal with the overwhelming amount of data using netnography (Heinonen and Medberg 2018), the researcher followed Kozinets's (2015) suggestions to sort data according to whether it is primarily social or informational and whether it is primarily on or off context. If data is directly linked to research questions, consequent abductive thematic analysis and hermeneutic circles were conducted to provide interpretation (Thompson et al. 1994; Thompson 1997; Braun and Clarke 2006). As explained in Section 3.3.1.2, this initial phase has a significant role in allowing the researcher to identify areas for further exploration in the main phase.

3.5.2 Analysing the main phase of data collection (interview and visual ethnography)

An exploratory approach was used for analysis of each transcript to determine which embedded relationships and meanings could emerge. This helped to clarify any questions brought up in the initial netnographic data collection cycle. It was expected that written and spoken material might differ (Martens 2012). Thus, different versions of the self might be revealed from the main phase of data collection when compared to the initial data collection set (netnography).

Data extract	Researcher's notes	Open codes	Re-coding	Axial coding
<p><i>[Unpacking ABIs] I mean, there's definitely a sense of happiness for the most part. Even if I don't love the item, I'm glad it's there and I can finally see it and touch it and [have it] be tangible and try it on. Then I can decide if I like it or not and return it, so [I'm] never sad an item's arrived or [is] now available and I can finally see it. I like to try things on and really compare them in person rather than just seeing them online. I'm always happy when things have actually arrived. Then, I can make my informed decision. Do I want to keep it or not? I keep it for that rental period, or for some time, and then return it. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)</i></p>	<p>When does Julia feel attachment?</p> <p>When does final appropriation take place for Julia?</p> <p>Is it important to conduct PRs for an ABI to be appropriated?</p> <p>Conducting physical and symbolic actions to appreciate and perceive the ABIs as new.</p> <p>Feelings can develop at different stages of access, affecting the user-item relationship.</p>	<p>-Interaction</p> <p>- Time</p> <p>- Feelings</p> <p>- Intimate knowledge</p>	<p>- Unpacking</p> <p>- Touch</p> <p>- Item 'loved' and appropriated before access</p>	<p>- Appreciation</p> <p>- PRs of unpacking</p>

<p><i>The very first thing I do is take it out of the plastic wrap because it comes with a smell; the way the dry cleaning process works leaves the clothes with this kind of musty floral gross smell that will permeate sometimes through my bedroom. [...] The first thing I do is I unpack an item, rip off the plastic and then hang it up. I don't put it in my closet, I leave it out. Maybe I don't ever put the clothes in my closet; I have a coat rack in my room that I just hang them on, where I see them, and then usually, I'll try things on either right away or as soon as possible to see if it fits and to see if I need to send something back right away. Then I'll leave things out to remind me to wear it the next day. I try to wear things as soon as possible. I'll get annoyed if I try something on, I like it, but then I end up not wearing it for a couple of days. I just wasted a spot; I could have sent it back and gotten something new by now. Hang[ing] it out is the most important thing. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)</i></p>	<p>What PRs has been done?</p> <p>Are there any physical and symbolic actions?</p> <p>How sensory attributes of items influence consumers' thoughts, feelings, and decisions?</p> <p>Is it easier to incorporate ABIs in comparison to owned items?</p>	<p>-Packaging materials and PO</p> <p>-Making ABI visible</p> <p>- Cleaning</p> <p>- Intimate knowledge</p>	<p>-Unpacking</p> <p>- Smell</p>	<p>- Appreciation</p> <p>- PRs of unpacking</p>
<p><i>Usually, I'll get home and I see the shipment is at my doorstep. I'll bring it inside my home, I'll unzip it, I'll open it up. I'll remove all of the plastic that covers it. I'll try it on. I'll see if I like it. If I'm happy with it and I want to wear it, I'll either wear it and go, or put it in my closet, or try and figure out how I'm going to style it with shoes and accessories. If I don't like it, I put it back in the garment bag. I'll take it with me to return the next time I go to the retail store. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)</i></p>	<p>How users incorporate ABIs into their possessions?</p> <p>How users affirm control over ABIs?</p>	<p>-Control</p> <p>- Intimate knowledge</p> <p>-Process of appreciation</p>	<p>-Trying</p> <p>- Newly delivered ABIs</p>	<p>-Appreciation</p> <p>- PRs of trying</p>
<p><i>[Choosing an item] is a laborious process. Typically, I know what colour I want to wear to begin with. I will typically choose by colour and then by event. Then I'll narrow it down based on what catches my eye. Once it catches my eye then I will go through the pictures. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview).</i></p>	<p>How users behaviour during browsing online?</p> <p>What is the role of other users' reviews?</p> <p>Are there any habitual practices?</p>	<p>Exploring other users' experiences</p> <p>Reviews</p> <p>- Intimate knowledge</p>	<p>Pre-access attachment</p> <p>Researching</p>	<p>-Planning</p> <p>- PRs of researching</p>

Table 3-6 Example of data extract and codes

The questions and themes in each interview were compared with other interview transcripts to analytically develop categories and ground the concepts on reduplicated data (Spiggle 1994; Bryman and Bell 2011). The transcription resulted in about 420 pages of text. Analysis of the interviews started with written summaries for each interview, identifying the background circumstances and other relevant matters based on interviewer analysis. These summaries were not conducted to point out any results at this stage, but to assist in handling the huge amounts of data produced from the interviews. The next step was the analysis, involving reading the interviews multiple times to uncover any indications of how access-

based users perceive the concept of PO (Patton 2003; Miles et al. 2014). Following this step, open and axial coding took place, engaging in long and careful consideration on what each theme was about and naming them accordingly. An example of a data extract and application of the main codes can be seen in Table 3-7.

ID	Pseudonym	Videos	Diary voice notes	Photos	Note-taking	Total provided materials (documents)
1	Zoey	6	7	26	41	15
5	Amy	0	0	7	2	2
9	Abigail	6	8	16	43	23
10	Natalie	23	25	40	96	12

Table 3-7 List of participants (digital diaries).

Table 3-7 shows all the different forms of digital diaries (i.e., videos, photos, diary voice notes, mobile screen recordings and written text) for each participant. These were transcribed and combined with the interviews and individual fieldnote files, which were then analysed iteratively. Analysing digital diaries and interview data helped to fully investigate aspects linked to practice (Goffman 1959). User–item relationships were revealed differently in non-visual methods, compared to how such relationships are seen in visual data – for example, describing how to deal with newly delivered ABIs in the interview, and showing how to actually do this in the digital diaries. The iterative flow between data collection, analysis of the interviews and visual ethnography helped to identify categories and concepts across the different methods and analyse text intertextually with hermeneutics of both datasets within a broader context (Brown et al. 2010). In particular, the iterative analysis of participants’ digital diary material and interview transcripts developed a better understanding of this phenomenon. By looking at participants’ practices, processes, thoughts, feelings and symbols, the digital diaries enabled the researcher to deconstruct participants’ behaviour and identify significant semiotic events in interpreting the user–item relationship in ABC (Wills et al. 2016). The digital diaries also enabled exploration of distinct circumstantial individual experiences.

To summarise, the hermeneutic approach reveals the significance in the sequence of ritualistic acts, which are instrumental or task-oriented to the extent that participants developed different forms of PO. These ritualistic acts also serve as means to satisfy elements of PO. The sequence of ritualistic acts can be aimed at physical ABIs or digital representations of these. Moreover, ritualistic sequence acts were relational and conducted to strengthen or sustain ownership feelings. As Pierce et al. (2003) argue, ritualistic

behaviour stimulates feelings of PO. This approach was adopted throughout analysis of the main phase, for both visual and non-visual data. Its focus and purpose, and its regularities of content and form were analysed, emphasising that similar ritualistic acts have similar focus and support somewhat similar aims (i.e., develop forms of PO). Chapter 4-6 sheds further light on PRs and explains how analysis construction is based on ritualistic acts in the three access stages.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research met the legal and ethical requirements of Cardiff University, preventing misconduct and ensuring that data was collected safely, responsibly and in accordance with expected standards. Throughout all stages of my data collection, all ethical concerns were taken into account in compliance with Cardiff University's requirements and Bryman and Bell's (2011, p.128) ethical considerations within the social sciences. As with all research, committing to ethical responsibility is a primary concern to ensure that research is conducted in a respectful, non-discriminatory manner that is not harmful and protects the vulnerable. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Cardiff Business School separately for each phase of the study (Appendix D and H). Each participant signed an informed consent form online before the interview and visual ethnography, each stating that they had read and understood the participant information sheet (Appendix B). The interview consent form (Appendix C) confirmed the study's purpose and reassured participants of their anonymity and freedom to withdraw from the participation at any time, as well as asking for their agreement to be either audio or video recorded. Participants also had the option to not be recorded at all.

Use of visual ethnography (digital diaries) as a research tool presents some key issues that need to be considered, such as how to work ethically and analyse visual representation. Digital diaries using video are helpful in recording behaviour, experiences and sentiments in real life, but making people present videos might strongly conflict with the idea of anonymity in research. As consent is perceived as an ongoing process within ethnography, informed consent was obtained at different stages if required. Participants were therefore not named, and content that personally identified people, such as face photos, was not reported unless the respondent agreed to usage of a blurred image to ensure anonymity. The researcher ensured protection of privacy throughout all stages of the research and followed GDPR guidance. As with all research, but especially research using a netnographic method, the issue of privacy for publicly accessible data must be considered. This issue was

discussed in Section 3.4.1.1. Based on these research procedures and analysis, the findings obtained are reported in the next three chapters.

Chapter Four: Pre-Access PRs

This chapter begins by introducing the context of the study’s findings presented in Chapters 5 to 7. It introduces how PRs are essential to understanding the existence of PO and outlines the structure of the findings. The remaining of this chapter focus on the pre-access PRs.

4.1 The structure of the findings

The research questions (Chapter 2) serve an important purpose in developing a construct of PO that is based on an understanding of the user-item relationship. In answering those questions, three core stages emerge from the data: pre-access, during access, and post-access. The participants carry out different possession and divestment rituals in those stages to mark ABIs as theirs (Figure 4-1) manifesting different forms of PO.

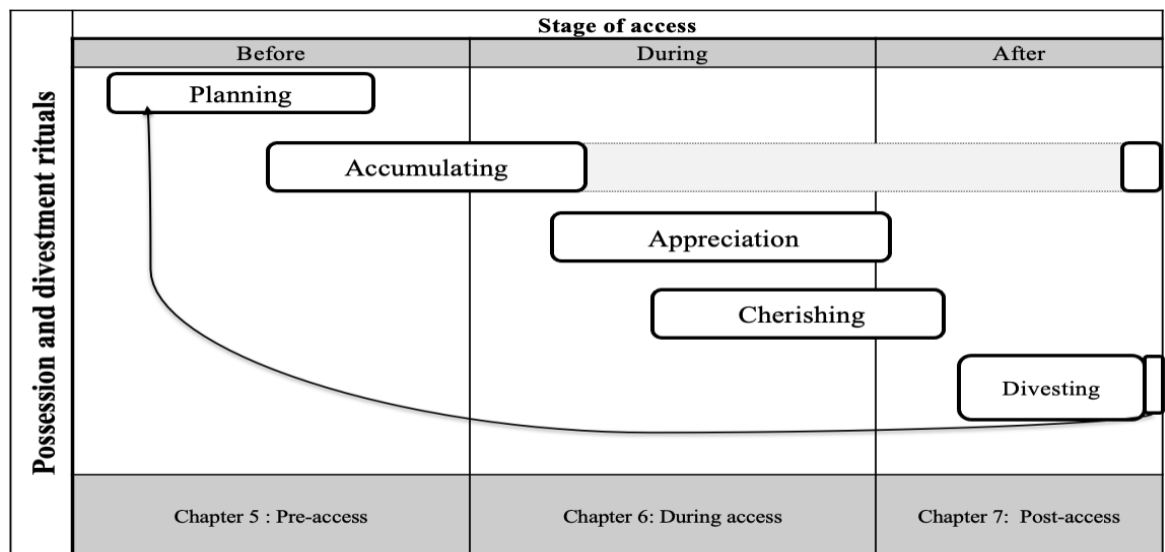


Figure 4-1 Key concept and themes and structure of the chapters

All the stages of access are important to feelings of ownership. However, the literature primarily focuses on PRs during access (Fritze et al. 2020), while neglecting PRs that take place before and after possession. These three findings’ chapters provide novel insights into user-item relationships and ritualised acts used to initialise psychological appropriation at these different stages. The thesis establishes that users engage with a range of PRs related to elements of PO, which ultimately leads to their experiencing different forms of PO. PRs were chosen as the focus of analysis for two main reasons. Firstly, PRs emerge from the data as an important way to understand the user-item relationship. Secondly, users actively engaged in various forms of PRs in order to experience forms of PO over ABI.

In the three finding's chapters, the focus will be on how users come to feel ownership, linking PRs to elements of PO at different stages of access, and reporting a clear narrative of new forms of PO. However, the appearance and clarity of these elements at any stage depend on the nature of the PRs and consequent feeling of ownership. The aim is to identify the key PRs in which the participants have attempted to achieve these elements and appropriate the items, despite their lack of legal ownership.

In analysing the data, the interpretations were aimed at addressing the following issues:

- Document the PRs performed by participants at each stage of access.
- How do these PRs contribute to users' experience of PO over ABIs?

Thus, the expressions of PO are reported from the perspective of PRs, which are exercised through control over, coming to intimately know, and investment of the self into the item (Pierce et al. 2003). Although these three elements of PO are distinct, one or more of these routes are manifested in the identified PRs. They are addressed and discussed within each PRs simultaneously. For example, a user might add an ABI to the virtual closet (accumulation PRs) in order to gain control over it. The same user will come to know this item passionately due to having more information and knowledge about it. Adding an item to the virtual closet might be perceived as self-investment in the item. Such items, it can be argued, become a part of the self and increase a user's sense of identity, as well as becoming a source of pride. PRs related to self-investment help participants to see their reflection in the ABI and to feel their own effort in its presence.

This chapter presents observation of users performed PRs during the pre-access stage of ABC in order to appropriate ABIs. It divided into two phases: planning and accumulating. First, the planning phase is a form of evaluation, consideration, and early appropriation enacted through PRs. The participants were conscious of planning their access, their PRs of browsing online, dealing with unavailability, and relying on the item's previous biography, helped them consider such items as known and belonging to them. This is followed by the ongoing process of accumulating and transforming ABIs' meanings by adding, categorising, updating, and sharing ABIs within participants' virtual closet, which also enables psychological appropriation before access. When participants engaged in these pre-access PRs, they were able to achieve a sense of QPO. QPO is a sense of ownership that users experience with digital representation of an item, even when they do not possess its physical counterpart. Chapter 6 considers several PRs in the during-access stage, which is divided into two phases: appreciation and cherishing. Chapter 7 presents divesting but keeping PRs, through which the participants retain a feeling of ownership post-access.

4.2 Planning

The PRs of planning refer to several ritualised acts at the pre-access stage. The main objective of these PRs is to establish a form of PO before physical acquisition whilst using the RTR platform. Engagement with an item is essential for PO to emerge (Pierce and Jussila 2011; Peck et al. 2013). The RTR platform's functions enable users to establish feelings of knowing (e.g., by gathering information from other users and by planning use) and control (e.g., by creating feelings of availability) that are central to PO (Baxter 2017; Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018), while avoiding feelings of contamination (e.g., by ignoring the fact that items are used) that can present a barrier to PO (Belk 1988; Argo et al. 2006). Thus, the focus is on users' subjective reactions to ABIs, which initiates pre-access attachment and paves the way for a lack of contamination in this stage. This section will also examine how some participants might develop an instant QPO through observing other users' actions. The limited availability of some desired ABIs also made finding such items a treasure hunt for the participants. Even though the possession ritual of selecting an item was associated with difficulty, these produced experiences of enjoyable desire.

In general, the participants went through the PRs during planning phase, which marked the items as valuable, sacred, and seemingly theirs, by spending time and effort on planning for their selected items and feeling more attached to frequently accessed items. Since users of RTR devote their efforts and emotions to their chosen ABIs, the planning rituals of considering (knowledge), evaluating (judgement), and appreciating (emotion) are an important part of which specific items they access and how. The planning phase involves ritualised acts such as browsing online, avoiding unavailability, and relying on items' biographies. Table 5-1 breaks down the planning phase into multiple distinct PRs and how they are linked to elements of PO.

Possession ritual	Definition	Linked routes to PO	Motives for PO
Researching	The act of looking through a platform with a specific purpose of finding ABIs.	- Intimate knowledge	- Efficacy and effectance - Need for home
Relying on the item's biography	Gathering information from other users.	- Intimate knowledge	- Stimulating self-identity
Dealing with unavailability (Chasing, waiting, and sacrificing)	Unavailability is a threat to PO, as it threatens motives/routes to PO, such as control.	- Control	- Efficacy and effectance
User blindness	Ignoring the fact that these items are used. Avoiding feelings of contamination.	- Intimate knowledge	- Need for home

Table 4-1 Elements of rituals: the PRs during planning phase and their links to elements of PO
(Source: own illustration)

4.2.1 Researching

The act of shopping is a possession ritual in a consumption-oriented society (Belk et al. 1989). The way users attribute meaning and value to ABIs is shaped by researching rituals. These early PRs can prompt psychological appropriation. The participants reflected on how they invested extra time in coming to know the items and the impact of this on their feelings towards what they accessed. For example, Zoey reported a strong feeling and attachment towards those ABIs for which she spent more time researching in order to make a choice. She reflected on the time-consuming process of looking for an item and how it resulted to attachment.


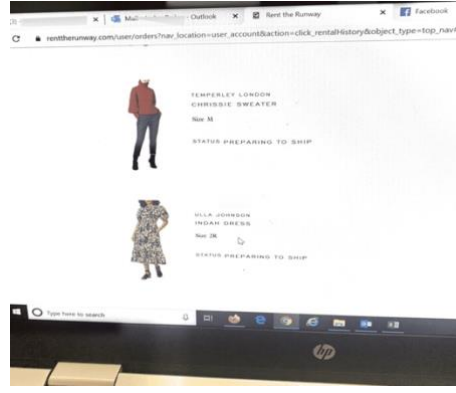
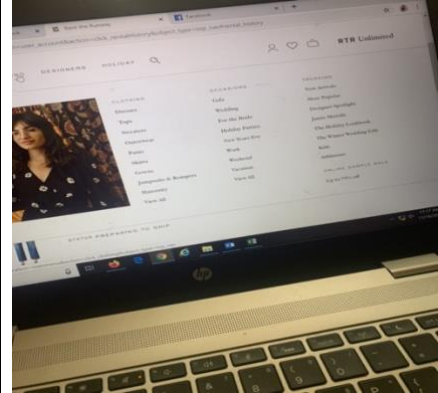
I spent a little more time picking these clothes than I did the last couple of times, which resulted in me liking the clothes a whole lot more. These clothes were all very nice and flattering. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note taking)

[P]robably only the negative feedback I have is there are so many items [...] it's really hard to sometimes sift through them just because they have so much stuff. Normally, I'll try to sort it – if I need like a formal attire dress, if I needed something for my bridal shower, what I need it for, and you can normally sift through; [I] try to sort down by category and narrow down [...] on what I'm actually looking for, as opposed to browsing through all the different [items]. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Zoey pointed out how researching requires effort in terms of managing and sorting when starting the process of appropriation of an ABI she liked. Although she found it challenging, spending more time picking items was a way to legitimise her possessiveness. For Belk (1983, p.514), possessiveness means “the inclination and tendency to retain control or ownership or one's possessions”. Zoey talked about searching between many options and emphasised how hard that was. Still, she came up with her ritual of hunting for items and a specific way of filtering her result, so as to find and go directly to a specific range of items. Zoey also provided more details on her researching activities in her digital diary, as seen in Table 5-2. She pointed out that as a consequence of that series of fixed ritualised acts: “*I felt like these items would be a good fit for my week ahead*”. One of her PRs was to use the categories to filter her search and she stated that this “*means the most to me*”. Researching activities appeared to be expressive in nature, with multiple activities that occur in sequence and are repeated over time.

Table 4-2 Researching rituals, appropriating them as ‘mine’

Pictures from Zoey’s digital diary

		
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“I love that it is so easy and simple to pick out clothes by style and type.”</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“[I choose this specific item because] I felt like these items would be a good fit for my week ahead”</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“I definitely think that using the categories means the most to me. It helps me sort, then further sort in order to ultimately find what I am looking for.”</i></p>
<p>(Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – notes)</p>		

It was observed that researching rituals helped the users to develop intimate knowledge about the ABIs, leading to early psychological appropriation. For example, Amy experiences a great passion for her ABIs, being involved in the never-ending process of hunting, developing feelings for her collection, and picturing herself in the items, and the places and ways she will wear them, all to satisfy her need to come to know the ABI so as to have an early feeling of ownership. *“While I am browsing for a specific item. [...] I’m usually curious. I guess I’m wondering how will it look on me? Well, I like it. Will it fit? The setting for where I’m going to be wearing it?”* (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). While hunting for items is tied to researching and search activities, it is also a distinct ritual. ‘Hunting down’ emerges, and the participants reflect on their feelings in such PRs, as Amy revealed. From these treasure hunt experiences, the participants reflect on their relationships with the items from such an early stage and how their researching rituals have an influence on their relationships with the items throughout the access period. The string of fixed events required to get an ABI begins with the participants researching on the RTR platform and continues with searching, evaluating, and accounting for suitable items.

[Choosing an item] is a laborious process. Typically, I know what colour I want to wear to begin with. I will typically choose by colour and then by

event. Then I'll narrow it down based on what catches my eye. Once it catches my eye then I will go through the pictures. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview).

Jessica describes the difficult nature of researching, alluding to pre-access attachment, and talking of narrowing her selection down to what “*catches my eye*”. To find something suitable, she mentions going through a range of ritualised acts in a specific sequence, from deciding on the colour, specifying the event, and choosing what she likes, to exploring other users’ experiences (based on their reviews and pictures – see the next section).

Another participant refers to using the thumbs down button, an RTR feature that helps with its algorithm, so that it only shows users items that will suit them, based on their behaviour. Thus, Abigail’s practice not only involves adding items to her virtual closet – she also uses the thumbs down button on any items she does not like:

[I use] the thumbs down button. I scroll through some more items and use it. When I saw something that I know for sure I would never wear and it basically hides the item so that it will never show up again when I browse or search for items in the future, which is super helpful because now I don't have to ever look at that item again because I would never consider it.

(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

It was described by Natalie as searching for something “*like a needle in a haystack*”. However, she distinguished between two different forms of researching – researching to find an ABI for a specific event, which required much effort, versus researching for routine items, such as work items, which she considered effortless:

I got married in July. I did it specifically to try and find a wedding shower dress. At first, it wasn't really that beneficial because, to try and find for one purpose, I found it very limiting. If that makes sense. I was trying to find that one white dress, like a needle in a haystack. It was very challenging. I found it. [...] But if I didn't have an event. [If] I wasn't looking for something specific. [If] I was just open-minded ... for work, I would rent just anything. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Natalie discussed her digital ritualised acts of searching for items - she takes any chance to research through the RTR app, doing so constantly. This process seems to be an integral part

of her daily routine. If Natalie likes any ABIs, she always makes sure to add them to her detailed lists (which will be discussed in the next phase). As she put it:

I'm constantly on my phone just browsing. I just do it as a default. I often do it in bed, or when I have downtime, when I'm watching TV that I don't really care about. I use the lists that they have curated. Around the holidays they did festive sweaters. I do wish they had easier ways to search. Their search interface isn't that great? I mean not that the search interface isn't great. They don't really have a back button on the phone so it's a bit clumsy. I use the heart button to like anything that I like. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Lisa referred to researching for items several nights a week at a specific time before she goes to sleep. She explained the effort involved in hunting and acquiring, then adding items to her list (see next section, "Accumulating"). While she talked about her PRs of researching, she used confirmative language in terms of 'having'. Lisa emphasised throughout her interview that these acts had replaced her ownership-based consumption and signalled how much she enjoyed her new researching rituals: "*I use the app. Maybe four out of seven nights a week before I go to sleep at night. I'll go through the app to see what new arrivals there have been. To add things to my heart list. You can categorise [the] heart [list]*" (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview).

If I'm on the train, I might go on RTR just to see what's new. If I'm lying in bed late at night and I get the urge to shop. I might go on the app, just see what my options are. I was trying to rent as many different designers as possible. I just wanted to see like all the different types of materials that different designers were using. I wanted to see like different fits and comfortability of different designers. Sizes are sometimes different between designers. That's something to pay attention to. Now, when I pick out outfits, I'm more experimental. I'm willing to try a designer that I've never heard of or never worn before. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

The importance of researching rituals is significant for Megan and for how she perceives ABIs and, consequently, how she will feel about them in subsequent access stages. Megan's description of her researching shows the amount of time it takes. She searches for ABIs before going to bed as Lisa does and also mentions other times, such as during train journeys. Megan indicated that her researching was a reaction to an urge, referring to a strong desire

or impulse to go on these hunts. It seems that she uses RTR to fulfil the need for QPO. Megan became more experimental with her ABIs compared to her previous way of consumption.

It can be seen that researching can occur under different circumstances, but that the participants generally perform these PRs along with other activities. There is a new development of PRs as characteristics of consumption where they can be done simultaneously with other activities, for example, watching TV, on the train, or by constantly checking the platform. Even though participants described their researching as spontaneous, they used specific times to do it: “*four out of seven nights a week before I go to sleep at night*” and “*if I'm just like lying in bed late at night, and I get the urge to shop.*” Therefore, the researching rituals seem to be frequent because they are part of the users’ PRs.

Unlike the unlimited users, the single rental users had their own way of planning and researching in advance, with a trade-off between purchasing or accessing in the planning phase. For example, Jessica explained that researching is a significant part of her PRs because her researching activities are rational and intended to elicit appreciation for her collection. Also, she used the word “*mine*” to describe the result of her researching, collecting, making choices, and planning access. She is happy with her collection and has a clear early ritual of researching that helps her to develop QPO before access:

I truly only browse it when I know that I have an event coming up. Either I've decided I'm getting RTR and I need to find something, or I haven't decided whether or not I want to get RTR, and I'm looking for some options. I'm trying to figure out from a budget perspective, where do I want to spend this money? Do I want to get a new dress? Is it worth getting a new dress for those sorts of things? If I'm planning a month or two months out, I'll go to my list, I'll add as I take a look at what's [there]. If they've been adding new items or something like that, I add mine into my list and then I probably don't get it until like a few days before I need it. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview)

Researching was a ritualised act that tend to be repeated each time. Extensive planning is consistent with traditional PRs (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991) and positive experiences can facilitate psychological appropriation (Thürriidl et al. 2020). The following subsections describe other significant aspects linked to researching online, namely, generating intimate knowledge from other users and dealing with unavailability.

4.2.2 Relying on the item's biography

The participants also seemed to gather new knowledge about an ABI while it was circulating among multiple users by using reviews and photos on RTR. This ritual was useful in helping them to evaluate the ABIs and as a starting point for determining what a specific item would look like. The results indicated that the participants clearly acknowledged other users' access and sought to obtain knowledge from them, especially information regarding whether an item fulfilled users' wants and needs. This shows how participants use previous users' private meanings to gain intimate knowledge of the ABIs and transform them into meaningful possessions pre-access.

The participants sometimes evaluate ABIs used by other users more favourably. They go through different PRs when getting to know an item through other users. For example, Sophie said that she sought intimate knowledge about what she planned to access through other users' reviews and photos, looking for salient information:

I like to see like how many people like the same dress that I will have. Where were they going when they wore their dress? How does it fit them? Their body type? I like to see the dress on different types of people. Because I can't wear, you know, everything that everyone can wear, but I like to just see how it looks for other people. (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview)

I would click into it. I would look at all their pictures. Then, if I was really interested, I would click on the reviews from other users, double-check what they were saying about the fit. Or, for some reason, if the item had low reviews, I would read a couple of them to see why people didn't like it. (Amanda, 28, Unlimited user, Interview)

The participants seek intimate knowledge about ABIs from previous users and do not consider there to be contamination due to previous usage. On the contrary, it makes them feel more attached to the frequently used items. For example, Sophie and Amanda mentioned that checking other users' reviews was an integral part of the researching ritual and part of appreciating an ABI was enjoying seeing what it looked like on others. This ritual seems to be experienced as valued work and linked to satisfaction, even for items beyond their fashion sense, as the following extract indicates:

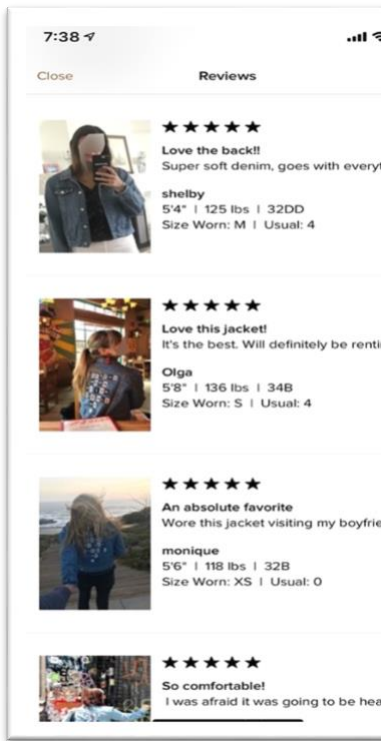
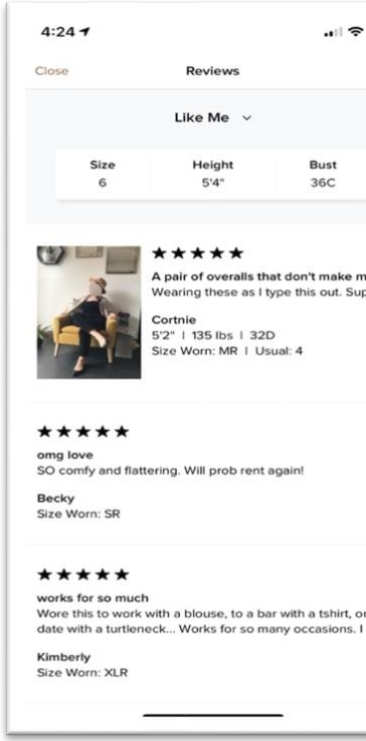
In terms of fashion sense, it's quite different from the items that I own. But that's what I like about RTR, it pushes me out of the things that are my

fashion sense. I've seen overalls on a lot of different members and in some reviews, and I thought I would like to try an overall so that's why I ordered this piece. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

Table 5-3 shows Natalie's typical researching ritual of counting on other users for three different ABIs (Items 1, 2, and 3) in her digital diary. Natalie reflected on her feeling of seeing others using those ABIs that she intended to order, moving on to report her ritualised acts used for selecting and planning her orders and then justifying her selection of these specific items and placing her orders. First, one of her PRs is to inspect what previous users think of an ABI and to learn from them, for example, about how to wear and style an item, which gives her the inspiration and motivation to access the item. Through the PRs associated with planning, it can be seen that ABC involves relational practice. It depends on other users to forge links between the ABI and other users, which can be seen as a part of the designated PRs. Pictures of the other users were important to all the participants apart from one (Abigail) who was less interested in them as she does not look like the RTR users of mainstream ethnicities.

As seen in Table 4-3, Natalie explained what types of information she was keen to find out from other users, such as how an ABI fitted. Like some participants, Natalie shows explicit favouritism towards ABIs based on where they have been worn (types of occasions users mention in their reviews), while others, such as Lisa and Abigail, consider the type of event irrelevant. The greater the congruity between users' preferences for an ABI, the greater is the feeling of knowing it. Natalie uses such knowledge and counts on other users, as she explains in Table 4-3, and emphasises *favourable reviews*: "*I ordered this pair based on the reviews from the RTR app, which were very favourable*"

Table 4-3 Natalie's ritual of counting on other users

Pictures from Natalie's digital diary		
Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
		
1- Her feeling of seeing others wearing those items on the website:		
<p><i>“The other users look amazing! I was motivated and inspired to rent it after seeing how cool and young they look! I got ideas for how to style it and hope I look as awesome as they do!”</i></p>	<p><i>“I like to see how other people style things. I mean, inform how I’m ordering something. But I do love to get ideas and inspiration from how other people wear things.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I love seeing how others wear the items I’m considering. I get ideas for styles and how to wear the garment, as well as how it might fit my body type.”</i></p>
2- Important aspects when selecting and planning her orders:		
<p><i>“For this second shipment, I was really looking for something that stood out, something that people would compliment me on. I made a list called ‘Order right away’. I have an upcoming concert and this jacket I've been looking at for a while, so I really wanted to rent it. The reviews are all really favourable, people said that the stitching is really nice. I look to see if I need to size up or size down.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Where do people [reference to people who wrote reviews] at work wear it? If someone says I wear this to work and lots of people agreed then I definitely like to consider it for work as well. How comfortable was it? If someone says it’s itchy then I'm definitely taking that into consideration, things of that nature?”</i></p>	<p><i>“Looking for size details, time of year other users wore it, how tall other users might be [in this case] since it’s overalls and they need to be long/short enough, fabric materials, things of this nature.”</i></p>
3- Reasons to select this specific item:		
<p><i>“I’m looking for a cool statement piece (something that people stop me on the street and compliment me on) for everyday use and for an upcoming concert so I chose this jean jacket with letter stitching on the back (see photos).</i></p>	<p><i>“I do need dresses for work. That’s why I looked at this. I often like to try dresses on to make sure they’re appropriate before I wear them to work in the school. This got good reviews. So I tried it for that.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I want to try overalls as they seem to back in fashion and an easy way to get dressed in the morning and to pair with multiple items and make many looks. I ordered this pair based on the reviews from the RTR app, which were very</i></p>

<i>The reviews were only positive and seem very favourable.”</i>		<i>favourable (see screenshot). I ordered them on Monday, January 27th and they were set to arrive the same day.”</i>
(Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking and diary voice notes)		

These BRs of getting to know an ABI form the initial phase where participants starting to appropriate an item. An item is transformed from an ordinary item into a meaningful possession using such knowledge to legitimise their possessiveness and develop feelings. Baxter et al. (2015) suggest enabling as a principle for developing intimate knowledge. This principle refers to the meaning carried by an item directly mediating meaningful experiences. These meaningful interactions are about enabling ultimate knowledge so a user can feel as familiar with the ABI as possible. This was felt when the participants read other users’ reviews and saw them wearing potential items. Going through other users’ reviews boosted the psychological appropriation. For example, this can be seen in all of Natalie’s digital diaries in Table 4-3, as well as her interview. Natalie (see below) was observing and learning from other users’ reviews, focusing on other users’ PRs as can be seen in the photos. This was also apparent in other participants’ experiences of a variety of emotions when seeing how items were worn by other users:

I also like reviews because I’ll say, “Oh, especially with skirts and tops how did somebody else wear this?” I rented a rainbow skirt the other day and I want to see how the model wore this and how other people wear this because I remember, when I looked at reviews, somebody wore it with a yellow top, somebody wore, like, a black top ... I like to see, like, what that looks like, not because I’m copying it, but because that’s inspiring. I don’t really have much of my own fashion sense, which is why I rely on RTR. I have no shame about that. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

The digital viewing of other users wearing potential items can be compared to the physically equivalent of trying clothes on. For example, Amy and Megan said that they tried to find other users with a similar height and shape to them to help them mentally simulate the actions of others, and to evaluate, and appreciate ABIs before selecting them. Both focused on previous intimate experiences with the item. The participants generally think positively of other users and transfer this positive association with others to the ABI which makes them appreciate an item more easily. Thus, they would appropriate an item more positively as they

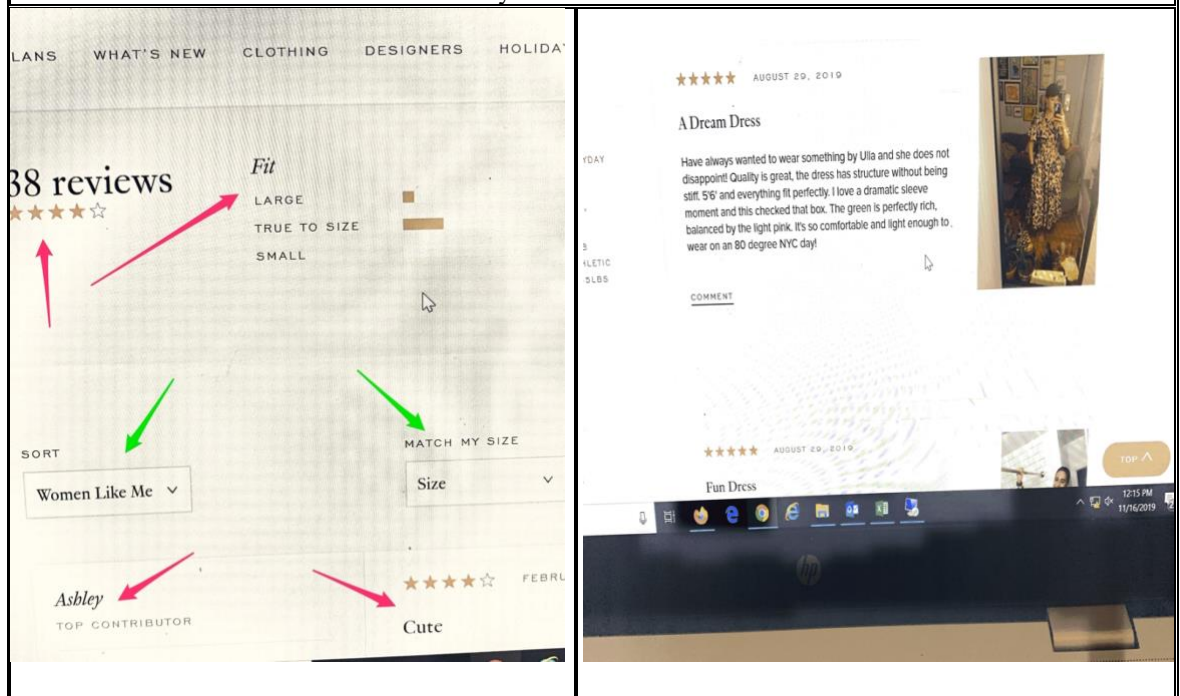
tend to look for users with similar bodies and other features to theirs, and would see how they had talked about the ABI in question.

[I]n their app and on the website, you can leave feedback and I like to post comments about dresses or clothing in general that fit well or that was fun to wear or just give feedback in general so that other people who want to rent the same style can get an idea of how it will work for them. It's really helpful for me when I'm renting to look through other people's feedback and get an idea of how it fits on a similar body type. This way I can make sure I'm making a good decision and selecting items. Pictures are very helpful in that way. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

First of all, I look for people that have ordered it in the same size as me. I try to look for women that have athletic body types. A lot of women post photos, with their reviews, of them in the dress. I like to see if it's a lower-cut top; I like to see how much cleavage I might have to show. I like to see if the size is true to size. Sometimes there's dresses that you might order in your size, but it's actually small, it's smaller than your size. You might want to order [a] size that's bigger. In the reviews, a lot of women will say, "Hey, this dress, it runs a little small, you might want to size up because it might be tight on the hips, it might be tight on the bust", situations like that. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Table 4-4 Rituals of relying on the ABI’s biography, to get to know it intimately

Pictures from Zoey’s digital diary
 Digital Diaries Protocol: Screen record or screenshot the most important aspects that led to you selecting your RTR orders.



Describing her actions and feelings:

“The reviews are definitely extremely important in my decision-making. I want to see how it looks on other people to determine if it is right for me.”

“I love it [seeing others wearing those clothes on the website]! It makes me more able to see what it looks like on a real person as opposed to on a model.”

(Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

Table 4-4 shows the most important aspects in selecting an item, for Zoey, who talked about how reviews are “definitely extremely important” because they allow her to get to know the ABI pre-access. She also reflects on how she loves seeing others wearing those clothes on the website, as it helps her feel she already knows the item. These results is aligned with those of Loussaïef et al. (2019), who also found that the lack of contamination can go as far as identity confusion between the owner and the borrower in situations of sharing between family members and friends. The participants seem to have spent a lot of time looking at other users’ reviews and experiences to find a suitable ABI and be inspired. It seems that the amount of time individuals spend navigating for information in ABC can stimulate PO (Lee et al. 2019). Most of the participants seem to spend a lot of time looking at other users’ shared reviews and photos and learning from them, looking for other users who are like them, as Emelia puts it:

I did see a dress yesterday that I thought was really cute. Then, when I saw the pictures and the reviews, it was not right. You know what I mean? It wasn't right on a lot of people. On some people, it did look okay. I can look at any reviews all day long and read any of those reviews. But when I look at those pictures, that's [what] really truly impacts me. [They're] really super true to life. Then, when I see someone with a body shape like mine, I'll know whether it's going to work for me or not. The reviews are super important. But that's kind of like with anything, you know, if you see a review on Yelp of a restaurant or a product and you have some people not liking it, it just turns me off. Definitely very important. We can look at pictures of the models all day long. But typically, American women are not going to look like that. It's from the eyes of an actual woman that you know is living day-to-day, those are more important to me than the model pictures actually. I rely on other pictures a whole lot. I really wish, actually, you know that 99 per cent of them, the websites or even magazines have the model pictures, but sometimes I just wish that they would show like a real couple of pictures of the real-type ladies, that's not the models. The majority of people are not six foot tall. They don't weigh 90 pounds. Maybe for one of the genetically lucky ones. But I like to actually see a real person, a real woman. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

In other words, crossing this first boundary of contamination seems to have started the process of appropriation and the development of feelings for the ABIs as well as for the RTR community, as Emelia pointed out the importance of intimate knowledge of an item to help her appropriate it. Zoey also revealed feelings such as happiness when she was going through such practices. As she put it: “I feel happy that other people have worn it. I like being able to see what the item actually looks like on people. That's really important to me” (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview). In a similar vein, Julia and Naomi focused on the advantages of getting to know an ABI through other users and the meaning assigned to such knowledge. For them, items that rotated more among users are seen as more lovable. Interestingly, Julia explained that getting to know an ABI through other users is acceptable in ABC, but would be an issue in ownership-based consumption. This can be grasped from Julia's quote:

I mostly rely on the photos but then slightly on the reviews. This is more for dresses or gowns, less so [for] day-to-day items, but the pictures are super helpful. If an item doesn't have any reviews, and any photos, and no one's

worn it before, I question if I really want it; it almost feels worse than if I was buying something if someone's rented it quite a bit. Or if an item has been rented quite a bit, it makes it seem more popular and there's a reason for more people liking it and then I want to try it even more, because if I don't like it, I can just return it. Whereas if I'm purchasing an item, if people haven't bought it yet, I think, "Oh, that's great, I won't run into anyone else who has it". (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Normally some of the dresses that I've picked, they're usually the most popular ones going around. So, it's nice other people [have] tested [it] out before you get it to your door and [have] already paid for it" (Naomi, 24, Single rental, Interview).

The PRs of relying on the ABI's biography is not limited to reviews and photos on the RTR site. Groups on social media and the physical shop of RTR all provide an opportunity for participants to communicate and socialise, sharing their feelings and intimate experiences with an ABI with any other users, whether or not they are active in these spaces. Megan, as a frequent visitor to the physical shop of RTR, pointed out her ritualised act of counting on other users in different settings:

Last time I was in RTR, like the store, I was talking to a girl about [how] I was able to give an in-person review to another RTR subscriber. She was asking me about this dress. I actually just returned this dress. I love the fit. Here's why it would probably be good for your body, and maybe how to style it. It's really fun. You get to meet a lot of different women. There's definitely a sense of community that I've found at stores as a regular frequent visitor. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

It can be argued that merely seeing other users perform their own PRs can enhance psychological appropriation at an early stage for the observer, who has no need to perform the ritual themselves. When participants observe a behaviour from previous users' reviews, this could trigger psychological appropriation identical to what would result from carrying out the behaviour themselves. Mentally simulating the actions of others has been found to elicit psychological effects similar to the actual performance of those actions (Ackerman et al. 2009). Therefore, the effect comes not only from enacting PRs at this stage but also from observing the PRs of others (from the reviews for each specific item).

Merely observing the PRs of others is not enough but can be seen as an important part of the appropriation process. This happens through the route of prior knowledge passed on by other users. A given user can be mentally stimulated to develop a type of PO. These shared PRs and traditions (Muniz and O’guinn 2001) could enrich the lack of contamination and, finally, result in QPO. Overall, participants show and feel a connection to the ABIs, but more importantly, they feel a stronger connection towards each other’s knowledge of ABIs. This finding broadly supports the work of other studies on online brand communities, linking the building of individual PO and a sense of collective PO to increase participation (Kumar and Nayak 2019).

Previous research has established that intimate knowledge has a strong role in the development of PO (Pierce et al. 2001). Traditionally, it has been documented that consumers rely on other consumers’ reviews and customer-created photo feeds to make decisions (Park and Cho 2012). Wolny and Mueller (2013) analysed the participation of ownership-based fashion consumers in online reviews and found that advice-seeking was not a significant motivator for consumer engagement but was a strong motivator for other, non-fashion items (Ho and Dempsey 2010). It is not only the interaction with a relevant ABI or the provider, but with other parties such as other users, that is important, because it helps participants to know an ABI passionately and breeds familiarity

4.2.3 Dealing with unavailability

In describing their process of acquisition in the planning phase, some participants indicated that this phase has a competitive nature. The PRs of planning were described as a “race”, “*racing against the clock*”, or making them feel “a little bummed out” when trying to find ABIs before other users. Thus, unavailability is a threat to elements of PO, specifically both to control as a route, and to efficacy and effectance as motives (Pierce et al. 2001). Participants sometimes described this period as being full of uncontrolled excitement or wild behaviour. For example, Lisa symbolised her researching as racing as if she were in competition with other users. She also pointed out the time and location at which she would usually place her orders (i.e., noon and at work), changing this from an ordinary action to a more ritualised act:

It’s kind of a frenzy. You have to make decisions quickly about it. Once you put something in your shopping cart, I think you only have 20 minutes where it’s guaranteed, something like that. You’re racing against the clock - you have to find something you like. You have to make the cut-off time. The shipment goes out the same day. They’ll let you know that you have spaces

available at 10 am. Then, you need to order by noon to get the item shipped that day. Okay, I'll be at work. Let me quickly see what I could order for tomorrow. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Participants stated that they needed to spend time and effort to manage disappointments. For instance, Zoey talked of her frustration at being offered an alternative instead of the item she wanted, as she had already developed QPO of an ABI. Her account showed that the intensive PRs of planning made her fall in love with an item. Although unavailability caused disappointment, Zoey agreed with the others that this was part of the process (i.e., the race) and that it was acceptable. Naomi also stated that she would find it difficult to not be able to access ABIs that she had developed feelings for. She would experience a sense of loss if this happened and might go and buy it from a retailer. Naomi followed some PRs to avoid developing QPO of ABIs that were not available:

It was actually a couple month out. I guess that time of year didn't have a lot of availability. I was getting pictures done last September. I was trying to find a dress for those pictures. I did try a few different dresses. ... it just didn't have those dates available. Maybe people had a lot of events. A lot of the dresses I checked happened [to be all gone]. It was a little frustrating. It looks like it's available. Then you click it and it's only available in one size. That size probably isn't going to work. It's a little frustrating, especially if you really fall in love with an item. Then, it's just not available for any of the dates you need it. That part's a little frustrating. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

I hate when that happens. I automatically filter out my size. First, I will never, that's something I just do to avoid, I'm not gonna fall in love with a dress that I can't rent, because I'm going to try to buy it. That's going to be a stupid idea and wasting money. I just automatically avoid the heartbreak of it telling you it's not available, and select the dates that you're going to rent first. That's how you avoid it. Like Airbnb, you don't look at Airbnb without putting [in] your dates. (Naomi, 24, Single rental, Interview)

Natalie's ritual for avoiding any disappointment over unavailability was to extend her search and add multiple items to her virtual closet. This strategy was echoed by some of the single rental participants – Emelia said that she tends to intensively search for several items as

“backups” and adds them to her virtual closet. She also mentioned a range of ritualized acts she carries out to manage unavailability (e.g., how and when she research, and saving backups).

I think because the lists are big enough, most often I'm using it for work. The work list I like to keep is big, there's 99 styles in there. If I were to look at it for things for today, this is delivering today, I can get three to four dresses, or three to four items. It feels big enough that I can pull from that. That tends to be what I use it for the most. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

I've always got a couple of favourites saved. That's just the way I am. What I'll do is, before an event, I will start looking thoroughly. Then I'll save everything. Make sure that it's available in my size, then always have a couple of backups because you don't want to be so disappointed when you have picked out that one perfect item that's not available before an event or something like that. Or, if I'd like to go out Friday night, or if I have to go out Saturday night, and I want something fresh to wear; I want something I haven't worn before. You can actually go to RTR for that as well. More a night out. I always have a couple of saves. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

Other types of researching online PRs related to dealing with items that participants were keen on but were unavailable. Such PRs not only included searching for and adding items to a virtual closet, but also sometimes being aware that finding an ABI might involve spending time and effort choosing it, chasing it, waiting until it becomes available, and sacrifice:

[Sometimes if] it's a specific item I've had to hunt down [for example] Dress the Population; not many people carry them, other than their own website and Nordstrom, but RTR do have a lot of dresses by them. If I was hunting down one specific dress for one specific occasion and I happen to come on to RTR, I would save it for the future. [If I'm] browsing, I would be hunting for something very specific. (Naomi, 24, Single rental, Interview)

Naomi described a firmly established and fixed sequence of activities she performs when chasing a specific ABI, which she refers to as “hunting down”. Planning spanned

researching, hunting, and considering items for future events, before starting the PRs of accumulating (see next section) by ‘saving’ them. The scarcity of her sought items positions this process as a treasure hunt (Gierl and Huettl 2010), demonstrating the ritual of chasing an item. This symbolic action can be seen as a form of possession.

I never rented something and then got a message saying it wasn't available. But there was one time where I saw a dress that I wanted and I favourited it. Then, when my return was processed, I opened the app back up to order it and it wasn't available anymore. Somebody had already rented it. I was disappointed cuz I wanted to try that dress, but somebody else had knabbed it. But it still shows up in my favourites so I could look for it later on.
(Amanda, 28, Unlimited user, Interview)

If I'm looking for specific things, like there's this one sweater I love, that is really hard to get. Whenever there was a time where I would go on every day, when my spot opened up, I would look for that sweater and it was unavailable. If you're trying to get something specific, they do have something called RTR reserved where you can reserve a specific item. It is hard. [...] (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Overall, the participants demonstrated a variety of treasure hunting activities, ranging from adding items to their virtual closet and continually checking their availability, to using a reserve option to get their sought-after item. Both Amanda and Natalie reflected on the PRs they used to avoid unavailability and their specific treasure hunting of some items, which seems to be part of their early appropriation process. It can be anticipated that unavailability reduces PO or prevents PO from forming since the inability to access could be seen as a lack of control. Amanda said she ensured she kept such sought-after items in her virtual closet under “My favourites” in order to keep an eye on them until they became available. Some participants may carry out such intimate PRs (keep items in a virtual closet and continuing to check their availability) as a way of forming a proactive relationship with a sought-after ABI. Natalie also described the development of her QPO, “*there's this one sweater I love*”, and the chasing PR whereby she daily checked if the item was available. Within Natalie's overall narrative, it can be seen that it is not important to her to access the identical ABI when re-accessing it, because she became attached to multiple versions of the same item. This theme was salient when she talked about re-assessing the same items. “*I've rented for about three or four months ... three different versions of this coat. I love this coat*” (Natalie,

30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary video note). Some participants regard their items as perfectly unique, and singular, whereas others understand and do not mind the notion of multiple versions.

Evidently, while the participants were concerned about access and the availability of an ABI, and despite the frustrations they had encountered, waiting until an item became available was another ritual they used to manage the unavailability. For example, Amy referred to engaging in explicitly signalling a commitment to wait for her selected items. Although Amy sometimes looks for alternatives, she tends to wait and invests time and effort in accessing a specific item, and does not give up. The participants not only evaluate items significantly more positively when they go through these PRs, but also seem to consider limited availability items as more valuable and sacred because of their scarce availability, which is in agreement with Lynn (1991). Such participants fuelled by the “fire of desire” of consumer passion for the inaccessible (Belk et al. 2003). The waiting ritual for Amy is an action driven by an expectation that it is likely to bring about the desired item, and consequently, the chance of accessing the item seems to enhance the pleasure of consumption, making her more excited about the item.

I think, in January, there was a shirt by Self Portrait that I really wanted to rent, but it wasn't available in my size. I didn't have anything to wear it to, but I really wanted to try it on and then maybe hold on to it for a later event. [It] was never available. Then one day I noticed it was available. I requested it. I got it the next day. I wore it the following night. I was very excited. I returned [it] after I wore it, the next day. Sometimes I have to wait to get things that I'm really interested in. But it's usually not the case that I have to wait more than a week or so. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

Megan (see below) also recognised that lack of access to limited items fostered her early appropriation. She described her attitude behind ritualistic behaviour of waiting until an item became available and reflected on her positive feelings during her wait. It is important to point out that this waiting is for an item to become available for order, not for delivery. For Natalie, when delivery is late, this will affect her psychological appropriation of the item in question. Waiting for delivery will be further discussed in the ‘during access’ stage (Section 5.1.1, ‘Unpacking PRs’).

For me, it is what it is. There's items that are really hot commodities. It might be a really long time before I get to rent it. I do know that I have

other options that I like. I'm okay with just a different option. I feel pretty laid back using the app just because I know I'll always have another opportunity. I'm pretty positive [about it]. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Suddenly, RTR finally arrived. It took a little bit longer than normal, which impacts the sense of ownership I have because I wasn't waiting for this for anything specific but, if I was, that impacts how I feel, a little bit, about it. If I need it for an event or anything. With this, I'm just trying [it] for fun (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary video note).

Apart from hunting for an ABI and waiting for it, participants were willing to compromise by choosing a similar item or wearing a different size. For example, Emelia reflected a great deal about ways of managing her expectations by replacing a desired item with alternatives. The number of options helps to support access since, even if one item is unavailable, there will be other similar choices, which can enhance the PRs during all other stages. In other words, the PRs of planning for Emelia involved early appropriation of three choices for specific events in case one might not be available at the time of requesting it. It is clear from her disappointment how her illusion of ownership of this imagined closet is violated (see Section 4.3 'Accumulating').

I'm disappointed, definitely disappointed. But then I've always got two or three other choices that I've saved as well, that I'll go back to, maybe that wasn't my first choice. Then, again, I've got a second and third choice, usually. I know that I've got other options. It's okay, it'll all work out. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

It is worth mentioning that some participants went through similar ritualised acts during their experience of shopping inside the physical RTR store. Three of the participants talked about visiting the physical shop and agreed that PRs inside the store are akin to traditional shopping and that the experience of selecting ABIs inside the store gives them a QPO of these items. For example, Megan reflected on the fact that the shopping experience had to be re-established through various PRs, through a new way of shopping, but produced similar enjoyment to that felt during traditional shopping. When she scans an item, she can choose where to add it in her virtual closet.

I go to the store at least twice a week. I'm definitely a shopaholic, I love shopping, but I don't shop anymore because I have a new way to shop. It still brings that excitement for me when I go into the store and see what's new. I go in there and try things on. From there, all I have to do is [to scan it]. Here I can actually show you [...]. This is one of my rentals that I have right now. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

The PRs of planning carried out in the store give rise to feelings of acquisition, as Julia's quote reflects her experience inside the store in great detail. During her visit to the RTR store, Julia was happy and enjoying herself because it delivered a rich customer experience. She recalled twice the importance of the experience and the sense of belonging, and not just on the items in the store that helped her to indulge in consumption without guilt. She clearly goes there for the experience and to feel the QPO (i.e., it feels like almost nothing's off limits) brought about by having membership. It is not a regular shopping ritual; Julia has demonstrated various habitual practices through which she asserts her early appropriation, showing what ABIs mean to her. Psychological appropriation, or even a sort of QPO over these items is evident here:

Well, it's very fun. It's a very cute environment. [...] pink and they have fun sayings on the walls, everything to wear and lots of plants. Most of the girls that work there are really nice and if you go in pretty often they get to know you. There's also a get-ready section in the back where there's a full, get-ready bar with mirrors and some make-up and hair products. You can go in before and then pick up your outfit, curl your hair, and then use that section and get ready. I've used that on a few occasions. But the stores, in terms of [how they are] different than a regular shopping experience, it's a little bit more enhanced, it feels more personal because you have a membership there. It feels like almost nothing's off limits. Everything, technically, you could rent with your own limited membership regardless of the price point so that's really nice. I like the fact that there's really tons of things and more inexpensive things, but everything's covered in your membership. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Concurring with these results, previous studies have demonstrated that PRs reinforce enjoyment because they require greater engagement (Vohs et al. 2013; Amati and Pestana 2015). The sense of treasure hunting and the pleasant shopping experience involved in these

PRs are also expected to influence the user-item relationship. The symbolic role of these PRs, namely chasing an item, waiting until an ABI becomes available, and sacrifice, helps them claim the ABIs as theirs, and stand out among all the other users who can make the same claim. There is also a sense of accomplishment during this phase, which can be seen as both the ritual of generating intimate knowledge and dealing with unavailability, resulting in QPO. The participants successfully established pre-access attachment and managed to transfer potential ABIs into meaningful possessions.

All PRs of researching can be seen as a form of possession because the nature of the ABIs (clothes) in such a context enables early psychological appropriation. So far, the participants have followed a set of PRs in which they invest their time and energy in searching for ABIs. Such time and emotional investment help them appropriate their chosen items more fully. The difficulty of finding a suitable item in the traditional consumption mode has been replaced by new PRs and, in particular, learning from other users (i.e., with the same body shape, height, weight, or occasions) in ABC. Although prior knowledge of ABI is crucial to establish feelings of knowing, the next section will focus on the habits of participants for avoiding feelings of contamination, whereby participants tend to ignore the fact that the items have already been used.

4.2.4 User blindness

There are other PRs of planning through which users, over time, become better at making the role of the provider and the item's previous biography temporarily absent. These PRs are shown to be enacted so that the participants can experience the items as their own and to reduce potential barrier to PO, avoiding potential contamination at the early stage of appropriation.

The PRs of user blindness refer to participants' explicit descriptions of their blindness to an item's previous biography as a way to smoothen the process of acquisition. PRs of careful avoidance were evident when participants were asked about an ABI's history. First, some participants do not consider the biography of an item during the planning phase. For example, Zoey had never thought about previous user-item relationships and she only mentioned this because she was asked about it. As she put it: *"I don't normally think about that. Maybe now I will. I have not actually ever thought about that. I'll be honest."* Julia only takes the history into account if she really likes an item and states the following: *"No, no, but if I really liked something, [...] I'd be happy that the item had had multiple uses before that"* (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview). Similarly, Zoey talks about her excitement and also her blindness to an *item's* previous biography through denial, *because*

there is a lack of certainty as to whether an ABI is exactly the same one. Once again, it can be seen how she avoids any contamination that could threaten her QPO:

I guess you're excited, you're going to wear the same dress. But the same is if you bought a dress off Amazon and you see someone in the room wearing [it] and you don't know if you're going to wear their exact specific dress because you don't know what size they were wearing, or [whether] there were multiples [of] that size. I don't think it weirded me out at all that I'm wearing the exact same dress this other person is wearing, I don't really think about it. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Another way to exhibit a kind of blindness to an item's previous biography, is to seemingly perceive an ABI as a new and different item to those accessed by other users. This occurs through different ritualised acts, such as noting the way other users wear ABIs differently or for different occasions in the reviews and photos. For example, Lisa points out that her PRs of planning involve observing other users' reviews and photos. She focuses on how the photo reviews help to revoke any feeling of contamination because the other users have personalised what they have accessed and each one makes their ABIs look like their own. This, in turn, paves the way for an early process of appropriation:

I think having the photo reviews is really integral to avoiding that feeling of disgust because each woman – it might be the same dress – is wearing it in a different way. They make the dress look completely different from picture to picture, either by their accessories or the event. It doesn't look like the same dress. Even if it actually is the identical item, everybody wears [it] definitely. Photos show that it doesn't look like the same dress, looks like 1,000 different dresses. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Abigail also had the feeling that she was wearing something new because of her ritual of choosing not to see any barrier to appropriation but instead focusing on dry cleaning: “*They usually are washed pretty well [so] that I think [of] them as new and fresh*” (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). There appears to be an attempt to avoid potential barriers to appropriation, often associated with trust in the provider. Also, phrases that incorporate possessive pronouns (e.g., “*I always assure that my items are fresh*” (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary video note)) seem to induce the process of appropriation. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Some participants were more explicit in their lack of interest

in an item's biography. It seems a form of deliberate user blindness and a way in which they seek to account for their experiences.

I guess the most surprising thing is that I've learned that dresses and shirts, all these items, can be worn dozens of times and still look fresh. When you wear something in your own wardrobe, how many times do you really wear it? Not that many things go out of style. Maybe you wear your favourite shirt 20 times total. I really don't know how many times people are wearing these items. I don't think about where it's going. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Lisa's last two sentences could be the most explicit statement of her blindness about the item's previous biography (and its after use?), a form of denial that embodies an absence of any contamination or barrier to early psychological appropriation during the planning phase. There is no sense of connection with other users, but at the same time participants also rely on the experiences of other users, which were discussed in the previous section. PRs of planning make the access experience similar to brand new clothes shopping. For Lisa, the movement of items among users is unseen and absent from her experience of ABFC. The participants clearly make attempts to singularise ABIs by denying previous use, which can be seen as a form of possession.

Natalie's reflection of her PRs manifest psychological appropriation at the early stage of access, as she describes her experience as "definitely mental", and that she perceives her PRs of planning as shopping: "There's the illusion you're shopping." This early psychological appropriation helps her to view ABIs as new as well, but not sufficiently for PO to be formed.

[I]t's definitely mental because, if I thought about it, I would be like, that's probably really gross. But it's never grossed me out. At the store everything is much cleaner. Not cleaner, but much newer; there's a sense the store's really clean. It looks like a store. There's the illusion you're shopping. You just don't exchange money. I think that helps reinforce this idea of everything's new and shiny. Maybe that helps with my idea of, like, it's clean. You can go and try on a lot of stuff [that] has tags on it. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

While often the previous use was absent from the participants' accounts, it can be seen that they view the ABIs as new. The movement of items in terms of their changing status is important for consumer research. Individuals imagine the biography of an item to be psychologically appropriated and incorporated (Kopytoff 1986) through PRs (Kopytoff 1986; McCracken 1986). Blindness to the previous movement of items during the pre-access stage is supported by the satisfaction of the access experiences, and the reaction to the role of the provider in eliminating any barriers to QPO. It is also supported by the illusion of newness, as several participants expressed perceiving their PRs as shopping. A range of PRs using the RTR platform often help prevent negative influences related to hygiene from occurring. The platform's design (e.g. detailed reviews) are driven to a large extent by the aim of preventing negative contamination by establishing feelings of knowing and supporting feelings of control.

This section has explored the PRs of planning and has argued that these PRs are part of the appropriation process. The next part of this chapter will focus on the next phase of pre-access – PRs of accumulation.

4.3 Accumulating

Accumulation usually occurs at the same time as planning. The PRs during the accumulation phase refer to users' tendency to add to, categorise, and update their virtual closet on the RTR platform in order to appropriate desired ABIs pre-access and share what is in them with others. All these PRs give users a feeling of control, extensive knowledge, and the chance of self-investment in the ABIs; such PRs seem to promote a feeling of QPO pre-access. Users obtain a living relationship with the items by virtually accumulating ABIs and giving them special, self-related meaning. The functions of the RTR app enable users to populate their virtual closets in such a way and this creates a new way of 'having' them.

Among the accumulation rituals, the participants perform the adding of ABIs to a virtual closet after they have gone through the experience of the treasure hunt, and they build a special affection and respect for their collections. The participants appear very enthusiastic about the digital accumulation of ABIs, which drives the living relationship and consequently enhances QPO and boosts the concept of the extended self. Accumulation facilitates the possession of those items with familiarity, and QPO is satisfied in the pre-access stage. The overall interpretation of the PRs of accumulating is presented in Table 4-5, explaining how each one is linked to elements of both the routes to and motives for PO.

Possession ritual	Definition	Linked routes to PO	Motives for PO
Adding ABIs to the virtual closet	Accumulating items virtually to signify possession and obtain a living relationship with them, which helps the participant to classify themselves and transform the possessions' meanings.	- Intimate knowledge - Control -Self-investment	- Efficacy and effectance - Need for home
Organising a virtual closet	Transforming items into meaningful possessions by organising the virtual closet and categorising it (e.g., with a special name).	- Intimate knowledge - Control - Self-investment	- Efficacy and effectance - Stimulating self-identity
Sharing their virtual closet	Displaying and sharing their virtual closets with friends and family.	- Self-investment	- Stimulating self-identity - Efficacy and effectance

Table 4-5 Elements of rituals: the PRs during accumulating phase and their links to elements of PO
(Source: own illustration)

4.3.1 Adding ABIs to the virtual closet

The participants added items to their virtual closets on the RTR platform, these being digital wish lists of items they planned to access in the future. Adding items to their virtual closets support users to achieve PO elements in the pre-access stage. This possession ritual contributes to the notion of the quasi-endowment effect that takes place when users develop PO over items within a digital environment (Heyman et al. 2004; Groening et al. 2021). Figure 4-2 gives an example of adding ABIs to the virtual closet, from one of the participants.

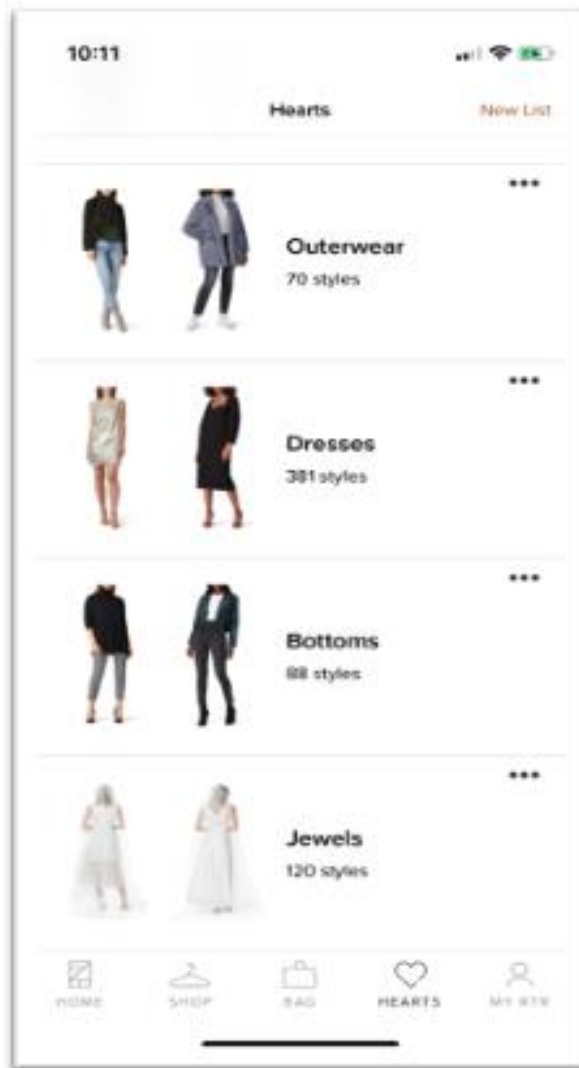


Figure 4-2 Example of how Abigail's virtual closet was organized

Such virtual forms of appreciation are increasingly being viewed by consumer research as a way for consumers to invest effort in appropriation processes and to enable them to create value for themselves (Franke and Schreier 2010). Like most participants, Julia said she spent a great deal of time collecting and regularly checking her list:

... I look at my list almost every time I look at the app, or every other time I look at the app. I think all the items in my list I always want and want to wear and I will wear regardless of whether or not I think I have an appropriate occasion to. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

When I use my app, I have a lot of different folders of things that I've hearted. These are all of the hearts and then I'll [create] folders, like this one says Houston wedding gigs. I have an earrings folder. I'm thinking of earrings I really like. I

have date night outfits, necklaces. I [have a] Balls for Mardi Gras² [folder]. I like to utilise the app to look towards the future and get excited for events that I have in the future, and just pick out things that I might be interested in trying on. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Megan pointed out that the value of the virtual closet includes the ability to search for an item in advance, creating categories, saving items into them, and picking items to access from these categories when needed. She asserted that adding items to her virtual closet, which she referred to as “hearted”, had become an essential part of her ABC. It formed part of her PRs for any future access. When Megan adds and categorises ABIs in her virtual closet, she is already picturing herself at those future events. The participants overall demonstrated that adding and categorising ABIs to their virtual closets were PRs that had to be done before ordering those items: *“I scroll, I use my phone to scroll through the website. I do [it] often, a couple of times a week. If I like a dress, I will save it and then see if it’s available in my size”* (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview).

It is evident that the virtual closet plays a crucial role in the possession ritual. In previous studies involving cognitive psychological experiments, the feeling of ownership has tended to be proven by having individuals just imagine putting an item in a basket that belongs to them (Turk et al. 2013; Kim and Johnson 2012). Naomi sensed QPO when she talked about adding ABIs to her virtual closet: *“I feel it’s a bigger closet, in my mind, I have a bigger closet to look at.”* (Naomi, 24, Single rental, Interview). This ritual develops a stronger user-item relationship. For example, Julia added items to her virtual closet to enable her to obtain meanings from these categories, and the items added to her virtual closet were always her first choice:

Anytime I’m ordering something, I have a spot open and I’m gonna order something to the store rather than just knowing that I’m going to pick something up right then and there at the store. I’ll go through my list to see if there’s anything that I really wanted last time, and that I just should order it if it’s available, or if I have an event, like, I’m going on a trip. I’m going to New York next weekend, [so] I’ve added a few things on to a list that I’m looking [at] to see if they’re available

² Mardi Gras balls refers to events of the Carnival celebration. These events often include costumes, dancing, and music.

to order in time for that. I look at my list almost every time I look at the app. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

As Julia illustrates, it is not just the availability of an ABI, but the importance of having the piece in advance in her virtual closet as it has already been through the possession ritual when she adds it in the first place. This is akin to a commitment - adding an ABI to categories within virtual closets and then choosing from these items and keeping them there even after access (i.e., divesting, which will be discussed in Chapter 6). For example, Lisa uses the lists to manifest commitment: *“I see items in my list as pre-vetted, things I’ve already decided that I liked and would wear; it makes it easier for me to choose from those hearts”* (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview). Likewise, through accumulation, Amy can create a special feeling about ABIs in her routine access behaviour by having a greater attachment to items in her virtual closet: *“I usually when I’m trying to select what I’ll wear, I’ll browse through my favourites folders. [...] that I’m excited to potentially try for, that I’m curious about, that I haven’t yet tried. I definitely prioritise those ones over items that I haven’t necessarily sorted into folders yet”* (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). She is only allocating space to ABIs about which she is really excited about, and may wish to consider in the next stage of access. It is a way of having feelings for these items in advance.

As shown in the examples from Julia, Megan, Sophie, and Lisa, users develop a sense of sacralisation about the ABIs in their virtual closets. This ritual increases the level of user-item interaction. In line with these results, previous studies have demonstrated that time spent on user-item interaction leads to strong attachment (e.g., Mogilner and Aaker 2009). Several PRs have been shown to be used by consumers to incorporate digital virtual goods (Watkins and Molesworth 2012) as part of their extended selves (Belk, 2013). This confirms the association between anticipating greater happiness and PO through appreciation in a pre-consumption scenario (Li and Atkinson 2020). It also reflects the findings of Groening et al. (2021), who also found that “wish lists engender psychological ownership” in the context of ownership-based consumption because such wish lists enable the quasi-endowment effect and increase the likelihood of consuming the item. They also found that such quasi-endowment effect can replace actual purchase and consumption, which consistent with this study findings. In the same context, consumers place items in wish lists to manage their cycles of desire, and those items have been found to be somewhere between possession and non-possession, with wish lists used to reduce the desire to physically own the items (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013). However, the participants in this study are found to use the virtual closet as a possession ritual, which goes further than what has previously been

documented. Mostly, adding ABIs to a virtual closet is found to represent an initial state, somewhere between QPO and material possession, as discussed in the next section.

4.3.2 Organizing a virtual closet

In transforming ABIs into meaningful possessions, the participants tend to organise their virtual closets and categorise them by giving them special names. Self-investment often relates to activities related to mass-customisation (Fogliatto et al. 2012; Mugge et al. 2009). The participants are often found to categorise their virtual closets in such a way as to make the ABIs theirs, utilising the platform features. The participants give meaning to potential ABIs within their own lives and transform them into meaningful possessions through this ritual. Such PRs help to create meaningful possession and the construction of an always-evolving identity, which is in agreement with both Belk's (1988) and Arnould and Thompson's (2005) concepts of meaningful possessions and the extended self. Using terms such as 'heart' and 'favourite' as verbs demonstrates how the participants transform these items into meaningful possession. These actions are symbolic of this transition, which goes beyond categorising:

I organise my hearts by type of clothing, such as tops, bottoms, dresses, outerwear, bags, and jewellery. This way, I don't have to scroll through a bunch of items if I'm looking for something in particular. (Abigail, 26, Digital diaries – note-taking)

I'm able to favourite items that I like and sort them into different folders. I'll go back to those items later on, depending on what I need it for. If I just want clothing, I know it's about to get cold out soon, I'll need a coat. I don't need a coat today. I might need one in a week or so. I guess I would wait. I wouldn't rent it right away. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

I try to organise it by work, if I could wear it for work or socialising, and things I just wear for socialising. Then I break it down to shirts on top, pants on the bottom, and then a small dress section as well. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Abigail's, Amy's, and Zoey's excerpts show this accumulation ritual and how they transform ABIs into meaningful possessions. As Zoey clarifies, it is not just accumulating these ABIs in her virtual closet; rather, it is the connection and meaning she gets by assigning each item to a specific category, helping her to define them. Her categorisation and accumulation of ABIs extends her physical wardrobe and makes her feel the presence of these items. Amy is

committed to her favourite ABIs in her virtual closet. She defines herself as a collector because she spends a great deal of time accumulating and organising these items. From Amy's general narrative, it can be deduced that these collected items are a means of self-investment. This is the case for all participants who used the virtual closet.

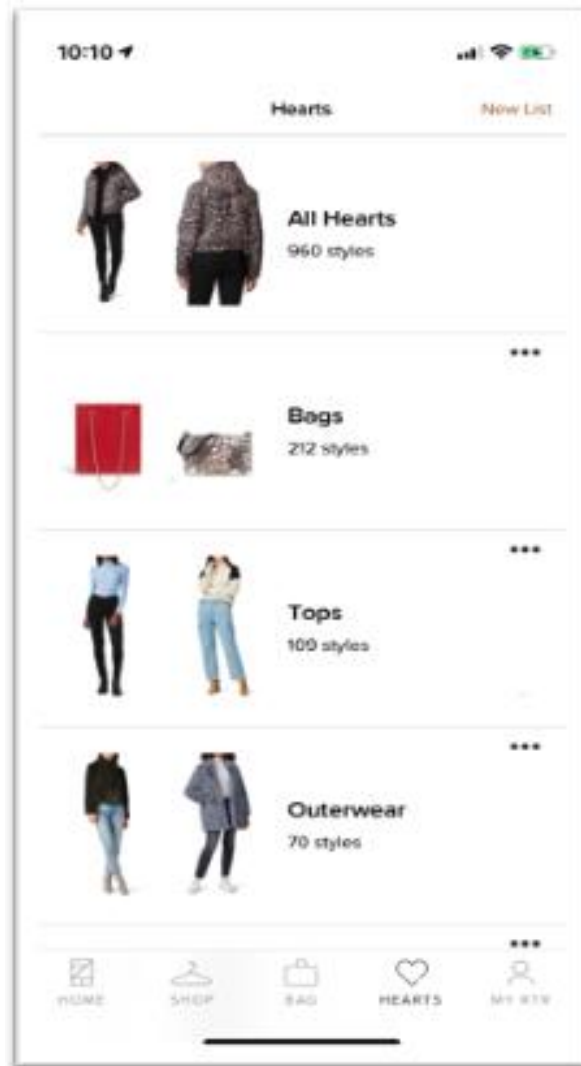


Figure 4-3 Example of how Abigail's virtual closet was organized

Two different ways of categorising virtual closets can be seen among the participants. The first is conventional categorisation, according to functionality, such as bags, tops, and outerwear. This is what Abigail did and is shown in Figure 4-2. The other way is personalisation of categories through renaming in a way that has meaning and goes beyond mere functional categorisation. For example, Natalie explained the importance of building her virtual closet and giving ABIs special meaning by categorising them in such a way as to make them meaningful possessions. She does this through the process of creating lists, labelling them with a special meaning based on how she will use her accumulated items, and sometime labelling based on her attachment. For most participants, both categorising

approaches were a way of intimately knowing, controlling, and self-investing in items they were trying to turn into meaningful possessions. For example, having those items in their virtual closets gave them a feeling that they had control over them and became part of their extended self.

Researcher: "Can you take me through how you like things and how you add them online?"

Natalie: "I use the heart button to like pieces and I often do the list. [...] These are the hearts that I have. One [...] heart has almost 1,500 styles and they call them Styles. Sum[ming] everything that I have had, it has 1,492 things in total. I have one called Work at Work. WORK, I think I'm very funny but I'm not. I have one called Funky Prints and Styles for things that are weird. I have a Generic Sweaters and Tops list. I have one called Wedding Ways because I'm going to a wedding in the summer. I have one called On all Pocketzz with two Zs. I have a list called Day into Night for when I'm, like, wearing something at work, but I might have an event at night so it can work both ways. I have a list called Skirts. I have a list called Vacate All the Way because I'm going on vacation. That only had seven things in it. Then, I have my worn and loved. I have a list called Maybe Baby for things I'm not quite sure about but might want to wear. Pants, and then I have one called Casual. I have one called Work it Out, Jumpsuits and Rompers, and Coats, Jackets and Blazers. I have a list called Reorder and Resize, for when I wear something or try it on but it's not the right size. I want to remember that it was wrong, and I might possibly want to try it again. [...] Glitters like Gold, for my list of things that are just really shiny. When I went to be styled, I made a list for the girl, Danielle – 'Danielle RTR style day' list. I have quite a few lists and I'm constantly adding to those. It's the only way I can keep track. [...] how do I call from this list? [...] it just seems like it's part of your wardrobe." (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

The narrative shows that Natalie exhibits a high degree of familiarity when accumulating ABIs. She emphasises that the accumulation of ABIs had become an essential part of her daily life, with the PRs of accumulating contributing to her lifestyle and reflecting her identity. She explains that she manages to make ABIs hers by adding them to these categories, something she mentions repeatedly in her interview and digital diaries.

However, it should be noted that there are some generic categories that do not hold any meaning, whereas other categories are used to transform ABIs into singular possessions

with personal significance. The way she labelled her categories also reflects her playful personality as seen in the play of words. This is indicative also of personalising and making it more meaningful to her. For example, the Maybe Baby list is for things that she is not quite sure about but might want to wear, Funky Prints is for things that are weird, Reorder and Resize is for things that she wants to remember and might re-access. Using Reorder and Resize signals repeated use in the future and draws on previous experience, which is another way of personalisation. Organising them into virtual closets gives ABIs more permanence and retains contextual meanings (e.g., holiday, a friend's wedding). The participants are found to actively categorise the items they collect, put them in specific categories, and gave them new meanings and value, which involves investing their selves in the process. This finding is consistent with previous observations on collecting (Belk 1995; Campbell 2005).

Natalie reflects on how she organises her virtual closet and how she uses lists to re-access items whenever she wants. In her digital diaries, Natalie talks more about organising her virtual closet because it gives her reassurance that she can find the beloved and suitable items again if she wants to access them in the future, for example, with her list "*My worn and loved*". She also asserts that items in her virtual closet feel like hers and feed into a kind of QPO: "*So my feelings on the items here (My worn and loved category) are essentially like [they are in] my closet*" (Digital diaries – diary voice note). For most of the participants, virtual closets help to create a special feeling about the saved ABIs, as if they are part of their own wardrobe when they are in their virtual closets. Therefore, it can be assumed that giving a list a name is a way of controlling it (Epley et al. 2008), enabling, and signalling other PO elements.

Participants' virtual closets also play a strong role in changing and expanding their lifestyle and significantly stimulate QPO. They actively choose to accumulate items with styles different to their usual ones. ABC allows the liquid transformation of self-identity, which is inherent in such consumption modes (Loussaïef et al. 2019). For example, Natalie reflects that she takes more risks because it is only ABIs, which have a lower risk; thus, she becomes more stylish. This is not only facilitating self-extension, but also allowing her to become more innovative in trying new styles:

This is very different from my normal sense of how I dress, but I wanted to try a new style and challenge myself to be more fashion forward and dress out of the box a bit! I love RTR because I can try things and step out of my comfort zone fashion-wise and there's very little risk! If it works it works and if it doesn't, no big deal! (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

I think, in general with RTR, my style has left my comfort zone. I'm definitely more experimental than I used to be. My outfits used to always just be jeans and a black shirt or leggings and a sweatshirt. Now I have a lot more fun with it. I think different women wearing exciting exotic outfits helps me push those boundaries and experiment even more. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

There is a sense of indulgence, with liquid consumption in relation to self-appreciation and acceptance, among the interviewees. For example, Natalie and Amy facilitate their self-presentation through items in their virtual closet and this virtual closet encourages their explorative sense. As cited, Natalie has lists in her virtual closet called Funky Prints and Styles for unusual items that she really wants to try. She asserts that the PRs of accumulating help her to try new styles and to challenge herself by transforming unusual ABIs into acceptable possessions.

[T]hey're all items I would like to wear for different reasons. There are some items that I suppose would be a bit more aspirational, rather than fitting for day-to-day use. I have some lists for formal events and some lists for nights out. I do find that sometimes. I've already rented something that I really like. I was excited about [...] a really cool skirt. I might not have [...] an event in that coming week that I needed that skirt for, but I'll find a way to wear it because I really wanted to wear it. Sometimes I'm a little bit more dressed up than I need to be. It's because I have access and the ease of picking up nicer things that I wouldn't normally force myself to wear for just like a day at the office or going to a casual dinner. I think all the items in my list I always want and want to wear and I will wear regardless of whether or not I think I have an appropriate occasion to [go to]. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Julia's quote illustrates several accumulative rituals, revealing how her virtual closet changes and expands to suit her lifestyle. She asserts her attachment to items on her lists. Julia accumulates ABIs to define and remind herself of who she is. Participants seem to have a sense of self-discovery and self-experimentation, trying new things in a way that they would be reluctant to do with ownership-based consumption. Huang et al. (2009) found that expanded choices ultimately function to help fulfil psychological needs such as self-affirmation and self-verification.

4.3.3 Sharing their virtual closet

Participants maintained the special stature of their ABIs through other curatorial practices, namely, displaying and sharing their virtual closets for their friends and family. For example, one of Abigail's accumulating rituals was to share the ABIs in her virtual closet with her friends. There is a language of self-investment and control associated with letting others see and choose from her virtual closet. Because Abigail took extra effort in creating her virtual closet and developing her clothes collections, it made her perceive them with a significance that justified sharing them, and triggered QPO:

My friend the other day was looking for a gown. She was [...] trying to do the search herself in her app, but then she was having trouble finding stuff that she liked. She asked me to see my list of items that I've hearted so that she could find [...] gowns that I've liked, and she found that helpful, being able to see my list; then, she was able to find a dress that she wasn't able to find on her own. It was part of my hearted list. (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

Abigail's friend appreciated her style with clothes and her accomplishment as a collector. Abigail's repeated use of the phrases "to see my list" and "but it was as part of my hearted list" is symbolic of this perception that it is hers. She explained in her interview that these accumulated ABIs would be difficult for others to find because she went through planning and accumulating rituals.

Megan also used a virtual closet to display her collection before and after access. If she planned to wear something for a coming event, she would normally let others see what she had in her closet. Megan showed the researcher the way she let her friends see her collection by opening her app, navigating through the virtual closet, and opening her lists. She recalled the last time she had showed her lists to one of her friends, showing digital representations of ABIs that was in her physical wardrobe. She was delighted to be able to show her collection and an item she was planning to wear:

I was showing one of my friends my different options of dresses that I had for an event and, without the physical dress, I would not be able to show her because I didn't have the physical dress with me. I was like, "Oh, this is what I have rented right now. Do you think I should wear this?" (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

It was found to be common among participants to not only display what was in their virtual closet, but also to recommend them to others, which can be seen as a ritual of transforming homogeneous ABIs into meaningful possessions through such possession practices (i.e., sharing, recommending, and display).

I use the app at least maybe every other day, if not more. It depends. If I have events coming up, then I'll be on the app more often looking at all the options of saving dresses and items. Sometimes I use that a lot to remember what the brand is of something that I'm wearing. Or [if] a friend asked me, I will show them the app. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Julia describes a range of ritualised acts she uses when organising her virtual closet and the advantages of doing so. She uses her collections in the virtual closet to remember which brands she has worn and to show her friend those branded items as part of her collection. She thus uses her collections to enhance her concept of an extended self because she asserts the importance of brands and how she shares them with her friend. The participants illustrate that they value the PRs of accumulating and the associated feelings.

The participants were found to accumulate ABIs in their virtual closets, not only adding them, but also organising, singularising, and transforming them into meaningful possessions by setting up specific lists, and pointing out their feeling about them. Indeed, clear feelings are shown by the participants: a narrative of control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge is evident in their language throughout the accumulation phase. Phrases that incorporate possessive pronouns (e.g., 'my items', 'I have', and 'my dress') seem to induce PO of the target of ownership (Kou and Powpaka 2020; Johar and Weiss 2013). Most participants express their high attachment to items in their virtual closets. This living relationship is important as ABIs meld digital accumulation with physical access, providing additional opportunities for users to feel QPO.

4.3.4 A living relationship (collecting and storing the items digitally)

The ontological stature of the virtual closet, lying in between the digital and the physical, enables users to experience new forms of owning through the ability to accumulate ABIs digitally. A recurrent theme in our findings was a sense that ABIs blended the physical and digital. When discussing their feelings, it became clear that for the participants there was no longer an obvious distinction between the digital and tangible. This section begins by laying out how the virtual closet is experienced as a living relationship, how ABIs are

organised into personalised categories within the virtual closet, and how the virtual closet is related to investing in and extending self.

James (1890) argued that PO came about through a living relationship between an individual and an item. A living relationship established between a user and an item is characterised by a strong relationship of attachment and even an intimate connection (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021). Although Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017, p. 586) discovered “a lack of strong connection to accessed objects” (shared cars), they predicted this lack might be overcome in other ABC contexts. Indeed, the context of ABFC is different, with participants rather pursuing PRs so as to have a living relationship with the item. Julia went through various PRs of accumulation to build a living relationship. The participants legitimized their possessiveness by adding ABIs to their virtual closets. Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond (2021, p. 10) focus on ‘building a long-term relationship’ with possessions in both traditional consumption and ABC. They argue that ‘being with’ is a new reality for having, and introduce it as an alternative to ownership.

There are many ways in which the participants develop and build strong connections with the ABIs in their virtual closets. In order to develop such living relationships, a number of accumulating rituals can take place, in no particular order: collecting, storing, caring, and recategorising. The living relationship includes the desire to collect and store ABIs, the enjoyment of these accumulating rituals, the desire to browse through saved ABIs, and even the desire to accumulate a countless number of ABIs that reflect past or future selves.

The living relationship is related to the possession ritual, because collecting is defined as a process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and sorting so as to turn items into personal possessions (Belk 1995). However, the living relationship goes beyond physical acquisition in such hybrid situations. Many of the participants discussed their living relationship with what they would access and had already accessed because it was there in the ‘virtual closet’ as a possibility, reminding them that it could be accessed at any time. Thus, the virtual closets made the ABIs seem more present and accessible before and after they were ordered. For some participants, the virtual closet had become just as or more important than their wardrobe. For example, Natalie suggested that the virtual closet extended her physical wardrobe, helping her to build a living relationship with the ABIs even after the physical items had been sent back:

I started making lists very specifically. Anytime I wore [something] like this, for example, [such] as a RTR dress and it fit me, and I liked it, I made a list that said ‘worn and loved’. I knew that, in the future, I could say or call from that list. I’ve

been cleaning out my closets and giving away a lot [...] like donating to Salvation Army or things like Poshmark or Threat Up. I don't know if these exist in the UK. There's an excess of clothes that I almost wear. I don't even know the percentages, but I probably wear 15 per cent of my closet. I wear maybe five, six pairs of my pants. I go to the same two or three dresses that I own. I was defaulting to the same clothes and there was so much of my closet I didn't even know was there because of how it was packed, or I just didn't like it. It didn't fit me. I've changed sizes. When I'm wearing RTR, I feel more confident. More people are complimenting me. I don't need to say that all of it fits nicely. Half of the stuff I try on, I'm [thinking] that's gross. Who designed that? It's a process. I think I feel more positive if I'm having a bad day or I feel badly about myself. I love putting on a nice dress or sweater or something that I know people compliment me [on] when I wear this because then it puts me in a good mind frame or it doesn't hurt at least. I think the RTR idea is positive and I don't feel badly that I'm spending \$170 a month because what I get out of it is so much more beneficial. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

In the second part of Natalie's quote, she reflects on how the virtual closet extends her physical one and how much she relies on her virtual closet to access items that make her feel different. These ABIs seem to be consistent with her self-identity and foster a temporary extended self. Although Natalie just acquires them digitally at this stage, she is also involved in communicating meaning about herself and her relationships through ABIs that she loved or might like. This seems to help her to develop user-item relationships with her beloved items, and she takes constant care of and makes a continuous commitment to such living relationships. Natalie, like other participants, tends to assert a positive affect: "I feel more confident." Previous studies have demonstrated that a positive affect (i.e., a positive feeling state, such as confidence) experienced during both actual and imagined consumption can increase individuals' PO (Thürridl et al. 2020). Positive affect has been used to refer to actual or imagined emotions that individuals feel when they use services (Spears and Yazdanparast 2014; Cohen et al. 2015).

One consequence of the living relationship between users and ABIs is related to "object attachments" (Belk 1992). This finding is contrary to those of previous studies, which have suggested the absence of item appreciation in ABC (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Sophie expresses this sense of a living relationship with the items in her virtual closet and that the virtual closet does replace the physical one: "I have a huge closet. It's just not in my

house; [my] closet is somewhere else” (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview). This is a common view among the participants, who consider themselves to have a QPO of these accumulated ABIs. The accumulating rituals seem to strengthen such feelings.

In this respect, the living relationship with the ABIs is a consequence of continual dedication towards digital accumulating, which makes their virtual closets “*an upcoming closet*” that belong to the users. If such living relationships did not take place or were terminated, the user-item relationships would not occur, and the items would be removed from the virtual closet. Another accumulating ritual is to ensure that the virtual closet is up-to-date:

I heart the ones that I like and think I could see myself wearing in the future. I have my heart list of all the items that I like and haven't worn yet. When it's time to, if I've returned an item and need to check out a new item, I go to my heart list and sort [the] new [items] and pick from there. Most of the time I'm checking out stuff that I would wear to work from Monday to Friday. Towards the later, second half of the week, I would maybe check out one or two items that I would use on the weekend. If there's a birthday party or a dinner I'm going to [...] that's the usual pattern. (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

If I'm planning a month or two months out, I'll go to my list ... I'll add as I take a look [to see] if they've been adding new items or something like that. I add mine into my list and then I probably don't get it until a few days before I need it. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview)

Both Abigail and Jessica here demonstrate the possession ritual of collecting and storing ABIs virtually, and their attention to the ritual. Abigail talks about using herself as a reference category – ABIs added are only those that are in alignment with her: “think I could see myself wearing them in the future”. Jessica needs to consider ABIs as “mine” in order to categorise them within her virtual closet. This is in accordance with the egocentric categorization theory (Johar and Weiss 2013) because QPO of an ABI seems to affect how the item is egocentrically classified and consequently added to her virtual closet: an ABI becomes “me” once it is added. ABFC has been found to strongly reflect and nourish consumers’ self-identity (Loussaïef et al. 2019). Self-investment and stimulating self-identity are clear in Abigail’s and Jessica’s narratives, as elements of PO.

I rent. I'm usually in and out of the retail space pretty often. I check the app every day [...] at the new arrivals section, and see, is there something new that I should be adding to the folders, and I usually spend about 20 minutes as I return an item, browsing through my existing folders to see what should I rent next. I have a lot of different folders. They're organised by season and function. I'll have summer work clothes, travel items, accessories, formal attire. Everything is divided. It's helpful for me to [...] look at them based on those categories. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

The participants would develop a strong living relationship between the ABIs and their past, present, or imagined future selves, to give them meaning within their own life. For example, Amy organises potential items as a form of possession ritual that holds personal meaning, such as associations with other styles, purposes, and occasions relevant to her. The participants showed a tendency to link accumulation and possessiveness and derived meaning from this living relationship in their everyday lives. The excerpts below also illustrate how the participants acknowledged this living relationship and perception of the ABIs in their virtual closets being theirs:

They've had delivery problems, things that are slow. I've had a few things that have holes in them. I've gotten the wrong items a couple of times. But I've found that, overall, there's nothing that would make me leave the service because the positive benefits have been profound. I feel I'll never be able to not rent my clothes, maybe not necessarily, maybe a better company will come along, but right now, I could never imagine something happening that would make me cancel my subscription. It's because, even if I have to call customer service, it's a little bit annoying. But the net benefit of having a wardrobe at my fingertips just makes up for any of that, any of that obnoxious stuff. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

I feel this is every girl's dream, to have designer clothes at your fingertips. Because I have an unlimited closet that I'm already paying for that I can utilise. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Although the participants might not have the item physically, they have the virtual closet, which gives them a feeling of a living relationship. Lisa emphasised the benefit of 'having' a virtual closet that is readily accessible, making her turn a blind eye to any problems associated with the service because she is completely dependent on her virtual closet.

Megan's repeated use of "I have" is symbolic of her perception that the items are hers, despite being in a virtual closet. They achieve this through the accumulation rituals, responding to their need for emotional bonding with the ABIs and to look after items they perceive to be theirs, which will be further discussed at the end of this section. The virtual closet is experienced in terms of ABIs being seen as more readily accessible. In many cases, the participants expressed having an unlimited feeling of access to those items due to the accumulating rituals, using words such as "quick", "jiffy", "effortless", "easy", and "handy". The participants seemed to fulfil their desire to feel competent through the ability to add ABIs to their virtual closets and its impact was a feeling of effectance. For example, for Emelia, going through accumulating helped her to utilise the subscription and gave her a feeling of having an unlimited closet:

If I need something very quick in my closet right away, then it will get to me. I think it's a very good thing because we're all such a fast [paced] society now. Definitely a lot of possibilities. That maybe you wouldn't even think about, but definitely it's something that, in a jiffy, [you might say] "Oh, I don't know what I could wear." You look on there [the virtual closet]. There's always an option for you. That's what I like. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

Commenting on whether she felt the virtual closet seemed like her own closet, Emelia said:

I feel the dresses are mine. I'm not 100 per cent committed or serious with anything on the list. But it's things that I like, things that I think would possibly fit me, and [would be] flattering. I'm thinking about events coming up in the future. These are [on my] saved list. They're not commitments, there's something that, in the future, if I need to look at them, that's what I will do. It does to a degree [seem like my own closet]. I would say to a degree because I know what my real closet looks like. This would be more of a fantasy closet. That's what I think. It's more like an upcoming closet and upcoming event closet to me. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

Emelia was very responsive regarding her feelings about items in her virtual closet, saying "I feel the dresses are mine". She used terms to demonstrate her feeling of 'having', such as "a fantasy closet", "an upcoming closet", and "upcoming event closet". This finding is consistent with other research that has found that imagery (Kamleitner and Feuchtl 2015) and touchscreens (Brasel and Gips 2014) systematically interlink to PO, thus causing items

to become 'mine'. Emelia also talked about the feeling of ownership of ABIs in her virtual closet but articulated how it was different due to the lack of commitment. It might be argued that this is less about the PO of any specific item, with Emelia referring to speedy and convenient access to a range of suitable items. However, attributes such as accessibility and availability have a definite role in terms of evoking ownership feelings (Pierce and Jussila 2011). For Megan, using and adding ABIs in her app is a way of having:

I am a minimalist when it comes to, like, things; I don't like to have too many things. I enjoy using the app because it just keeps a space in my apartment very limited and they don't have to store a lot of clothes. I really enjoy the minimalism of using the app [RTR]. I like to try to tell all my friends about it. I try to get as many people I can to at least try it once. I think it's a great option. I just moved to Chicago three months ago. Some of my existing clothes that I owned that were in my closet had mould on them. I didn't find out they had mould on them until I found other mould throughout my apartment. I had so many clothes I had to throw out that I owned and it didn't really hurt to throw it out because I have an unlimited closet that I'm already paying for that I can utilise. I'm okay with letting things go. For me, RTR is a really great option because I'm not really ever tempted to buy from the website, because you do have that option as well. If you like something so much, you can just purchase it for a discounted price. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Megan is a minimalist in ownership-based consumption, but at the same time, she actively goes through the accumulating rituals. The virtual closet is a way of having, a feeling of having, that replaces physical accumulation of owned items. She shows a high level of emotion and devotion in the way she relies on her virtual closet, which completely replaces her traditional wardrobe. She believes that she has an unlimited closet and can utilise it. Megan's comment and the overall results for the accumulation phase show that the QPO of ABIs accumulated in the virtual closet can replace the traditional wardrobe; this accumulation can strengthen the attachment connection. Materialism is found to be a positive predictor of engagement in liquid consumption (Davidson et al. 2018). The findings presented above indicate that such accumulation rituals can shape the ways in which users relate to ABIs. In this early stage of access, accumulating items in the virtual closet clearly affects the feeling of QPO.

The ability to touch and add ABIs to a virtual closet is seen to be related to feelings of control. Such factors will lead to higher feelings of PO (Meißner et al. 2020; Jussila et al.

2015). PO can be felt even with a lack of physical possession, and with respect to virtual, digital content (Karahanna et al. 2015). This finding is in agreement with previous work on touch, which induces a spatial and temporal proximity result in PO (Peck et al. 2013). Even imaginary touching of an item leads to greater perceptions of controlling it, and increasing feelings of ownership (Huang and Liao 2017; Peck et al. 2013). Thus, imaginary touch through a smart screen, enabled by the virtual closet, can be linked to a psychological state of control and QPO. Such technologies maximize feelings of perceived control (Marinova et al. 2017).

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the PRs of the pre-access stage and looked at the planning and accumulating phases. If participants intensely engage in these phases' PRs, they feel QPO, which will lead to stronger psychological appropriation in the other stage of access, specifically, temporary and QPO. The participants also feel pre-access attachment (e.g., 'falling in love' with an item), backed by a lack of contamination (e.g., looking for "someone with a body shape like mine"). For users who practise planning PRs, these serve to incubate ABIs and, therefore, an early illusion of ownership of those items.

QPO during the planning phase is felt through the following: the researching rituals inherent in researching activity, the features available to help the user navigate the RTR platform, the potential barrier to appropriation made absent, and the degree of early psychological appropriation participants feel at such an early stage. This also makes the provider role temporarily absent. Each of these factors is influenced through the RTR platform design, for example, ability to come to intimately know an ABI through item's biography. Lastly, the analysis of the planning phase indicates that mentally simulating the PRs of others, and users' rituals that pass intimate knowledge among themselves, reinforce QPO.

The accumulating phase shows how participants develop QPO even though they are only accumulating the ABIs virtually and do not yet possess them. These digital, ritualised acts facilitate a living relationship with the ABIs and give them a special self-related meaning. For example, adding ABIs to the virtual closet not only enhances the living relationship, but also magnifies the concept of the extended self. The participants were very enthusiastic about using digital accumulation to make their ABIs more meaningful. The argument is that participants' role in the processes of creating and categorising lists, saving items into them, and picking an item to access from these categories facilitated their appropriation of these items as their own pre-access, facilitating a form of QPO.

The following chapter will examine the PRs performed ‘during access’, after the participants physically receive the ABIs

Chapter Five: During-Access PRs

This chapter presents the PRs performed by participants during access, divided into two phases: appreciation and cherishing. The PRs of appreciation focus on singularisation ABIs upon arrival, while the PRs of cherishing are about creating a clear and potentially enduring link between oneself and the ABI during access. The goal of each phase is quite different. When participants engaged in these during-access PRs, they were able to achieve a sense of TPO. TPO is a sense of ownership wherein one feels that an ABI is temporarily ‘mine’ while possessing the physical ABI.

5.1 Appreciation

The PRs of appreciation refer to the way in which users integrate the physical ABIs into their lives. It focuses on PRs of singularisation ABIs upon arrival. This is manifested in PRs of unpacking, trying, styling, storing, and treating their ABIs in a special manner and with respect throughout the time of usage. These ritualised acts are often interlinked and happen as part of one larger process of appreciation, but they are interpreted separately in this section for clarity. The appreciation phase represents the users’ role in transforming the ABIs so that they can be controlled, intimately known, and made part of the self. Table 5-1 breaks down appreciation into multiple distinct PRs and their links to elements of PO.

Possession ritual	Definition	Linked routes to PO	Motives for PO
Unpacking	Taking both physical and symbolic actions to appreciate and perceive the ABIs as new.	Intimate knowledge, control, and self-investment	- Efficacy and effectance - Stimulating self-identity
Trying	Trying all items on first, appropriating them as ‘mine’.	Intimate knowledge, control, and self-investment	- Efficacy and effectance - Stimulating self-identity
Styling	Styling ABIs to personalise them as ‘mine’.	Control and intimate knowledge	- Stimulating self-identity - Efficacy and effectance
Storing	Storing ABIs in a special setting as a form of possession.	Control and intimate knowledge	- Stimulating self-identity - Efficacy and effectance

Table 5-1 Elements of rituals: The PRs during appreciation phase and their links to elements of PO (Source: own illustration)

5.1.1 Unpacking

This section will discuss participants’ experiences of unpacking, which include unwrapping, reconciling items, and sometimes sharing the pleasure of opening newly delivered items with friends and family. Unpacking is sentimental and used to facilitate TPO. This PRs of

unpacking is important for transferring ABIs into appropriated possessions, which is in agreement with McCracken (1986) and Belk et al. (1989b).

The very first thing I do is take it out of the plastic wrap because it comes with a smell; the way the dry cleaning process works leaves the clothes with this kind of musty floral gross smell that will permeate sometimes through my bedroom. [...] The first thing I do is I unpack an item, rip off the plastic and then hang it up. I don't put it in my closet, I leave it out. Maybe I don't ever put the clothes in my closet; I have a coat rack in my room that I just hang them on, where I see them, and then usually, I'll try things on either right away or as soon as possible to see if it fits and to see if I need to send something back right away. Then I'll leave things out to remind me to wear it the next day. I try to wear things as soon as possible. I'll get annoyed if I try something on, I like it, but then I end up not wearing it for a couple of days. I just wasted a spot; I could have sent it back and gotten something new by now. Hang[ing] it out is the most important thing. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Lisa covers most of the PRs of the appreciation phase in the quote above, ranging from unpacking items, to trying all the ABIs on first, to how she stores them. She behaves during this phase in a ritualistic manner, to incorporate the ABIs. Unpacking the item and hanging it out, making it visible, is a critical ritual for her: “*Hanging it out is the most important thing.*” A fundamental part of the appreciation rituals lies in the packaging materials, such as plastic bags, and unwrapping them evokes the desire for appreciation. For Lisa, smelling the musty floral scent is part of her PRs, showing that her newly delivered ABIs were dry cleaned, and helping her to smooth the process of appreciation because it helps avoiding perceived contamination by previous users. Prior consumer psychology research has noted how sensory attributes of items influence consumers' thoughts, feelings, and decisions (Krishna 2012; Krishna et al. 2010).

Lisa distinguishes between second-hand items and ABIs in the following quote, the latter being easier to appropriate due to the trust associated with the cleaning and packaging:

[The] second-hand experience was very similar. But I guess [with] the rental experience, I trust that the clothes are at least as clean as they can be, because I know that they're dry cleaned. When you order from second-hand, you don't know if it's been washed or laundered. You always have to do that first (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview).

Interestingly, the ABIs are found to be easier to incorporate in comparison to items in other, traditional modes of consumption. The ABI is experienced as new; however, that feeling does not occur in second-hand practices (Norum and Norton 2017; Edbring et al. 2016), which are even often associated with product inferiority (Winakor 1969) and where contamination cues are more visible for clothing (Argo et al. 2006). For example, Julia compares how she incorporates ABIs into her possessions, compared to second-hand and even new, owned items (traditional consumption mode). ABIs are viewed differently and can easily be incorporated because the PRs do not require cleaning. RTR make sure to clear away any traces of previous use, to prevent any obstruction of appreciation. Making the ABI ready for use can play a significant role in easy appropriation. RTR does that by dry cleaning its items. This gives the user a feeling of wearing brand new items and overcomes any barrier. In Chapter 4, ‘user blindness’ was reported, another way in which the previous biography of an ABI can be obscured and made easy to ignore, and the participants never mention the items’ previous biographies when describing the unwrapping of those items. As Julia puts it:

Let me give you an example: when I go into a thrift store, or a huge clothing store, if an item is high end or still potentially ... [I'll] purchase it, but I'll always wash or clean or dry clean [it], depending on what kind of item it is because I do feel it's used; someone else has worn it. I need to clean it. But when I'm in RTR, I don't have that barrier. I'm obviously okay trying things on or just wearing them immediately. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

ABIs are immediately treated as special and, during the unpacking ritual, they become sacralised and incorporated by the users into their active possessions.

[W]ith Poshmark [Social commerce marketplace for second-hand clothing], sometimes you get something and you pull a hair off of it and [...] if I can see or smell [there is the] notion of somebody having worn it for some reason, it's a disconnect. With everything that comes from here, sometimes they'll smell it and make sure it's clean. But if it comes in a bag and it's sealed, somehow it feels clean. I've never gotten anything that's dirty. It's not like anything's ever come and looked or smelled dirty. I've been using it September, October. I've been using it for quite a while. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Natalie ensures that items are sealed in plastic bags. She inspects her newly delivered ABIs to appropriate them and perceived feeling of newness. The feeling of newness has been found to be a motivator for engaging in ABC (Lawson et al. 2016; Edbring et al. 2016). The feeling of newness steers the user's imagination when they are unpacking their items, making them feel the items are more sacred and as if they are opening something new and belonging to them.

Suddenly RTR finally arrived. [...] I always open them on the ottoman for whatever reason. Here's my return label. I take it out so I can easily put it back. I open it up to see, does it fit? I have no idea [if] these are gonna fit me, I haven't worn overalls for many years. When I take it out to see how is it going to look [...] I am going to lay it out on my couch. I like to make sure the back [is] at the bottom. I can see it's sealed and then I know it recently was dry cleaned. These are corduroys, I can feel they are really soft, and I'm going to take them out and I'm going to try it on now. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary video note)

In Natalie's digital diaries, she reflects on carrying out a number of practices when unpacking her ABIs, doing so in a special and identical setting each time – a specific place in her home – when unpacking an item from the bag. She also lays it out in a particular spot after inspecting it (Figure 5-1). There is a routine being followed here; the unpacking is not just simply taking it out of the bag, but inspecting it carefully to see whether there are flaws in the product. Participants deal with mixed feelings at the moment of the arrival of the ABIs and they give them special treatment to make them temporarily their own.

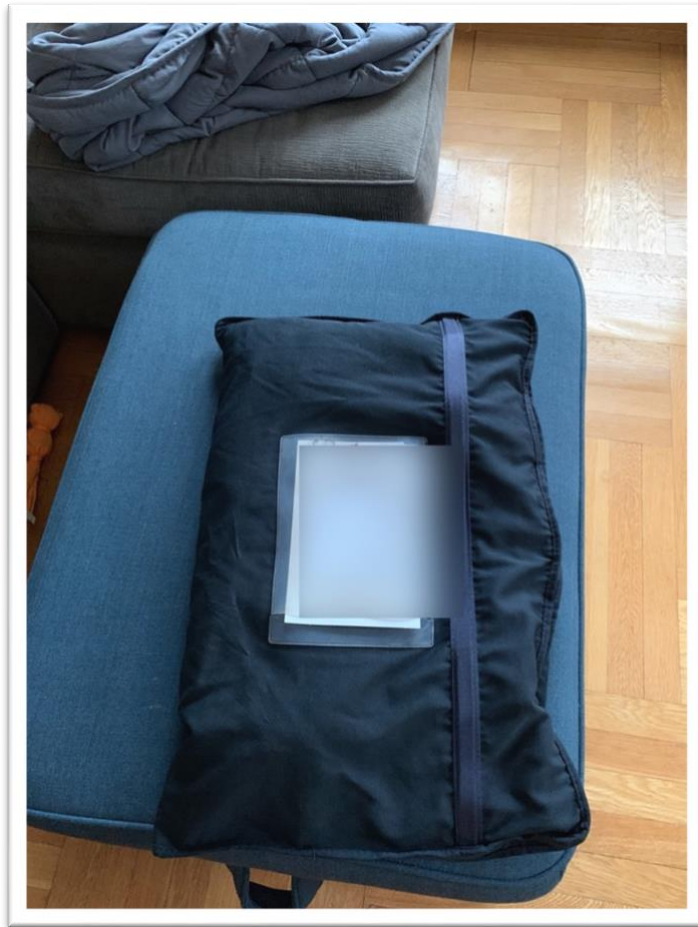


Figure 5-1 Natalie's usual space for unpacking her items and going through her appreciation steps

For Natalie, ABIs are subject to intimate PRs and she gives them distinctive care as a way of connecting with them. One of Natalie's – and others' – PR is to feel the fabric of her newly delivered items, when describing the arrival of her first shipment, “[t]hese are corduroys so I can feel they are really soft”, and second shipment:

I make sure my bag is sealed. It is and feels clean and dry cleaned. That's one way I always assure that my items are fresh. It's really soft. This is actually one of the nice things, sorry, about renting this jean jacket. It's normally really stiff and it's already broken in because it's been worn before. These are really nice and soft to the touch. The part I'm most excited about is this really cool stitching on the back that says, “You are my moon, my sun and all my stars.” That's really well done. You can see some of the reviews said that the stitching was coming apart. This one doesn't seem to be coming apart at all. Really nice. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary video note)

An integral part of her unpacking ritual, that she documented in her diary, is how she always places the garment bag in a good position and then needs to feel the fabric (Table 5-2) and this made her feel like these are special items for her. The way she arranges and takes care of her newly delivered items endows the appreciation ritual, in which the ABI becomes an item that is treated with continuous care until it is sent back. What Natalie mentions about her instant possession ritual is in line with the traditional concept of the endowment effect, as it relates to psychological appropriation (Thaler 1980; Reb and Connolly 2007). This range of PRs carried out after receiving newly delivered ABIs enhances Natalie's sense of control. These can be considered significant PRs because she repeats the same actions in all three different shipments noted in her digital diaries.


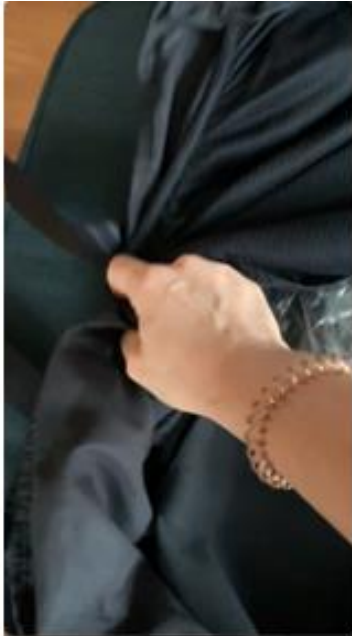
		<p>Unpacking practices: 1. Set items in the garment bag in a good position. 2. Feeling the fabric. Picture cropped from diary video note.</p>
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Table 5-2 Natalie's demonstration of her unpacking practices

Touching newly delivered items was found to be a common part of the participants' unpacking practices. For Julia, psychological appropriation, high valuation, and joy are associated with feeling the *fabric as soon as her items are delivered*. Touching the item is one of the participants' appreciation rituals because they decide whether to keep the item or not based on this action. Physically touching or imagining touching an item has been shown to influence perceived ownership and the valuation of an item (Peck and Shu 2009; Belk 1988; Wolf et al. 2008). Even though some appropriation happens pre-access, more occurs during this ritual:

[Unpacking ABIs] I mean, there's definitely a sense of happiness for the most part. Even if I don't love the item, I'm glad it's there and I can finally see it and touch it and [have it] be tangible and try it on. Then I can decide if I like it or not




and return it, so [I'm] never sad an item's arrived or [is] now available and I can finally see it. I like to try things on and really compare them in person rather than just seeing them online. I'm always happy when things have actually arrived. Then, I can make my informed decision. Do I want to keep it or not? I keep it for that rental period, or for some time, and then return it. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Zoey and Naomi also go through ritualised acts that are a form of appreciation ritual. They are similar to most of the other participants at this second stage, but both describe unpacking the ABIs with some concern about contamination, and inspecting the items and then steaming them before trying (as explained in table 6-3) or hanging them. Zoey explains how she interacts with newly delivered items and how the ritual includes both careful inspection and removal of creases, which seems to be a way of enhancing her sense of intimate knowledge of the items. Such items become appropriated and made meaningful during and after usage:

First thing [when I] receive the item [is I] unzip the garment bag. I check it [to] make sure there's no spills or anything or any stains, make sure it looks good. A lot of times, it may arrive wrinkled just because it [is folded] and that's normal. Just because it's been in transit for a little while. I'll try [it] on, make sure it fits. Then, normally, I'll either iron or steam the item to get any of the wrinkles out. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Table 5-3 shows Zoey's typical unpacking rituals for ABIs, both her actions and here feelings from the moment she receives her items until she places them in her wardrobe, back in their plastic bags. She portrays how unwrapping and unpacking ABIs gives a pleasure that parallels the purchase of new items: "I was so excited to open everything and try it on. It was the same feeling as getting new clothes that I buy!" She also describes her feelings about unpacking ABIs and how these boost her TPO: "*But I feel I can comfortably use them for the time being and they're mine for a certain period of time.*" This is a feeling linked to the early period of receiving her items, when unwrapping and unpacking them. Zoey reflects on her own understanding of her relationship with the ABIs in each of the different PRs of unpacking, trying them on, appropriating them as 'mine', and then storing them along with her own clothes, but in a specific setting. It can be noted that, through the unpacking, the ABIs are connected constantly with psychological appropriation, taking into consideration how she describes her feelings alongside each action she makes. This is in agreement with

Peck and Shu (2009), who found that touching ABIs led to consumers including them in their extended selves.

Table 5-3 Zoey's usual symbolic and physical PRs of unpacking an item during the appreciation phase			
Pictures from Zoey's digital diary			
Reflective notes with regard to these pictures in different forms	<p><u>Describing her action:</u> <i>"This is the photo of when I first touch the RTR items."</i></p> <p><i>"I took each one out and looked at it to see if I liked it or not."</i></p> <p><i>"I was trying to look at it and get ready to try it on."</i></p> <p><u>Describing her feelings:</u> <i>"I was so excited to open everything and try it on. It was the same feeling as getting new clothes that I buy!"</i></p> <p><i>"I definitely don't feel like I own the items. But I feel like I can comfortably use them for the time being and they're mine for a certain period of time."</i> (Diary voice note)</p>	<p><u>Describing her action:</u> Trying on the item.</p> <p><u>Describing her feelings:</u> <i>"I felt like this dress was very artsy and cool and did a great job at reflecting who I am."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel excited and comfortable and like myself."</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her action:</u> <i>"This is how I store the runway items in my closet. They are stored along with the rest of my items. However, I put them towards the front, so I remember that I need to return them."</i></p> <p><u>Describing her feeling:</u> <i>"I feel like I should treat the items well, both because I want them to look nice for when I wear them. I hope everyone in the RTR unlimited programme feels a little bit of a sense of community and wants the items to continue to look nice and the programme to continue for everybody involved."</i> (Diary voice note)</p>
Further	Unpacking the items.	Trying ABIs on first. See section 6.1.2.	Storing. See section 6.1.3.

It has been confirmed that induced ownership with new items could form associations between the newly appreciated items and the self within minutes (LeBarr and Shedden 2017). These results support previous research into the instant endowment effect, which manifests the immediate effects of ownership for newly appreciated items (Nayakankuppam

and Mishra 2005; Dommer and Swaminathan 2013). Unpacking ABIs comes with an immense sense of excitement and desire. The users go through PRs of enjoying consuming something new in ABC, but without assuming the burdens of ownership (Hazée et al. 2017; Moeller and Wittkowski 2010).

Participants illustrate PRs of ABIs similar to the PRs of acquiring new owned items, used to mark ABIs as temporarily theirs during the moment of receiving the items. These experiences are described as a form of possession. For example, Naomi emphasises that receiving and touching newly delivered items is “*like normal shopping*”. Lisa also mentions several points associated with PRs, including the excitement engendered by “*unwrapping something*” because the design of the RTR service influences how the users interact with and experience the items due to the packaging. This echoes PRs, with Lisa perceiving an ABI as being like a gift. At the end of her reflection, she focuses on feelings, comparing receiving her ABIs to the shopping experience and the joy that comes with it. This can be grasped from the following:

It's [as] exciting as if it was like a new, like a gift almost. You know, you get something new for the first time, you know what it is, but it's always a little bit of a surprise. It has that element of unwrapping something. It's for somebody that enjoys shopping just in general for that feeling. It gives you that feeling.[...] [I]t's like buying something from Amazon and you get the Amazon package and you're like, ooh, what did I get? It's like that, it's not a huge surprise. You obviously know what it is, but [...] a little bit of an emotional response. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Waiting for a desired ABI to be delivered, then unpacking it, is fundamental to the appreciation phase. For most participants, the experience of anticipation and excitement (Belk et al. 2003) when accessing a desired ABI can be seen as a process of acquisition and a chance to experience TPO. This is evident from the frequently used expressions of anticipation and excitement during the appreciation stage

The RTR experience is designed to remove barriers to appreciation rituals. Users of RTR need to perceive ABIs as new in order to be able to continue with the PRs. For example, when Zoey has ABIs delivered, she wants to experience newness and finds that experience to be full of excitement: “*I think it feels like new items because I guess they're just new to me. There's something I've never worn before. I get the same kind of feeling as if I were to find something new, except I don't keep them, which is maybe a bummer on some items, but not a huge deal on others*” (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note).

Here, for Zoey, the feelings brought up by such experiences underline a form of possession that is associated with a secure attachment. Such signals of having feelings for a limited time suggest a TPO.

Emelia also stresses the role of appreciation rituals which are full of excitement, thus perceiving ABIs as new, and having a feeling of control: *“It’s exciting. It’s definitely exciting. You feel sometimes like a little kid almost, and it’s exciting knowing that you’re going to get to wear it soon.”* She also emphasises the delivery: *“Receiving anything in the mail, for me anyway, is excitement. Packages in the mail is always exciting. I love that. It’s definitely exciting for me”* (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview). Emelia’s quote illustrates the effect of receiving and touching ABIs and their role in backing up the process of appreciation. Appreciation metaphors are also invoked by the participants in expressing what it feels like to possess the ABIs. For example, Megan talks about the shopping experience during her frequent visits to the physical store of RTR as a metaphorical expression of appreciation:

It still brings that excitement for me when I get to go into the store and see what’s new. Maybe once a week so [I] see some new stuff every time I am there. The best part about leaving the store is that I get to leave with brand new items that are new to me. But I didn’t have to swipe my credit card (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview).

The ABIs were not found to take away pleasurable anticipation, excitement, or desire, because of the PRs of appreciation. This feeling of appreciation is linked to the shopping experience, which is crucial for the participants. An example is provided by Lisa, in terms of how she considers her ABIs as new: *“I guess because it’s new to me. The condition 99 per cent of the time. You can’t tell that it’s been worn before”* (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview). Interestingly, when the participants were asked what feelings they had when wearing the ABIs, many of them emphasised feeling like they were wearing something new, which is indicative of what can be considered a strong form of psychological appropriation:

It feels the same as if I bought a new dress [...] I feel great. [...] I’ve gotten a few things that have been brand new, or most of them I feel people have only worn once or twice to an event and then it gets cycled. They feel a lot more new, which feels the same as if I [had] bought a new dress. I’m running guilt [free]. Maybe I feel like it’s just like wearing something new [or I’ve] just bought a new outfit. It feels

similar to that. It doesn't feel like wearing clothes that I've worn 1,000 times. It just feels like a new outfit. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Zoey, who embraces sustainability, asserts that the appreciation rituals give her a feeling of wearing something new and talks about greater psychological appropriation when she wears ABIs compared to her owned items. Abigail also refers to her feelings around owned items: *"I definitely do have some basic pieces that I own and pieces that I really like that I still wear repeatedly."* Abigail's extract suggests that the perceived 'newness' of the ABIs helps to stimulate her self-identity and stresses that the feeling of efficacy is significant for such items. As she puts it, *"I think when I wear them, new items from RTR, I feel I'm almost dressing up a little bit. I feel special in those clothes because they're new and I feel different in them. I guess it's a different feeling"* (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). For Natalie, the feelings accompanying unpacking rituals, such as newness and high appreciation or "love", make her feel different about her ABIs, leading to a preference for them compared to her owned items. The PRs of unpacking can enrich this feeling:

The first time I touched this jacket, I just knew I was going to love it. It was soft, it had stars, it had the patching, it was completely different than anything I owned. I knew I was going to love it. The sleeves were a little longer and it fit maybe not exactly like I wanted but I knew if I went medium, it would be too large. I knew if I went extra-small it would be too small. I couldn't wait to try it on and take it out and just dress it up and dress it down. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, diary voice note)

In all accounts, the interplay of both psychological appropriation and perceived 'newness' is seen. Natalie shows strong excitement and shares her feelings during the unpacking rituals of not being able to wait to take the items out. This opportunity to come to know an item, and invest effort in the appropriation processes, facilitates a sense of attachment: *"The first time I touched this jacket, I just knew I was going to love it."* The following section will discuss the ritual of trying ABIs on first.

5.1.2 Trying

Another significant possession ritual is trying all the items on first, appropriating them as 'mine'. The participants try the ABIs on first to incorporate them into their wardrobe and to reconcile access and possession. This takes place immediately after unpacking, touching, and inspecting newly delivered ABIs.

Usually, I'll get home and I see the shipment is at my doorstep. I'll bring it inside my home, I'll unzip it, I'll open it up. I'll remove all of the plastic that covers it. I'll try it on. I'll see if I like it. If I'm happy with it and I want to wear it, I'll either wear it and go, or put it in my closet, or try and figure out how I'm going to style it with shoes and accessories. If I don't like it, I put it back in the garment bag. I'll take it with me to return the next time I go to the retail store. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

So as soon as I can (...) I try it on to see, does it fit? Do I like it? Is it flattering? If I don't like it, I drop it off immediately. If I get it during the week, like yesterday or something, maybe not yesterday or Friday, I returned something, it got returned on Monday. I already ordered something this morning that's coming tonight. It's so fast. For people who live in the suburbs, it's not as fast, but in the city [it] gets [here] crazy fast. The turnover is insane. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Participants are very clear and responsive regarding this PRs and how they are keen to immediately try newly delivered ABIs to intimately know them and affirm control. For example, the narratives from both Amy and Natalie show that trying on the ABI immediately is crucial. Amy reveals her process of appreciation during the access stage, through getting to know the item and planning its use. It also depends on developing a special feeling with an ABI at this stage, and she highlights her task to be able to incorporate ABIs into her possessions: *"I'll see if I like it. If I'm happy with it."* Examples of these conditions are that it fits, before any feelings of ownership can be developed, as well as whether the participant likes it. Once those conditions are met, she will continue the possession ritual by either placing the ABI in her wardrobe or personalising it. For Amy, and most of the participants, it is not only about the fit of the ABI, but also how much psychological appropriation is felt when trying it on. When users fail to develop this feeling at this stage, the ABI will go straight back in the garment bag, as Amy explains, and straight back to the provider. She will even try to get rid of any unappropriated items as soon as possible. In most cases, TPO will be established upon arrival, but in these examples, participants probably did not go through pre-access PRs as usual. Thus, QPO was not developed for these ABIs, which might result in difficulty in developing TPO.

Natalie explains how she tries on ABIs before choosing to keep them. She clearly emphasises the role of this possession ritual of trying items on during the appreciation phase. Natalie goes further than Amy with regard to items that fail to be legitimised as possessions, with her statement, *"If I don't like it, I drop it off immediately"* and her eagerness to return

an item immediately and replace it with one that reflects her sense of self: “*Do I like it? Is it flattering?*” As Natalie explains, if an item is not suitable, it will be sent back straightaway and will not be placed in the wardrobe. The participants tend to send ABIs straight back that they do not want to keep, without going through the stage of storage rituals:

When I first received that, I tried [it] on immediately, I just want to make sure it is the right fit. Then I'll just hang it up in the closet. Then, usually, it's right around the corner when I need to wear it. I wear it to the event or wherever I'm going.
(Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)




I come to my room by myself. The kids are not there. But I like to put the bag in my closet and put thec[items] in my closet. It's normally delivered through the postal [...]. I'm by myself. I like to try the clothes on by myself; there's a mirror in my closet. I try it on, make sure it looks good. If not, then I had a problem before, I had to call the store. But I like to plan ahead. I won't just rent [an] outfit. I will know well in advance about an event. I will plan, just in case, you know, something doesn't fit. Normally, [for example,] I rent[ed] a month ago, I started looking at things two weeks before. (Sophie, 40, Single rental, Interview)

Emelia and Sophie, as single rental users, try on newly delivered ABIs in the same ritualised acts in order to know and control. For Emelia, the task of trying such items should be done immediately, as early PRs. These items will subsequently be placed in her wardrobe. It is an initial act of appropriation because she will then have the feeling, “*It's right around the corner when I need to wear it.*” Equally, for Sophie, she tends to try on newly delivered ABIs, but with more attention to the ritual environment. She will find a quiet area within her house and ensure she is by herself and then try an item. Others validate their feelings towards the items. For example, Sophie spoke of sharing this moment by calling her sister: “*Touching the dress. Trying it on, you know, calling my sister on the phone [and] showing her the dress.*” In sharing this moment and presenting how she has tried the item on, the call requires an understanding of what has been appropriated. It also implies that Sophie is trying to elicit particular feelings in herself and in her sister. As one of the rituals' dimensions is to send a message to an audience, when it is privately enacted, it carries a self-centred reinforcing message (Rook 1985). This decision making at this stage, deciding immediately if ABIs are 'in or out' (i.e. mine or not mine), seems key to appropriation. ABIs are not left in limbo, stored in the closet without making this decision. Deciding not to immediately

return it means simultaneously deciding to keep it and that it is temporarily 'mine'. The main reason for returning is that ABIs do not feel like 'me'. However, engaging in the pre-access PRs appear to decrease the likelihood of this happening.

Abigail shows that trying on and transforming items into hers right away after unpacking them is an important possession ritual that determines how she moves forward with the rest of the PRs (e.g. styling, displaying, and storing). For example, Abigail's digital diaries document her PRs when trying on items, and she goes into more details at this stage than she reported in her preliminary interview. Table 6-4 shows pictures of Abigail's different shipments and her self-reporting with regard to each shipment. Each shipment contains four new ABIs. She explains (Table 5-4) her usual range of PRs, and emphasises appropriating the ABIs when they capture who she is. This means that, as long as her newly delivered ABIs are in agreement with her ideal self, she automatically categorises them as hers and places them in her wardrobe. She also points out her feelings during this process of appreciation: "*I feel super excited.*" Abigail reflects on her mixed feelings when receiving newly delivered ABIs and the effects of trying to ease her psychological appropriation.

Table 5-4 Abigail’s ritual of trying all ABIs on first and appropriating them as ‘mine’

Pictures from Abigail’s digital diary		
First shipment	Second shipment	One of her shipments ³
		
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“I received these items tonight at my apartment and I immediately take them out and hang them up and get rid of the packaging one by one. I love seeing the new items arrive and seeing how they look and how they look on me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Open up the package right away and try on the items in front of the mirror.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel super excited because it’s receiving three new items.”</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“Received my four new items from RTR and I hang them up to check them one by one to see if they fit.”</i></p> <p><i>“I tried these red pants on and love the pattern! But unfortunately, they don’t fit at the waist, so I have to return these. Really wish they fit better!! I’d consider ordering them again one size up but then the legs are too big. I don’t think this style/designer fits my body.”</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“Today I tried on this white dress I rented for work. I like it because it’s tailored very well and I love the white colour. The details are stunning. It captures who I am – I like simple colour clothing but with very interesting form like this one and very tailored pieces.”</i></p> <p><i>“I love the dress especially for work because of the colour being simple but the form begins very unique and the length perfect. When I tried it on, I did notice that it fit perfect on the top but was slightly tight on the bottom, but I thought it was okay for work.”</i></p>
<p>These items will then be placed in the wardrobe, which will be reported in the next ritual (Storing) but the ones that are not appropriated will be sent back straight away.</p>		
<p>(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking and diary video note)</p>		

Abigail’s appreciation ritual of trying ABIs on first helps her to come to know them intimately. Participants actively talk about this intimate knowledge. Evidently, while the

³ Abigail did not indicate in her diary which shipment this is from

participants go through such PRs to make these items theirs straightaway, they also engage in clear signalling of how important it is to know these items intimately, for example, in terms of their fit. Abigail (see the third picture in Table 6-4 and her reflection on it) says that the better she feels about the dress during this ritual of trying on, the more she will appropriate it. This act of appropriation plays a role in the forces that are necessary for TPO to arise.

In the following quotes from Natalie's digital diaries, she reflects on her ritual of trying the ABIs on first before choosing to keep all her documented three shipments. With her first shipment, she points out how this possession ritual was undertaken and its effect on her self-item relationship: *"I tried it on right away to see if it fits and I should keep it or if it's too small or big (or unflattering) and [should] be exchanged and sent back."* With her second shipment, she reflects on eagerly awaiting to go through the ritual of trying them on: *"This is something I've been waiting for, very thrilled and eager to try on! [...] I opened it right away to see if it was soft and if the stitching was nice and to see how it fit me."* With her third shipment, she was keen to go through these appreciation rituals, such as feeling the fabric, inspecting, and then trying on the items: *"Made sure it fit and wanted to feel the fabric and try it on right away, like all my orders"* (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking). Trying the items on helps them to plan outfits and decide when or where they will wear the item, for example, *"I thought it was okay for work"*. They also try it on with other items in their own wardrobe, accessories and other ABIs.

Table 5-5 Abigail trying on her sweater right after this item was delivered – one of her range of PRs

Pictures from Abigail's digital diary



Describing her actions and feelings:


“This is a sweater that I rented, and I really like the style, but don’t like the material once the item arrived. It had a glittery effect that was more festive and attention-seeking than I was hoping for. It also wasn’t as thick and easy going as I thought it was going to be, so I felt slightly uncomfortable in it. I still wore it and kept it casual by pairing it with white jeans and white sneakers. I won’t be renting this again.”

(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

It is also evident that some participants experience difficulties appropriating some of their ABIs during the trying-on ritual. Although many of the participants say that they tend to send such items back to the provider immediately, others refer to trying to keep the unappropriated items, but finding this challenging as they would then need to go through extended PRs. For example, Abigail refers to coping with keeping an ABI that she does not appropriate immediately after trying it in (see Table 5-5). It was not easy for her and she conducted other, extra PRs. Although Abigail would usually send unappropriated items straight back, she made an effort to incorporate this item with other items of her own, hoping to get a better feeling about it, but also saying that she had no intention of re-accessing the item because her process of appreciating it was not accomplished.

5.1.3 Styling



The focus in this section is on the possession ritual of styling ABIs. This refers to users' tendency to personalise ABIs so as to develop TPO. Although some participants mentioned thinking about styling pre-access, decisive styling tend to happen right after the PRs of trying ABIs on. Abigail reflects on how she restyles an ABI to make it look like one of her own items and the effort she takes to feel more comfortable wearing it (see Table 5-6). She asserts her ritual of pairing ABIs with other items and that the consequence of this ritual is a clear, TPO: "I felt like the piece was one of my own". In Abigail's previous two quotes, she refers to styling ABIs whether she feels uncomfortable or comfortable with them because, for her, this is a form of possession. Amy goes through a similar possession ritual – trying an item first, but also getting to know the item, planning its use, and trying to style it with shoes and accessories. The ways participants think about how to style ABIs can be seen as signs of personalising them (Holt 1995).

Table 5-6 Abigail's PRs of styling to incorporate ABIs
Pictures from Abigail's digital diary

<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"I wore a somewhat dressy dress, but paired it with comfortable and casual clothing and accessories like my own cashmere scarf to make it comfortable. It was a bit thinner than I imagined when I ordered it, so I had to bundle up and add on layers to be more comfortable. I felt like the piece was one of my own and not rented just because it blended so well with other items."</i></p>
(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

Julia reflects on her feelings and ways of incorporating ABIs by trying to wear them differently. This helps her to appropriate an ABI and facilitates her feeling of ownership. She points out that either using accessories or wearing an item in a way that is distinct from other users' styles (which she has seen in the item's reviews) helps her to develop TPO:

I definitely feel like they're mine. [...] I will wear them differently than people were in the photo. I think that's something that's always fun. I always do look at the photos of something I rent and see how other people wore it, like just to get different ideas, and then I'll still choose to wear [it] with whatever I want, either the accessories that it goes with or sometimes things like a dress has a tie, you can tie it backwards or forwards or wrap it around and then tie it. I'll still wear it differently and in my own way, in comparison to the photos I see. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Abigail's and Julia's ritualised acts are important for their forming and maintaining of user-item relationships. When individuals invest time, effort, and self in getting to know and be familiar with an item, that item will more likely become part of their extended self (Pierce et al. 2001, 2003). Natalie documents these PRs of appropriation, including styling to incorporate ABIs and make them feel hers, as seen in Table 6-7. She restyles her ABIs "to make the jacket feel like my own". Natalie is a very active user and tries to create her own style from ABIs by mixing items, which makes her "love" them and develop TPO.

Table 5-7 Natalie styling to incorporate an item, one of her range of PRs	
Pictures from Natalie's digital diary	
Second shipment	Third shipment
	
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"I added a necklace, heels, and my own 'flair' to make the jacket feel like my own."</i></p> <p><i>"And wore the jacket again to a party with a different top, because I love it (so have worn it three or four times now)."</i></p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"I added the jean jacket (Shipment 2), heels and a necklace the first time I wore it. I might wear the dress again, but it did get very wrinkled after just one wear."</i></p> <p><i>"Pairing the jacket and dress together."</i></p>
<p>(Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)</p>	

It might be necessary for individuals to carry out certain PRs to be able to develop a feeling of ownership (Belk 2014). This means that they consume through integration, acquiring and manipulating items through personalising practices (Holt 1995) that serve to draw ABIs symbolically into elements of a user's identity. The participants in this study engage in the usual PRs when accessing items, going through extensive appropriation and personalisation. It is clear that the users do not feel constrained when it comes to styling. This is significant because such personalisation is a ritual of possession, a ritual of incorporation helping to extend the self and make possession "our own" (Belk 1988). Comparison of these findings with those of other studies confirms that consumer items such as heirlooms are reinvented through styling, whereby special possessions can be transformed, materially and/or compositionally, to take on new narratives over time (Türe and Ger 2016). The latter authors define compositional transformation as the reuse of an item by making it new and

aesthetically styling it without changing its material form. One of the primary forms of personalisation discussed in the consumer research literature is material transformation (Campbell 2005; Türe and Ger 2016), which is not allowed in ABC. But participants used compositional transformation as an alternative means to appropriate their ABIs. The narrative regarding appreciation was more widespread among the participants in terms of how they styled and wore ABIs.

5.1.4 Storing

The possession ritual of storing refers to users' tendency to store ABIs in special locations to facilitate psychological appropriation and mark the ABI as temporarily theirs. The storing ritual comes right after the users finish trying the ABI on. Storing may be done in the same way as with owned items: "I hang it up in the closet, like I do with anything that I buy" (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview). This in itself is a ritual of appropriation. Participants ensure they create the right place for an ABI. Some tend to blend them with their owned items, while others do the opposite but try to singularise them and keep them separate, for several reasons. First, participants highlight that keeping ABIs visible is an important practice in creating the right space, whether the items are kept inside or outside their wardrobe. Consumers also tend to keep certain possessions out of sight when they are perceived as less valuable (Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005) but here participants make effort to make them visible. There is a clear language of appreciation, referencing the participants' extra feeling of responsibility, driving them to become the keeper of the ABIs they possess:

Researcher: "Where do you exactly put it in your home?"

Megan: "I [use] a hanger that I own. [...] they (do) offer hangers at the store, but I typically don't like to take more items [than] I need so I'll just hang the clothes up or I'll lightly fold it and drape it on a chair."

Researcher: "So, you leave them in your closet, or you just put them somewhere in your house."

Megan: "I'll either leave them in my closet or drop them on my table. I live in a studio apartment [that] are pretty small, so I don't have a lot of space anyway. I like to keep my clothes visible. I like to see what's new because I do rotate my closet a lot using RTR. I like to know what's current and what I have. I typically

like to leave them out just to see what I have.” (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

As Megan clarifies, this is not just a way to store her ABIs; rather, it is a symbolic action used to remind herself of her current possessions, “to see what I have” and “to keep my clothes visible”. Thus, for her, creating the right spaces for her ABIs becomes an enduring quest. Equally, Emelia emphasises the importance of keeping ABIs distinct during the storage phase: “*I will put it in the closet, but I’ll definitely single [it] out*”. Zoey had a different way of storing but for similar reason:

Researcher: “Where do you keep your rental items?”

Zoey: “I keep it in the same closet. But I will keep it in the garment bag that they send. I don’t put it in my closet with my clothes. I keep the garment bag that they send with the clothes in the same closet.”

Researcher: “You said you don’t like to keep it with your clothes, right?”

Zoey: “Yeah.”

Researcher: “Why?”

Zoey: “I just don’t want to forget a habit, I guess. I don’t want to throw it in the closet and then not [be] aware of it and I just throw it back in the closet that night and then I forget I have it. I forget to return it. It’s just easier to keep it [...] separate. Then, I could just get out of the bag when I need it, put it back in the bag, and ship it right back.” (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

As these items are accessed, not fully owned, the users become their “caretakers” and make an effort to create the right storage place for them. Zoey keeps her ABIs in her wardrobe but inside the garment bag; she even keeps them in a separate side of her wardrobe in the garment bag to ensure she preserves their sacredness. This can be seen as sacralisation (Belk et al. 1989), that is, creating a specific space for the ABI and keeping it separate from owned items. This draw parallels with sacred and profane argument (Belk et al. 1989). They argue that sacred items are typically stored separately from the profane to mark their significance. Sophie explained how she separately kept her ABIs and was excited to reveal how she stored

them. The narrative shows that Sophie exhibits a high degree of passionate possessiveness when storing ABIs in her wardrobe:

Researcher: "Where and how do you keep the dress from RTR?"



Sophie: "I take all my clothes and I scooped them alllllll the way over, I move eeeverything out the way. I keep it completely separate from everything. I don't have a huge closet. But if there's enough room in there where I can make it to where it's separated by itself."

Researcher: "Why do you keep it separate from your own clothes?"

Sophie: "I like to keep it separate because it's like a special garment to me, it is so expensive. Nothing in my closet costs as much as the things I get from RTR, nothing. I like to keep it separate, away from everything. When I go into my closet, I see it. I actually put in my closet the whole outfit together. I'll put the shoes together, the jewellery [...]. When it's time for me to get ready for my event, it's all there." (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview)

Zoey and Sophie intentionally keep the ABIs separate within their closets to single them out and give them more priority to be worn. Zoey says that keeping items separate has become habitual: "A habit, I guess." For both of them, keeping items separate within their closets is a way of ensuring they preserve their sacredness, which is a form of appropriation. The ABI is given sacred status on the basis that it is a special and luxury item, and so the strength of the perceived appreciation informs their TPO.

Table 5-8 Abigail's PRs of creating the right spaces for the ABIs

	
<p>First shipment Picture cropped from diary video note</p>	<p>Second shipment Self note-taking</p>
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"This is a video of my closet – as you can see, the four items I rented are in the front and on RTR hangers, and all the clothes that I own are on wooden hangers in the back. I'm bringing these four items on a trip."</i> (Diary video note)</p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"I store the RTR items at the front of my closet because I want to wear them 'first' before my own items. All my other clothing, the ones I own, are categorized, but the RTR items I put at the very front, out of the categories, because I want to be able to see and access them right away and wear them the next day. I have a sense of ownership when it comes to these items, even though I will only [wear] them for a day. [...]"</i></p> <p><i>See picture above. I always keep the RTR items on RTR hangers in order to differentiate the items from my clothes in the closet. This way I don't get confused and it's easily distinguishable. Once I accumulate a bunch of RTR hangers I recycle them."</i> (Note-taking)</p>
<p>(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries)</p>	

Consider next the notes reproduced in Figure 5-8, from Abigail's digital diaries. The pictures are captioned: "[T]he four items I rented are in the front and on RTR hangers [...] I store the RTR items at the front of my closet." This can be seen as a way of integrating her ABIs with her own clothing, but distinguishing between them, for example, by placing them on a specific side of her wardrobe and using special hangers. Further insight into why she does this comes from her explanation of singling them out, and prioritising the ABIs. Storing rituals help Abigail to recognise the items as temporarily 'mine': "I have a sense of ownership when it comes to these items, even though I will only [wear] them for a day." This TPO is mentioned by her when describing her actions and feelings when storing ABIs.

Table 5-9 Natalie's ritual of creating the right spaces for her ABIs

Pictures from Natalie's digital diary

1	2	3
		

Reflective notes regarding these pictures in different forms (self note-taking and diary voice note).

Describing her actions and feelings:

"[T]his is where I keep all of my RTRs. Here's my normal closet. You can see some of my previous RTRs that I said I bought are in here. Once I've bought them, I put them in my closet, but while I'm still renting them, they go here [The back of a closet door]. There's no extra sense of responsibility. I don't know why I put them there. I put them there because, just to remember how many pieces I have out. Right now, I have one or two pieces out. But I do have a winter coat that I'm renting that I'll show you, [that] is in my closet with the rest. This winter coat [...] from RTR, I've rented for about three or four months. I've gotten three different versions of this coat. I love this coat. It's in my regular closet with the rest of my pieces. I have no extra sense of responsibility, but the rest of my pieces are all in that closet." (Diary video note)

"I felt excited to put this in my closet. I did put it like I put all of my rentals. [W]ith care at first in the bag on the back of my closet, but the more I wore it, the more laissez faire I became. [...] I eventually just put it on the back of my chair in my living room. It felt like one of my normal closet pieces and I took a little bit less care to keep it safe. [...] I do feel that I treated [it] about the same as my own clothing." (Diary voice note)

"Wore this so often it found its way to the back of my table and chairs." (Note-taking)




The first set of Natalie's appreciation rituals was discussed early on in this section, beginning with unpacking, trying on, and styling items. Her storage rituals are similar to those of other participants, as are her reasons: she places her ABIs hanging on the back of the door, but once they are fully owned, they are integrated into the closet and items that are held for longer will be blended with her own clothes, as she explains she has done with her winter coat (Picture 3 in Figure 5-9). Although at first, she is careful to separate to signal TPO, over time the boundary between owned and ABIs becomes more blurred.

However, keeping them separate is not about avoiding integration, rather to remind herself actively remember that the item is only temporary hers, which she does not do with the items held for longer. Natalie talks about another item and how she hangs it while using it. She points out that she appreciates these items, asserting that they feel like hers. This feeling becomes permanent when she uses an item for longer: "*the more I wore it, the more laissez faire⁴ I became*". Natalie performs specific, PRs when storing her items. She carefully places all her shipments, through a ritualistic act and in a similar manner each time, treating items as if they are hers. These ritualised acts are used to assign meaning and make sense of important possessions in the participants' lives. It is clear that intimately knowing an item, here, is a practice of having the item (Pierce et al. 2001), and known items become part of the individual's extended self (Belk 1988). In order to use the ABC correctly, and return items within the given timeframe, participants need to take steps to separate items in some way from their owned possessions. Thus, there is a need to actively remember that the item is only temporary theirs - to appropriate too much and confuse the item with one's owned possession would create issues with the use of the ABC. Thus, there is a desire to appropriate the item as 'mine', but with limits. This separate storage helps to remind users that it is only temporary and avoid full appropriation.

Some participants also reflected on their PRs for packing ABIs when travelling. Abigail illustrates the PRs she uses when packing ABIs with her owned possessions and dealing with them in a similar manner (Table 5-10). The way she arranges, takes care of, and places her ABIs on the bed endows a meaning of psychological appropriation. These items become items that demand appropriation from the user. Abigail also confirms that she

⁴ The idea that people should be free to choose how to do things, without too much control from someone in authority (Cambridge Dictionary).

mixes ABIs with her owned items in her suitcase, which can be seen as another possession ritual.

Table 5-10 PRs of packing ABIs for travelling
Pictures from Abigail's digital diary

<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>"Here, I am packing the four items for the trip. I packed them how I would normally pack my own clothes, and I mix them together with my own clothes by day/outfit."</i></p>
<p>(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)</p>

So far, this section has focused on how the participants aim to feel a temporary sense of ownership through storage appreciation rituals; signs of elements of PO appear throughout these PRs. The following section will discuss PRs from the cherishing phase that include wearing, memorialising, and sharing.

5.2 Cherishing

The PRs of cherishing make up the second phase of the during-access stage. Whereas the previous phase is about initially singularising the item, making it feel like a personal possession rather than a commodity, the PRs of cherishing is about creating a clear and potentially enduring link between oneself and the ABI during access, both in participants'

own eyes and in the eyes of others. These PRs are enacted through wearing, memorialising, and different types of sharing, enabling the participants to cherish the ABIs and develop TPO. For example, wearing an ABI might make it look like ‘mine’, or taking and keeping photographs may make it possible for the users to create more personalised relationships with such cherished possessions. Tobin (1996) referred to cherished possessions in relation to identity maintenance and their self-continuity into the future. In this phase, cherished possessions (i.e., ABIs) described by the users as “loved”, “favourites”, “valued”, “special”, and/or “unique” are explored (Kleine et al. 1995; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). The participants’ narratives explain the PRs they use for cherished possessions, to make meaningful evaluations, and to legitimise their TPO. Table 5-11 breaks down cherishing into multiple distinct PRs, explaining the practices used and linking them to elements of PO.

Possession ritual	Definition	Linked routes to PO	Motives for PO
Wearing	Appreciating as an indication of possession through responsibility, enjoyment, and trying to make them look like theirs.	Intimate knowledge, control, and self-investment	- Stimulating self-identity - Efficacy and effectance
Memorialising	Taking and keeping photographs of ABIs to prove the act of having.	Intimate knowledge, control, and self-investment	- Need for home - Stimulating self-identity
Sharing	Sharing photographs of ABIs on social media.	Intimate knowledge, control, and self-investment	- Need for home - Stimulating self-identity

Table 5-11 Elements of rituals: The PRs during cherishing phase and their links to elements of PO (Source: own illustration)

5.2.1 Wearing

This ritualised act appears in the participants’ lived experience: (1) in language that makes further reference to taking care of items, (2) choosing to enjoy them, and (3) most importantly, the way they try to make ABIs look like theirs when wearing them.. Firstly, there is an important component that affects the experience of PO: responsibility when wearing. Previous research shows that a sense of responsibility is a component of PO (Parker et al. 1997) or an outcome of it (Pierce et al. 2001). It is therefore reasonable to expect that participants might show stronger responsibility when wearing ABIs.

I think I’m more careful with rentals than things that I own. Because, if I were to, let’s say, pull the tag off or get [...] crumbs from a cake on a dress that I owned, I wouldn’t feel as guilty because I know I could just send it to the cleaners. But I try to take more care of my rentals. I want to respect these items. They’re not mine, I

don't own them. In general, I try to respect all my possessions and take care of them. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

How does it feel with other items, that I've bought? It's very different. I'm not sure yet if I like the difference or if not. I treat the item [...] pretty much the same as the items that I own. I don't think of it differently. While I own it, I mean, while I'm renting it, I feel like it's an item that I own. I have a jacket that I've been renting for four or five months and I think of that as my coat. If it wasn't for the price, I would probably buy it, but it's very expensive. I think of it as my coat. It just takes up a slot. [...] With all of the pieces that I rented, I treat them exactly the same as my pieces. I take care of them, but I don't take extra care of them. [...] How do I feel putting it in there? I feel no sense of responsibility ... Though, it's not my own. For now, I feel like it's a rental. I don't feel like I own it. But while I have it, I do feel like it's mine until I decide to send it back. There's that sense of ownership while it is in my possession. I do feel that I treat it about the same as my own clothing. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

When the experience of PO stems from responsibility, the participants choose symbolic rituals that focus on communicating the sense of responsibility that is attached to the items. The excerpts above show ritualised responsibility and the emotional reaction that emerge from it. They highlight that the act of responsibility-based ritual is connected to a strong feeling toward ABIs, which functions as a way to communicate TPO to others. Amy is more careful with ABIs than with her owned items. Although she states that these items are not hers, she is referring to legal ownership as she clearly recognises them as among her possessions: *“But, in general, I try to respect all my possessions and take care of them.”* Similarly, for Natalie, being in possession of meaningful and appropriated ABIs requires a high amount of responsibility but no extra care. Natalie expresses confusion over whether she owns the items or not, at first, saying *“while I own it”*, then correcting herself to *“while I'm renting”*, but she admits that she has a feeling of ownership of these ABIs, commenting, *“I feel like it's an item that I own”* when giving the example of her jacket. Natalie uses the phrases, *“while I own it”* and *“but while I have it, I do feel like it's mine”*, which can be seen as references to TPO. She also shows strong attachment when she considers buying what she has taken care of. Amy's and Natalie's above excerpts are good examples of participants' disparity in revealing TPO. Some participants are more willing to reflect on their feelings and be open about them. Uses the item differently from their owned possessions can be simply seen as a key feature of TPO.

I guess I treat it [like] my own clothes. I don't really have an issue conditionally. Well, I can imagine such a dress can go sooner, like a matter or four days, unless you're running it over with a car [or] staining it at a party. I always have [a wipe] in my purse. (Naomi, 24, Single rental, Interview)

I would say I am very aware of the fact they are rentals and that I am not keeping them. However, I still try to keep them nice like my normal clothes, since I would like the next person to enjoy them just as much as I did. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

Naomi illustrates how responsibility and TPO do not conflict. Her PRs symbolise psychological appropriation because she demonstrates that she tends to follow cherishing rituals when accessing the ABIs in a similar way to her owned items. Zoey also reflects on taking care of her ABIs during her temporary access, and her stewardship behaviour. This might indicate a different form of feeling, namely collective PO, because she is very aware that she is accessing the items along with other users; this form of PO was discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). Szamatowicz and Paundra (2019) found that collective PO plays a key role in determining engagement in ABC. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identified shared consciousness, PRs, and responsibilities as the major factors in creating a sense of collective PO among a brand community. A sense of moral responsibility among the participants in this study is clear, not only during but also post access.

This finding of responsibility is contrary to those of Schaefer et al. (2016), who found contagious effects of users' misbehaviour in ABC, and those of Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) who found that users felt ABIs were not theirs and consequently felt no sense of stewardship. In fact, a direct consequence of PO development is engaging in extra acts of stewardship (Peck et al. 2021; Peck and Shu 2018), and the participants in this study demonstrate that.

Secondly, participants describe their enjoyment when renting as an easy form of acquisition and a pleasant experience and how this is linked to their self-investment. This user-item relationship clearly appears during the cherishing phase:

Well, now it's become my lifestyle. [...] [B]ecame such a habit. It's so nice not to have to go shopping, not to have to go into a fitting room and try things on. I would never want to stop. [...] [T]he clothes fit me better than any other clothes. I feel I'm finally wearing something that was meant for me. And, you know [...] you're tall

and thin [...] a lucky body type. I kind of got lucky. I never always felt lucky until I could wear these beautiful designers where I just zip up a dress and it literally fits my body perfectly. I wouldn't even need to get any tailoring. If I were to buy this dress off the rack, that's really cool. It makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I'm the way I'm supposed to be. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

The main reason to add easy acquisition to the cherishing phase is that the participants reflect more on their new ritualised acts regarding ABIs in the during-access stage. Lisa is clear about how she enjoys her new “lifestyle” and “habit” of appropriating cherished ABIs. This subjective appropriation corroborates the idea of an experiential purchasing effect. Li and Atkinson (2020) suggested that the experience of using an item reinforces PO in comparison to that of an owned item that is not much used. In the second part of Lisa’s quote, she clearly reflects on how an ABI is an extension of herself, with these items making her who she is. Such narratives are common among the participants when they talk about their feelings when wearing ABIs.

Lastly, it is evident that participants make ABIs look like their own when wearing them while wearing them. This ritual comes up in discussions of whether the participants think others tend to believe they own the items and if their ownership is clear to others. Some participants go through a range of PRs to make an ABI look like it belongs to them. For example, both Julia and Megan point out that they make an effort to display their possession and how such practices affect their feelings towards the items:

To make it look like I own it, [I] like to wear [it] in a way it looks like it's mine, I feel comfortable in it. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

[N]o one would know that it's not mine, unless I opened up that conversation or if someone asks me where I got it from; [I] 100 per cent feel comfortable sharing where I got it from because I'm a huge supporter of RTR and letting more people know about it. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Sophie shows enthusiasm for displaying her possession of these items; it is a must-do when she wears an ABI: “I make it seem as though those are my clothes. [...] [W]hen I go to a wedding, I want to make it feel like it's my dress. [...] If I go to a dinner party, I want to make it seem like it's my dress.” She wants to show control over and intimate knowledge of the ABIs. This also shapes how the ABIs contribute to sense of self:

I had my dress that I rented on there and my accessories. I felt like a celebrity, almost, because of how nice I looked [...] I feel like a totally different person. Even my husband says, YOU LOOK COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. We laugh and we laugh about it. I feel different. I feel better. (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview)

In the same vein, Amy focuses on the feeling she has when wearing ABIs when she has made an effort to exhibit her ownership: *“Sometimes [I try to make an item look like mine]; it depends on the item. I think I do that with the handbags. Just the way that I carry myself and my attitude when I’m using them, I guess. I feel comfortable keeping them for [a] long [time]”* (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview).

This shows how this cherishing ritual plays a role in the establishment of feelings. It has an effect on Amy’s relationship with the items, appearing in the desire to keep the item for longer. Amy’s description captures how the ritual takes place, in her explicit illustration of making an ABI look like hers. She not only does this with her actions, but with her ‘attitude’ as well, which is a way of legitimising her possessiveness and TPO.

As a result of these PRs, PO metaperception bias is evident among the participants. PO metaperception bias can be seen when people believe their ownership of an item is obvious to others (Kirk et al. 2017). This bias is clear in this study’s participants’ narratives; two different narratives emerge to deal with it. First, some reflect on how their ABIs will be seen as theirs by others. For example, Emelia believes that others have always thought that she owned her ABIs, and she confidently asserts that others consider these items hers: *“I think they think it’s mine. No, no, no, I wouldn’t see [...] why they would have any other reason not to. Even if they had seen it on RTR, it doesn’t prove to them. What if I did rent it there or purchased it yet?”* (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview). Similarly, Julia has a strong PO metaperception bias: *“I think people on the street seeing you wearing things, they probably just think it’s mine”* (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview). This PO metaperception bias is due to the signalling of PO through cherishing rituals (i.e., making ABIs look like mine). Some participants actively try to make the ABIs look theirs, and others assume that when they wear them, people will see ABIs as theirs.

Some participants differentiate between the responses of others and put them in two groups: those who know they are involved in ABC and those who do not. As aforementioned, Amy displays PO by engaging in physical and attitudinal ritualised acts. She did not mention that her TPO is threatened when people know that her items are accessed-based. She also alludes here to the notion of high satisfaction that comes with PO metaperception bias:

I think people who know me well know that I rent and I'm very true, honest about that. But I think strangers who might see me on the train, or co-workers who I don't work with so closely, or people who I don't get to have close conversations with might just think I own these items, which is pretty cool that they could think that I have these important possessions, I guess. But I think a lot of people who know me well know that [the] majority of my clothing is rented. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

Concerns are expressed about PO metaperception bias by a politically motivated participant who avoids conspicuous consumption. Lisa seems to feel slightly uncomfortable about others believing she owns luxury items. She explains her ownership status regarding these ABIs and is even apologetic in her responses:

You know, within, if anybody knows me, they know it's a rental [...] because I've been too open and honest about it. Maybe [...] that's a bad thing. I think [...] more like an apologetic thing. Oh, you know, this isn't really mine. I'm just renting it. Maybe it's a defence mechanism. I don't want people to think that I'm the type of person that actually has this in their closet. I don't know, maybe I have negative associations with wealthy people. I'm not sure. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, interview)

More attitudinal ritualised acts can also serve as cues for PO when individuals decide when and how items are used (Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018). The wearing stage reveals three key attitudinal PRs: taking care of items, choosing to enjoy them, and trying to make ABIs look like their own when wearing them. It is important to end with this; some participants consider that such attitudinal PRs momentarily give them some sense of PO. The participants talk of developing a special feeling for some of the items accessed and during the cherishing phase; consequently, they conduct further cherishing rituals, such as memorialising and sharing, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

5.2.2 Memorialising

Memorialising and sharing are two cherishing rituals evident in the participants' narratives. They include taking, keeping, and sharing photographs of ABIs to appropriate them as 'mine'. Taking and keeping photos, as appropriation rituals (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005), are done for different reasons, such as adding an element of permanence (Belk 1990)

to an ABI. These PRs take place during the cherishing phase, when the participants take and keep photos of the ABIs in use (i.e. being worn), which can be seen as clear, ritualised acts. For example, Julia describes her cherishing ritual: “I like to take a lot of photos; I try and take one photo in each item” (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview). For most participants, possession of such photos seems to have an effect on their attachment and enable user to develop a more enduring form of quasi-PO post access. To cope with the strain of sending an ABI back, some participants react by keeping photos of their items. For example, Zoey reflects on her experience with items she has been attached to, and asserts that taking photos of ABIs can help her deal with the mixed feelings she has when sending them back. Taking photos is thus one of Zoey’s ritualised acts during the cherishing phase:

I don't keep them, which is maybe a bummer on some items, but not a huge deal on others. [...] I don't have a ton of storage space in my current home. It's great to be able to wear something and get some good use out of it, maybe take a picture of it, and then be able to send it back.” (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

The photos taken by some participants not only give the ABIs more permanence, but also capture indexical meanings. This ritual of taking photos seems to capture indexical meanings (Grayson and Shulman 2000). For example, Jessica develops associations between ABIs and past events or past selves:

I remember what it looked like and what I looked like in it. I have pictures. [...] I'm going to look absolutely fabulous for this one evening. I'll have all the pictures to prove it. I don't need to have the same dress. [...] I like being able to be seen in different pieces. I like taking pictures. I don't like taking pictures in the same outfit. On my social media, I'll notice if somebody has the same outfit twice. I don't like it. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview)

Jessica believes that picture-taking is a way to prove her possession of her ABIs. That is clear from her account where she uses phrases such as “*I remember what it looked like and what I looked like in it. I have pictures*”, and “*have all the pictures to prove it*”. Jessica seems to have convinced herself that taking a picture is a form of possession. For Jessica, the picture serves to capture and hold these indexical meanings just as effectively as the dress itself would. Thus, it appears that for her, it is not necessary to have enduring access to the dress to sustain these meanings.

The ritual of taking pictures is a way to add an element of permanence to the otherwise liquid consumption. These results corroborate the ideas of Belk (1990), who suggested that possessions are valued because they add permanence to otherwise ephemeral meanings and memories. Zoey takes pictures before and while wearing the items. Taking and keeping pictures of her ABIs helps her to have a continued illusion of acquisition: *“Normally? I’ll take a lot of pictures wearing the clothes [...] because I know I’m never going to really wear that specific item again”* (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview). Some participants stated that they take significantly more pictures with their ABIs compared to with owned items. For example, Zoey feels that she does not need to take pictures of her owned clothes because her acquisition of them is clear. In contrast, she takes many pictures of her wearing ABIs, which can be seen as a way of demonstrating her appropriation. This is not only a way to add permanence, but also helps to validate her attachment: *“But if it’s an item I own, I may not take a picture because [...] I can just wear it again. I can take a picture of some other night or some more important event. If I’m only wearing the item one time, I can just take as many pictures as I wanted”* (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview). Thus, a cherishing ritual can consist of taking and keeping pictures. Keeping pictures seems to be a way to legitimise possessiveness. Lisa also asserts that taking photos of an ABI is critical for her to stay connected with those items: *“That’s why the photographs are important to me. I can remember the moments.”* In Lisa’s full quote (below), she reflects on her cherishing rituals used when moving from ownership-based consumption to ABC; cherished possessions are irreplaceable in ownership-based consumption (Curasi et al. 2004). These possessions are typically deemed irreplaceable because of the meanings (often indexical meanings) they hold (Belk 1990; Grayson and Shulman 2000). This is different in ABC because ABIs are actively memorialised in photo form, and these photos are seen to hold these meanings as effectively as the ‘real thing’. It can be seen how her user-item relationships have changed in this transition to ABC. The following narrative about memorialising these cherished possessions reflects the importance of this ritualistic act in relation to elements of PO. It shows how the burden of ownership (Moeller and Wittkowski 2010, Hazée et al. 2017, Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) has led Lisa to see photos as more convenient holders of indexical meanings. These results reflect those of Grayson and Schulman (2000), who also found that possessions as holders of indexical meaning.

I used to be very attached to my clothes. [...] Before RTR, I still have the dress that, when my husband proposed to me; I will always keep that dress. Over the years, I’ve just lost that attachment to owning items. I think partially because I’ve moved



a lot in the last two decades. Each time we would move [...] you can't bring 40 pairs of shoes to our new apartment and the closet won't fit them. [...] I've always been open to donating things [...]. I wouldn't keep something just for the sake of keeping it, except for those very select few items. [...] Maybe that's why the photographs are important to me. I can remember the moments. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

It is clear that the personal meaning moves from the item itself to the photo of the item. If a user takes a photo of an ABI because of having strong attachment to it, this ABI could become less indexical because the photo takes on some of the indexical meaning, thus proving that the past event certainly took place. The memory continues to exist. These results reflect those of Chu and Shu (2017), who also found that a memory of an experience might help to reduce the negative effect linked with the ending of the experience. Due to this cherishing ritual of memorialising, most of these items will become sacred (Belk et al. 1989) because the ritual singularises cherished ABIs.

The cherishing ritual of memorialising is more important than accumulating the physical items, for some participants: “[Y]ou’ve got pictures to look back on. That’s really what the memories are, too. A lot of pictures. A lot of video[s]. [...] That, to me, is more of a memory than something just sitting in your closet. I’ve got [tons] of pictures. Oh my gosh, I’ve got so many” (Emelia, 47, single rental, Interview). Emelia describes here how she is satisfied and has a feeling of competence due to keeping many pictures of her ABIs, and she believes it is a better way to add permanence to her meaningful possessions. McKechnie and Tynan (2006) found that photographing personal possessions was one of the ways of claim possession of them. It also helps users to establish QPO during the post-access stage and deal with divestment (as discussed further in section 6.1).

The participants were asked to capture moments that expressed how they cherished the ABIs and to reflect on their PO of these items. They were asked to share such photos and comment on them in their digital diaries. For example, Abigail and Zoey documented memorialising rituals as a way they cherished and appropriated ABIs, and reflected on their psychological appropriation, as seen in Table 5-12. For Abigail, there is a specific way that she captures the moments of wearing ABIs, and she reflects that “I felt like I owned them”. From her overall narrative, it seems that such pictures help her to transform her ABIs into meaningful possessions. For Zoey, taking pictures is also a means of transforming ABIs into meaningful possessions: “I felt like the item was mine” and “I felt like this is my own shirt and did not treat it particularly differently”. Therefore, taking these pictures are must to do.


As she puts it, she “*checked [this] off my to do list*”. She also reflects on her feelings about the item she was wearing and asserts a feeling of ownership and that the items were hers. Through taking pictures and keeping them, the participants can also gain a continuous feeling of competence, which is a PO motive. They demonstrate this efficacy and prove it by taking pictures. This can be seen as a competence as long as it produces a feeling of “efficacy and pleasure” (Pierce et al. 2003, p. 89). Picture-taking rituals help the participants to maintain the continuity of their self-identity and build and express their identity (Karahanna et al. 2015). Possessions that carry memories of past identities are important to consumers because such meaningful possessions are key to self-identity (Pierce et al. 2003). Individuals want to preserve a sense of security and continuity through such PRs (Cram and Paton 1993). As participants take pictures of their ABIs and use them to record their experiences while wearing them, these pictures become part of their memory archives over time.

Table 5-12 PRs of memorializing, reflecting cherishing	
Pictures from Abigail’s digital diary	Pictures from Zoey’s digital diary
	
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>“Wore this coat and earrings from RTR today to an art exhibit. I loved how “extra” this coat is, with the subtle colours and gradient effect. It was a showstopper and I got compliments on it. The earrings made me feel special also – paired so well with the coat! They were very comfortable and I felt like I owned them.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I love this top from RTR that I wore for thanksgiving. This is the first time I actually really truly loved an item I got from RTR. However, because it is such a specific item, I would not have spent the \$350 the shirt costs to purchase it in order to only wear it a couple of times. I felt like the item was mine for the day and I acted the same way that I would have without the item being rented as I generally like to keep my clothes nice anyway. For me, the only difference is eventually having to send the item back, but since, with unlimited, you can keep an item as long as you need it, I can do this on my own terms. Since I really enjoyed this particular item so much, I am going to bring it to Charleston so I can get another wear out of it and then send it back while I am there. I felt like this is my own shirt and did not treat it particularly differently.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel good – I got to wear the items and I got pictures in several of them, and I do not have to keep them or store them. It feels like I got something checked off my to do list.”</i></p>
(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)	(Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking).

5.2.3 Sharing

Sharing these photos on social media can be seen as another cherishing ritual because actively displaying ABIs on social media allows for greater signals of psychological appropriation. Individuals have an inherent desire for control, which results in the reinforcement of the formation of PO (Furby 1978; Pierce et al. 2001). Different social media platforms offer opportunities for the participants to achieve such experiences and allow them

to share pictures to fulfil their need to demonstrate appropriation, which can be seen as a way of forming PO (Karahanna et al. 2015). The participants show that they like the fact that they have shared photos of their ABIs and in general feel more in control of those possessions while they have them because they are able to share them. Zoey documents these PRs of sharing photos of an ABI on her social media, as seen in Table 5-13.

Table 5-13 PRs of sharing photos on social media
Pictures from Zoey’s digital diary

<p>Take a photo or video showing the different feelings you have for your rental items compared to your own items. Reflect on this feeling please.</p> <p><i>“I don’t feel as though they are different at all. I just treat them like my regular clothes until I am ready to return them”</i></p> <p>Try to capture moments that made you feel (un)comfortable with rental items?</p> <p><i>“I felt very comfortable with the rental items during my trip to Charleston. Here is a picture of me wearing two rental items at once (top and coat) [that I posted in Instagram].”</i></p>
(Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – note-taking)

Many participants explain how posting pictures is an important way to prove their possessiveness: *“I would say the majority of my photos in general are wearing RTR clothing”* (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). The feelings of TPO are further enhanced by the sharing of photos on social media alongside tagging of the platform and its

community; some participants mention this when reflecting on how meaningful those possessions are, such as Lisa:

I share photos on Instagram and Facebook. [...] Sometimes tag RTR, if you could see, if you can see the dress, I tag them. There's also community hashtags like #myRTR because I like to look at people's photos who are doing this. It's a fun little community of women that feel amazing. [...] I feel amazing most of the time, more so than with clothes that I own because it's the fun novelty of wearing something once. [...] I like bright colours, I like bold patterns [...] and I like to take pictures. I post on Instagram and stuff. If, in the past, I had an event, I would buy something new. Not even an event. If I was just going out with friends on a weekend, I would buy something new to wear if you knew there [would be] pictures taken or whatever. I wouldn't want to wear that same thing again because I don't want people to see it on me again. I liked the notion of wearing something one time, having an experience in it, and then wearing something else. It doesn't bother me at all to not own the clothing. [...] [S]ome people buy the clothes from RTR after they wear them. If they really like it, you could buy it. I never do that. I just like going through and trying something else. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Lisa also points out how her ritualised consumption has changed her from a consumer to a user, and she talks more than once about taking pictures. She also talks about the experience of ownership and, at the same time, she accepts the lack of legal ownership. Others tend to demonstrate psychological appropriation by sharing their ABIs on social media, but without mentioning the provider. "I have posted photos on social media. But I haven't posted where the outfit came from. I would just post pictures of the wedding or the reception. I really wouldn't post where the outfit came from" (Emelia, 47, single rental, Interview).

The psychological appropriation is further enhanced by the likes and comments received on the social media platforms. These can boost the fulfilment of perceived control (Karahanna et al. 2015). When users share a picture, they have put in effort. Likes and comments seem to reinforce their appropriation and thus TPO:

I get lots of compliments. I get, like, "Wow", "You look nice." I take pictures and I put them on my social media. I get comments on my social media page when I wear these dresses. If I wear them to a dinner party with my husband, I get compliments from other wives that are there. I like the way I feel when I wear these clothes.

(Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview)

Dittmar (1992) argued that possessions are used to tell others about what individuals do and who individuals are, thus assisting them in achieving social recognition; this is the main reason for publicly displaying their items. Expressing possession to others through social media is a cherishing ritual, which seems to be used as a form of possession. The participants reflect on how they feel when sharing these moments on social media, sharing their possessions with others, and getting feedback on them. They make an effort to edit the pictures, and the focus is on showing the ABIs. As noted by Marwick (2015), sharing photos is a powerful form of self-expression. Belk (2013) argued that sharing possessions on social media can provide valuable resources for the construction of identity among even a significant number of people. Memorializing is mainly about indexical meanings, which are private meanings that help define identity and personal history. Sharing is more about public meanings. Participants feel it is important to share these photos, rather than just keep them for themselves to emphasise public meanings and reflect self-identity (Richins 1994).

5.2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the PRs performed during the access stage of ABC, and has looked at the appropriation and cherishing phases where physical engagement with ABIs occurs. During the appropriation phase, a number of PRs are reported and they tend to start with unpacking, trying on, and storing newly delivered ABIs. All of these acts are found to momentarily create some sense of PO (i.e., temporary), which is reinforced by the sensory attributes of these PRs. The cherishing phase also shows how the participants benefit from TPO. Here, they use wearing the item to incorporate it and gain a more personalised relationship with the cherished ABIs. The PRs include symbolic treatment that relates to how they take care of the items, choose to enjoy them, and try to make them look like their own. Lastly, memorialising and sharing practices are used to add permanence to their cherished possessions. The during-access stage is part of what makes ABIs appropriated and cherished, which is central to evoking a TPO.

Looking at the PRs performed during the access stage of ABC, the ABIs were found to be perceived 'as temporarily mine'. PRs are carried out to deal with meaningful and cherished possessions. Users do not seem to want the object itself to become a cherished possession because the ABI will be returned. This is why they memorialise it instead so that the photos can hold the meanings that would traditionally have been held by the object. The feeling accompanying these PRs provides opportunities for the participants to project their

control and come to know the ABIs. The participants make it clear that the feelings evoked by the ABIs are much better than those evoked by owned items, which is effective in stimulating self-identity. These PRs help them to view the ABIs “as new”, though they are well aware of the fact that they are not new. After the ABIs have been integrated into the participants’ possessions, they report pleasant experiences and high satisfaction, which results in appreciation. Such appreciation seems to create meaningful relationships with the ABIs, which can be caused by and/or result in the TPO.

Chapter Six: Post-Access Possession rituals

The last stage is concerned with possession/divestment rituals that take place post-access. This concerns how participants deal with ABIs post-access and how this affects their feelings of ownership. The possession/divestment rituals occur in the later stage of the appreciation process, when participants physically rotate their ABIs, exchanging old for new, while digital keeping representations ABIs for sentimental and practical reasons. The emotions associated with these rituals (i.e., sadness vs happiness) are discussed. The main possession/divestment ritual observed in this chapter is the process of keeping ABIs in the virtual closet post access to maintain QPO.

6.1 Divesting but keeping

Divestment can often be problematic and stressful for consumers (Coulter and Ligas 2003; Ferraro et al. 2011), so consumers may be reluctant to part with items. These rituals of divesting whilst keeping help to reduce this stress for users, making it easier for them to part with ABI since they are able to simultaneously keep their digital counterparts. Divestment rituals is identified as a key form of ritual (Holt 1995). The meaning is transferred from the goods to the individual through different rituals, including divestment (McCracken 1986). Up to now, far too little attention has been paid to how the speed of divestment of ABIs influences PO, as well as future acquisition and divestment (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Divesting but keeping is a ritual used by the participants to retain private meaning regarding their ABIs after sending them back. They use divestment rituals when they are ready to separate from positively charged and meaningful ABIs. This tends to be done not only through taking photos and videos to memorialise meaningful possessions (as explained in the during-access stage), but also through ‘active keeping’ through virtual closet.

Active keeping is a ritual whereby participants keep meaningful possessions in their virtual closets, but for a purpose different to that explained when discussing the accumulating rituals (Chapter 4). This ritual is conducted after the use of an ABI, when the participant has formed an attachment with it, but has to send it back. Some participants create a special folder for such ABIs and this virtual closet becomes an active link to these items, which can be re-accessed. With such active keeping, participants transfer the private meaning from the disposed-of ABI to a visual representation of it in their virtual closet. By doing so, the essence of the private meaning is retained, and hence the user more easily divests themselves of the ABI.

Divesting but keeping takes place when participants go through the divestment ritual, trying to physically dissolve their relationship with an item by sending it back, and sometimes deleting it from their virtual closet. However, participants often enact an assertive possession ritual to claim an item as their own by actively keeping it in their virtual closet post-access. Table 6-1 breaks down the post-access stage into two distinct rituals and their links to elements of PO.

Possession ritual	Definition	Linked routes to PO	Motives for PO
Divesting as rotating	Rituals of rotating ABIs in the physical and virtual closets, rather than truly divesting themselves of them.	Control and self-investment.	- Efficacy and effectance - Stimulating self-identity
Virtually accumulating ABIs	Rituals of virtually accumulating ABIs at the end of their access.	Control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge.	- Efficacy and effectance - Stimulating self-identity - Need for home

Table 6-1 Elements of rituals: The PRs during divesting but keeping phase and their links to elements of PO (Source: own illustration)

6.1.1 Divesting as rotating

Physically rotating ABIs is an important stage of the divestment rituals. As seen in the previous stages, some ABIs are emotionally meaningful to the participants, but the nature of this consumption mode necessitates their return. This process of rotation forms an important change in the user-item relationship, because the item transitions from a possession to a resource (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2009). The latter authors' research looks at how used items create a stock that extends an item's biography, so that it is considered exchangeable and part of the user's possessions. The participants do not consider themselves the final users of the items, but are actively involved in rotating them. This shows that the participants recognise and appreciate the ongoing rotation of ABIs. They have continuance and rapid access, which play a role in the divesting rituals: "*[I] like to have stuff on rotation to wear to the office*" (Amanda, 28, Unlimited user, Interview); "*So, my closets [are] always on rotation*" (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview); "*I was rotating them very quickly*" (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview). However, the participants only refer to physically rotating the ABIs, and do not refer to going through processes of emotional and psychological detachment. The way Megan utilises her unlimited subscription and her reflections on her divestment rituals for ABIs illustrate how the ability to "change" and "rotate" ABIs is an important part of her possession/divestment rituals. This can be seen as a new form of appropriation within ABC:

You have this unlimited shopping option with better quality that you [are] not able

to buy anyway so, [...] I've really enjoyed it. [...] I'm not sure if you know, with the monthly subscription you get to have your four items. You can hold on to these items for as long as you want, or you can return them as quickly as you want. My closets [are] always on rotation. RTR is always adding new clothes. There's clothes that have been on the website that I still haven't even tried or rented. I know that I'll be able to do so. I have all of these options open to me. Another thing that has helped me or it's something that I really like about RTR is that you can change. You can change the sizes; you're not just stuck to, when you start your account, you put in that you're a size two and a size small, well you're not going to be a size two and a size small the rest of your life so, since I started using the app, my first rentals were size zeros and size twos, now I'm in a size six and a size four. It's awesome that I don't have to hold on to these clothes or [if] I wanted to buy these clothes that might only fit for a few months and then, say I love a dress that I bought. I just can't wear it because it's no longer my size. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

The flexibility of physically rotating ABIs was important for the participants. For example, Megan talked about holding onto items if she wanted or sending them back quickly as soon as she had used them. It is a common ritualised act among the participants to physically rotate ABIs as soon as they are worn. For example, Zoey (below) explains how she promptly sends an item back after she has used it and took some picture, but her relationship with the item does not end there as she virtually accumulates loved ABIs, as will be explained in the next section.

I gotta send it back as soon as I'm done wearing it. I don't wait for the end of the period. If I'm wearing it for a specific picture, specific event, I take the picture, go to the event, then that's it. Then I normally, either that night or the next morning, depending on timing, go to UPS and get it back. I don't want to hang on this stuff longer than I have to. I send the item right back as quickly as I can. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Interview)

Before physically rotating the ABIs, the participants tend to feel some momentary sense of PO and classify those items as meaningful possessions. Emelia attributes her divestment of the items to the nature of ABC:

Maybe when you're wearing it, you feel sort of proud in that moment, but to me, I'm excited to send it back because I know it's served [a] purpose. I know it did its job, and I'm ready to go to something new. [...] I know in order to get something new from RTR, I'll need to send this old one back now. But it served its purpose. So no, I never actually feel like it's mine. [...] Oh, I feel like 'whoopee' [excitement sound]. I feel excited because then I know that my next one is probably just right around the corner, my new one. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

Emelia focuses on exchanging old for new and expresses her excitement about sending an item back. She develops some momentary sense of PO and pride in the item, but such feelings seem to be ephemeral because she has no issues with returning an item as she wants something else new – she points out that the item has “served its purpose”. Emelia reflects on an element of PO, being in control, at the beginning of this quote, and highlights the temporary nature of such a feeling: “*you feel proud in that moment*”. Pride is found to be an antecedent of PO (Kirk et al. 2015). There is a clear contradiction, here, in her claim that there is never a sense of PO. However, in this quote she seems to be referring to legal ownership, as she clearly pointed out throughout her interview both temporary and QPO, through comments such as “*I feel the dresses are mine*”.

I think it's a little more special because you wouldn't want to give \$1,000 or \$800 for a dress. It's special to get a little moment in something that is desired like that. You feel special, you feel more jazzed up. When you're wearing that you want to get your make-up done, you want to get your hair done. You want to look really good. It's almost like Cinderella, when she had the dress, but then the dress left at 12. It's like that. (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

Focusing on Emelia, she clearly uses ABIs as a form of self-investment. She again describes QPO of something expensive, which makes her feel more excited. Most of the participants specifically point to items being “expensive” throughout the rituals carried out during the access stage. Emilia mentions leaving at 12 when her special possession turns into nothing, as a metaphor for physically rotating an ABI, and sending it back.

It's not hard now. There have been a couple times when I've got something that was the exact, perfect fit. You know how hard it is to find your perfect fit? You're like, “Should I keep this? Should I not keep this?” You're really weighing that decision. [...] “[A]m I ever going to dress [like] that?” Or “Am I ever going to get

an item that fits me like this again?" A couple times, I've had that moral dilemma, but I did end up send[ing] it back because I looked at myself honestly and said, "You're never going to wear this again. You're not going to do it, so just send it back and get something newer and fresher." (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview)

It happened one or two times. "Oh, I really want to keep this." I thought about purchasing it. There was this white button-up shirt that had embroidered pretzels on it. It's probably one of the most odd items that I've rented. But I kept it for three weeks; normally, I definitely don't keep anything for more than a week. I thought about buying it. Then, I really questioned if I would like it forever for the foreseeable future, or [if it] feels more of a novelty thing. What I told myself to do was to return it because I need[ed] to get some other stuff for an event. If I was still thinking about it later on, I could see if it was available. I told myself [to] wait a month and then see if it was available, and then maybe I could think about purchasing it. It happened once or twice. I think one other time. I really liked this Chloe shirt, [it] was [a] kind of tunic. I think I wanted it again. Then I realized [I] wasn't gonna be wearing it very much because it was winter, so I returned it. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Although Emelia and other participants physically rotate the ABIs, they keep them digitally. They tend to develop a strong attachment as a result of being with such items; therefore, those accessed items are positively charged with rich attachment and emotional meaning. To deal with the strain of losing a valued extension of self, the participants go through self-negotiation, which is described by Emelia as a "moral dilemma". However, this is a bit of an exaggeration as she finds it relatively easy to detach, comparing with previous work on divestment (Ferraro et al. 2011). Julia says she has thought of purchasing some of the items. Many participants say they prepare for separation from their meaningful ABIs by comparing the advantages and disadvantages of holding on to them, purchasing them, and returning them. Although sending ABIs back is an easy task, making the decision can be hard for some of the participants. It can be argued that ABC creates pressure on the users to divest themselves of the items quickly.

It is clear that participants develop new relationships with their meaningful possessions, which are temporary. As Abigail (below) points out, she enjoys being able to return items and finds it to be full of excitement.

Just because one [is] living in New York, you don't really have a lot of storage space [...]. [M]y closet is limited in size and my dresser, so it's hard to fit a lot of different stuff in there. If I want to wear different kinds of things, I like being able to return them so that I free up space for new items. Limited space is one thing and then also just variety. I get tired of wearing the same thing. Trying new things is exciting. (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

The divestment rituals also include rotating ABIs in several ways, forming part of the entire set of access rituals. The participants tend to return items either by posting them, sending them back with friends, or taking them back to the provider in person. They find returning ABIs an effortless process and an important way to reflect on their appreciation:

Easy. Very easy. I liked it. I've done it several ways. I've returned it in-store. I've returned it by UPS. I had my girlfriend drop it off. It's easy. (Jessica, 46, Single rental, Interview)

I got to wear it once when I rented it. Then I returned it immediately. I just didn't want to potentially damage the item, or I didn't want anything to happen to it. Not that I would be affected. I try to keep all of the clothes really nice, but I knew I wasn't going to get another wear out of it that week. I just returned it as quickly as possible because I know somewhere down the line in the future if I really want to wear it again, I will rent it again. [...] If I really enjoyed that particular item that I rented, I know that I'll have an opportunity to rent it again. It's easy for me to let go. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Both Jessica and Megan illustrate that they value and appreciate going through their divestment rituals. These results differ from previous work where divestment is portrayed as problematic and time consuming (Price et al. 2000). Such rituals for some participants have the power to singularise their items, transforming them into meaningful possessions with personal significance. For example, Amy (below) explains her preferred way of returning her ABIs, that is, to do it in person. She points out the importance of time in such rituals and how she manages it to hasten her access process. Abigail makes the same point about dropping her items off, as seen in Table 7-2. She focuses on her feelings and how divestment is a relief and she wants to get it done.

I don't often mail things to return them just because it's a slower process. It's a matter of me going to the UPS store, dropping it off, which I have to make time for,

and then waiting for it to get delivered, and then be opened up and scanned for return. Whereas, I could take a train into Manhattan, which is a short distance for me. As soon as I scan something in their door, I can rent something new. I usually return items in person instead of mailing. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)



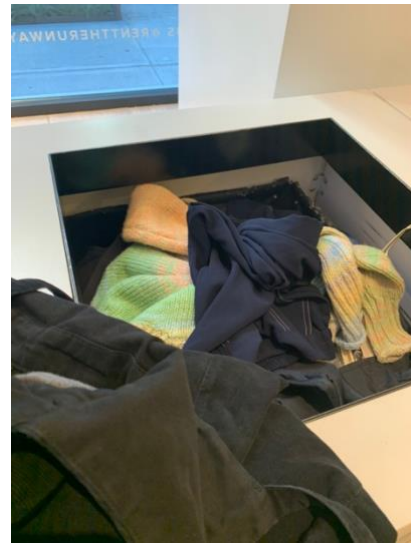
Table 6-2 Physically rotating ABIs by post	
Reflective notes regarding these pictures in different forms (diary voice note, note-taking)	
	
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> <i>“Dropped off two items today at the UPS drop-off point. I felt great relief because I can’t wait for them to be checked back and ... to get more items on Monday. In the meantime, I’m going to browse the RTR app and start figuring out what I should be ordering on Monday. [...] I wore my own clothes today instead of RTRs. I always think my own clothes are more basic and plain compared to items that I get from RTR.”</i></p>	
(Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – notes)	

Table 7-2 shows an example of when and how participants deal with divesting themselves of their ABIs. Natalie, like the others, focuses on the rituals she takes to accelerate her liquid consumption. She values such experiences because, *“I often rent multiple pieces within a week”*. These ritualised and habitual practices help her to effectively rotate ABIs, in the exchange of old for new.

Table 6-3 PRs of physically rotating ABIs, “exchange of ‘old’ for new”

Pictures from Natalie’s digital diary



Reflective notes regarding these pictures in different forms (diary voice note)

Describing her actions and feelings:

Natalie describes the process of returning an item to the West Elm Store in New York: *“There’s a box and a scanner. You scan your RTR pass and then you return the pieces, and it immediately opens up a spot, so I go here also quite often because it immediately opens up the spot because they can confirm that you’ve returned the pieces. I like it [...] instead of waiting to drop it off at UPS. That way, you don’t have to wait and then if you order, if you drop it off early in the morning, you can same-day order a piece to be delivered between 2 and 4pm. If you drop it off later in the day, you get it between 8 and 11pm. If you drop it off much later than that it comes the next day, but it’s pretty convenient.” [...]*



“When I put my clothes in the box, I’m not sad. [The] same feeling as when they return them to the store. I feel like I have a new spot and I’m ready for something else. I can always re-rent something if I want it back and I feel open to new opportunities and new possibilities.”

(Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

Participants put effort into making an item theirs by divesting it in their own personal way. The effort of managing the divestment of ABIs can also serve to enable users to feel that such items are meaningful. The ritual of physically rotating ABIs enables the experience of something extraordinary in a participant’s life. The act of divesting requires that participants involve themselves in several appreciation acts, such as inspection, re-packaging, and returning the item in a specific way. These acts are a driving force, helping to facilitate the final transition ritual (virtual accumulation), which will be discussed in the next section. However, the participants point out their feelings and emotions when physically rotating ABIs, and these differ based on the forms of PO developed during the pre- and during-access stages. In Natalie’s reflection on her emotions during divestment (second comment in Table 6-3), she describes her emotions and feelings when returning items to the store, and how she

manages them through QPO, assuring herself of her ability to re-access the item. She asserts her ability to re-access and acknowledges that she has great feelings about having “new opportunities and possibilities”. It has been observed previously that the process of divestment involves a “psychological process through which a person comes to feel physically or emotionally detached and separated from a possession”, before actual divestment happens (Roster 2001, p. 429).

Natalie shows different feelings for different items at the time of returning them. As shown in Table 6-4, Natalie mentions her attachment to the item from her second shipment, making comments such as, “*I did love it*”, “*I was sad to send [it back]*”, and “*I was upset to send this back because I really liked it*”, whereas her reflection on her third shipment was flat and emotionless. The capacity to easily divest themselves of items is high, but is accompanied by a promise to re-access them in the participants’ narratives. This reflects QPO. For example, Natalie says she is not sure about her feeling of ownership but she can always re-access them. Surprisingly, divestment here is found to be an exciting ritual rather than something difficult and to be avoided. This finding is contrary to those of previous studies, which have suggested consumers tend to experience guilt or sadness (Coulter and Ligas 2003) and grief (Ferraro et al. 2011).

Table 6-4 Emotions and PRs of discarding and physically rotating ABIs	
Reflective notes regarding these pictures in different forms (diary voice note, note-taking)	
Second shipment	Third shipment
	
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> “I returned the jacket after a few days of wearing it. (Pictures attached.) I did love it so much that I ordered it again a few days later!”</p>	<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u> “Fine with sending it back: it was nothing special and I’ll likely rent for work if I need a dress.”</p>

<p>“The same way it came, in the garment bag with the label.”</p> <p>“I was sad to send the jacket back but I needed the space to order something else for an upcoming event. I will be re-renting it soon!”</p> <p>“Like I said above, I was upset to send this back because I really liked it, but I wanted or needed a space to open for something else. I sent it back, but I have already re-rented it. The nature of RTR for me is that I can send things back really quickly or drop them at the store, drop them at my drop-off box, and can re-rent them or get them again. That’s the one benefit of living in the city. <u>I feel like, even though I don’t own the items, I can always re-rent them.</u> That’s not a problem. I can send it, especially for this jacket. I know there are lots of them available. I dropped it off, returned it, got something else and then re-rented it.”</p>	<p>“I wore the dress one time and returned it because it got too wrinkled to wear again.”</p>
<p>(Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note, note-taking)</p>	

The participants’ narratives provide support for QPO and a way of dealing with it when going through the divestment ritual through the reassurance that they are exchanging old for new. Megan (below) describes a situation where an item “has elements for me” and asserts her attachment to and valuation of the item. She illustrates her multiple usages of the item, but is cheerful about rotating it for something newer, which does not conflict with her QPO:

I really liked it because it has elements for me. I feel my style is classic. It was fun for me to be in something that was very classic, something that I haven’t really tried on. I typically don’t wear lace. This is a complete lace dress. It was really fun for me to try something different, but that was still in my wheelhouse. [...] I was just gonna say it’s fun too because I got to wear this dress. This is the \$350 dress. I got to wear this dress three times. Now I’m a little bored of it. I can just replace it and get something new that I’m super excited to wear. Definitely, it’s fun and it keeps me happy. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

Other perspectives were expressed justifying the physical rotation of ABIs, ranging from sharing a connection with other users to sensitivity to an item’s onward biography. Prior works on dispossession in the context of transmission have found that divestment is not about removing traces of oneself, but about moving items effectively to others (Price et al. 2000). Sharing a connection with other users is a sub-theme noted with reference to the divestment rituals. It comes up, for example, in the rationalising of the physical rotation of ABIs among users. Amy (below) talks about owning ABIs for a short time, points out her rituals for rotating those items, and then confirms the importance of sharing a connection.

Her narrative not only refers to the elements of PO (e.g., self-investment) but also offers a clear language of QPO, in that she uses words such as “owning”, and “having” for “a short time”.

*I like the idea of owning, of having, these luxury items for a short time [...] I would say the clothes that I own are very repetitive and these are a nice change in my wardrobe. I would say the majority of the clothing that I do wear is rented. It's nice to have a different way to present myself every day. It's definitely contributed to the way that I present myself and see myself. It's helped me a lot and I'm very much a happy customer. [...] I think they're probably similar to me. They're looking to experiment and try something new. It's filling a need for them, whether they're a mom who doesn't have time to buy clothing for herself, or a businesswoman who needs to have a fresh set of outfits every week. I think it's cool to see a community of women who have different perspectives able to wear, to share, clothing. It's like that book, *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*. These clothing items [...] people have travelled with them. People have worn them to important events. [...] They share that. It's sharing connection with people. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)*

Participants get the benefit of knowing that the item will go on to be used by another users, but they do not have to engage in the laborious process of finding a suitable person to pass the ABI on to, as in the case of work on heirlooms (Türe and Ger 2016) and garage sales (Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005). Divestment seems much more seamless. Amy argued that users might have a clear desire to extend an ABI's biography, in terms of hoping that it has many other users in the future, for different reasons, such as a high level of commitment to this consumption style, while Lisa disagrees because she has no direct communication with other users:

*I've never felt that philosophical connectedness to the item, like *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, where in the world has this item been, partially because RTR is very secretive about how many people are members, how many times an item has been rented. How many of one size of one dress do they own? I really don't know how many times an item has been worn. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)*

However, a common view among the participants is that a shared connection and shared emotions among the users do exist. This helps to smooth the process of divestment, as Megan puts it:

I know the fashion industry is one of the leading industries for waste. One of the things that I really appreciate with RTR is, we're just a group of women sharing a closet of clothes [...]. I mean, I don't have an issue with it. I am the youngest sibling of three. Most of my closet growing up as a child, I was just getting hand-me-down clothes from my sister. This a similar concept to me. It's this opportunity to just share and exchange clothes with other people that are interested in fashion. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

The sensitivity to an item's onward biography can be seen through some participants wanting their fellow users to access and appreciate what they have used. For example, the participants reveal a high sense of responsibility towards the ABIs. Emelia points out her concern for and appreciation of other users' pleasant and smooth access: "[T]hat's why I also think about the next person that's wearing it after me" (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview). This is not only about responsibility, but also showing a desire to extend the item's biography to include other users. Zoey shows a desire for this and emphasises her appropriation of ABIs similar to her own items:

I would say I valued them [ABIs] the exact same way as other items that are currently in my closet. I have treated them the same way, if not a little better, because I know they're going to be passed on and worn by someone else and I want that person to have a good experience as well. (Zoey, 25, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – diary voice note)

It's shopping to an extent, but I don't keep these pieces forever. I think, for me personally, there's a little bit less guilt associated with it because the pieces continue to have another life. [...] I'm going to try and be careful with the pieces because I want them to be worn again. [...] [F]or me, the focus has been significantly on reducing my personal consumption of new products for environment or sustainable reasons, so I like the fact that [...] renting allows me to have a really nice item, but then I can just return it. They dry clean it, someone else can use it. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

For Julia, sensitivity to an item's onward biography limits the guilt associated with consumption because she keeps in her mind product longevity and other political issues. Although product longevity is mainly focused on boosting the user-item relationship, ABC reshapes this (Baxter 2017; Edbring et al. 2016). Sophie goes further in asserting that ABIs can be more appropriated than owned items, and she perceives the act of access as a purchase, which seems to reflect QPO. She is also sensitive to an item's onward biography: “[T]here are many clothes that are sitting in my closet that I own right now that I don't wear anymore. They're just sitting there because I don't want to throw them away. Now, if I had purchased them from RTR, I could give it back and somebody else can use it” (Sophie, 40, Single rentals, Interview).

Amy adds to this narrative by arguing that she is concerned about the items' onward biographies because of the sustainability of this, emphasising her satisfaction in extending a product's longevity:

It's funny because I think my friends who don't use RTR think it's weird that I would wear the same clothes that someone else has worn, but it doesn't make me uncomfortable. I understand that it's more sustainable. These are items that I would probably only have worn once or twice regardless and then just kind of buried in my closet. I'm happy to see that this garment gets more use than it would have otherwise. The life cycle of the garment has a lot more stops in it. I really don't mind that other people are wearing the clothes. It doesn't bother me. (Amy, 26, Unlimited user, Interview)

To ease the burden of physically rotating ABIs, the participants engage in ritualised acts, ranging from promising themselves they will get something new instead, sharing a connection, and knowing they are extending an item's onward biography. Furthermore, they keep their QPO by virtually accumulating ABIs post access to deal with the burden, which will be discussed in the next section.

6.1.2 Virtually accumulating ABIs

Although the participants physically rotate the ABIs and have ephemeral relationships with them, they are able to maintain QPO of them by accumulating them virtually, by keeping items in their virtual closets. They prepare for separation from ordinary or meaningful ABIs by intentionally keeping them, either in their original categories or, in the case of meaningful items, in special categories. Moving items into special categories could be seen as a transition ritual. By performing the virtual accumulation of ABIs (active keeping) at the end

of their period of access to them, the participants gain the unique ability to reinforce their psychological appropriation and signal their QPO. The last stage of the possession ritual is this active keeping whereby participants assert and strengthen their ‘having’ feelings. These active keeping activities are associated with PRs and linked to the past and present extended self, as well as the anticipation of the future self (Schultz et al. 1989), when the participants are hoping for re-access. Thus, this is not symbolic keeping because the virtual closet is a dynamic and active link to the ABI, which can be re-accessed.

Two discrete reasons emerge for the digital accumulation of ABIs: (1) sentimental and (2) practical motives, both of which are confirmative forms of possession in the post-access stage.

Firstly, with sentimental motives, some participants are able to keep their relationships with ABIs after access and retain some of the positively charged private meanings those items have for them. This is because the virtually accumulated ABIs are stored, and the participants try to avoid any engagement in digital divestment rituals, even though this can be done with just a click. One participant (below) suggests that she keeps all loved ABIs in special lists in her virtual closet. The acts of virtually keeping and replacing ABIs within their virtual closets also serve to assist users in marking accumulated items as meaningful and valuable. As Natalie describes, keeping the items in her virtual closet after access is like purchasing and owning them, and clearly gives her QPO:

I love that jumpsuit. It's the kind of thing [...] I think adds confidence in a way that normal clothes might not. [...] I added [it] to that list [to denote that] I've worn this. I love this. I can continuously add it to my wardrobe because I'm going to rent it in the future if I need it. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

According to Natalie, an ABI is hers if she has added it to one of her special lists after access, which she names “worn this” and “love this”. Moving these items is a type of transition ritual rooted in elements of PO. It represents keeping their relationship with the item alive, because Natalie sorts out what she wants to keep in these special lists. Natalie also performs the transition ritual on items she is attached to by moving them to her “To buy” folder.

I am attached to some of them, so some of the ones that I bought I had attachment to. I definitely have attachment to my jacket and that sweater, but I think what that “To buy” folder (name of a list) is I have attachment to them. But they are so expensive that I'm not gonna buy them, but I will put them in there with the idea that [...] if I ever saw them in the online sample sale, I might buy them. But I doubt

it because they're really nice pieces. I want to remember that I liked them a lot.

(Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Natalie always shows a clear temporary and QPO of the ABIs. Attachment is clear here, as she emphasises not only the virtual accumulation of ABIs, but also the desire to keep recalling and sustaining those feelings: “But I want to remember that I liked them a lot”. Most participants demonstrate passion for virtually accumulating ABIs post-access, including taking pictures of them (as mentioned in the cherishing phase). Having access to these items and then sending them back is not the end of the interaction. Natalie demonstrates various digital ritualised acts that she uses to imply psychological appropriation post-access. The participants virtually accumulate the ABIs to remember the previously established TPO and to feel QPO when engaging in ABC. Megan also reflects on this point, talking about virtually keeping her favourites to remember them:

I'm going back to look at some of the things that I have [scrolls through her digital wishlists on the RTR app]. Some of the things that I have in my favourites, I've already rented. I keep them there just in case I want to rent them again. [T]hat's another fun thing about RTR is. If I wore a dress in the past, I don't have to buy it. I can just rent it again when I'm ready to wear it again. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

The participants put effort into keeping an ABI and making it seem like theirs by virtually accumulating items they liked post-access. Although this narrative came up during the reflection on divestment rituals, paradoxically, these efforts at active keeping can be seen as PRs. However, there are similarities between this ritual, in which users erase meaning from possessions by virtually keeping them for a while before decluttering them, and those described by McCracken (1990) and Roster (2001), wherein consumers store things away for a while before physical separation as a way to achieve dispossession.

Secondly, there are practical motives, whereby participants tend to keep meaningful loved items in their virtual closets for potential re-access. This is one of the most common ritualised acts of the divestment phase. There is an overall desire to virtually accumulate ABIs that are appreciated by the participants. Thus, apart from the appropriation before and during access, participants go through high-intensity appropriation after access. Lisa explains how she deals with special items after access, her attachment to them driving her to keep them in a distinct list in her virtual closet, which she calls “Wear again”. She talks about a “way to save things”, and this control reflects her QPO post access. Lisa is very

passionate about what she has already accessed, so she tends to create her own collection of those items, even though she does not re-access them that often:


This actually helps me determine if I were to start investing in clothing again. How do I choose something that I would really want to wear a few times? There's probably been three or four things in the last three years that I've worn twice. Like, most things, I'm fine just wearing once, but the few special items I do. There're ways to save things that you really like, so I do have a list of things called "Wear again". If I can't find something new to wear, I'll go to the "Wear again" folder and look for something. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Relocating an item within the participant's virtual closet can be seen as an act of appropriation and used to legitimise feelings of ownership post access. The excerpt below also demonstrates how Natalie uses her virtual closet to create lists, for example those called "Worn and love", "Maybe", and "Reorder/resize", which she also mentioned in her first interview, and was discussed in the 'Adding ABIs to the virtual closet' section. Natalie's emotion and language of control over the virtual closet are explicit. She uses words such as 'love', 'like', 'archive', 'keep track', and 'curating' to express and signal elements of PO. She chooses to keep meaningful loved items post access when she considers the items to have felt like hers, and to be consistent or compatible with the person she is. The items must "fit me" and "I like them" to be relocated within her virtual closet. This transition ritual is an active link to and a form of PO. Natalie emphasises her PO of such items, which are similar to items in her wardrobe, stating "my feelings on the items here are essentially like [those I have about] my closet", as the following narratives demonstrate:

The way I feel about my "Worn and love" list – this is the list of things that I've created [...] for things that I've worn in the past that fit [...] I like them and I want to re-rent them. I use it as a way to archive and keep track of things that I want to re-rent and I have a list of maybe 50 to 70 pieces over the course of the last year. So I started in April using RTR. My feelings on the items here are essentially like [those I have about] my closet. It's not always items that are available but there're items I know have fit me. I like them. I want to re-rent them. These are the pieces I know, in the future, I can curate from here. It also helps me keep track since there are a lot of items I rent. I want to rent. This helps me keep track and also, especially, some items look the same. For example, little black dresses, they often look the same to me. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Diary voice note)

I was fine returning this item because I was unsure about it and might rent it in the future in a different size. It went to the “Maybe” and “Reorder/resize” lists in my app. (Natalie, 30, Unlimited user, Digital Diaries – note-taking)

A common view among the participants was that virtually accumulating ABIs helped them to have a living relationship with them, resembling the feeling of owning them and even substituting for legal ownership. For example, Table 6-5 shows how Abigail went through re-accessing an item she had previously accessed and kept in her virtual closet. In her quote, she describes her QPO of the item and how she accessed it for the second time, along with her intention to re-access it in the future. Abigail tends to virtually accumulate ABIs, which feel like hers. As she points out, in the past if she saw herself owning something and found it difficult to return it, she “didn’t want to let it go”. Thus, active keeping helps her to overcome such issues.

Table 6-5 PRs of divesting but keeping	
Pictures from Abigail’s digital diary	
	
Reflective notes regarding these pictures in different forms (self note-taking and diary voice note).	
<p><u>Describing her actions and feelings:</u></p> <p><i>“I love this white dress and this is my second time renting it!!! I did it once in the summer and found it very fitting, so decided to get it again. I wore it with leggings and boots to make it better and warmer for the fall and got lots of compliments on this dress!!! I think it’s so unique. Especially the neckline. I will definitely rent this again – if not buy it myself!!! [...] it was something that I could see myself owning and didn’t want to let it go. I know it’s easily accessible so I can rent it again.”</i> (Abigail, 26, Unlimited user, Digital diaries – notes).</p>	

Moreover, the ritual of virtually accumulating ABIs (actively keeping them) involves decluttering the virtual closet. This is largely done by the participants who tend, where possible, to virtually accumulate what they have accessed. Thus, when treasured possessions lose their sense of sacredness, the participants will delete them from their lists. For example, Julia keeps her list within her virtual closet up-to-date, very similarly to what happens with the traditional form of possession. This ritual of transitioning items from mine to not mine signals the start of psychological detachment and the completion of the divestment phase for an ABI:

I think anytime I'm looking through a list, if I see something that I don't like ... anymore, I'll definitely delete it. I like them to be pretty up-to-date, and I've deleted lists, like I went to quite a few summer weddings, last summer. That's why I joined. Some of those were just very specific to that occasion and the style of the wedding, so I definitely deleted some of those lists. (Julia, 30, Unlimited user, Interview)

Such rituals of regular divestment are akin to the rituals of active keeping, and are common among the participants. Some spoke of updating the whole list, as Julia did, while others focused on updating items within their list. Lisa talks about the divesting of items from her virtual closet's lists that she does not like anymore; her feelings towards those items have changed over time:

I have a list that is primarily generic fall and winter clothes. By the time warm weather comes around, I'll go through it and see which I might want to wear again next year. Or, items that I scrolled past for three months. Obviously, I don't really like them. I'll take them off the list. A couple of times a year I'll go through and delete items. (Lisa, 38, Unlimited user, Interview)

Participants are seen to evaluate their virtually accumulated ABIs post-access, deciding which to actively keep and which to totally divest themselves of; thus, such regular divestment can be seen as significant in legitimising their QPO of the remaining items. Participants also felt that intention to re-access those saved items was part of the appropriation and, in some cases, they were sure of their ability to re-access, which seems to allow them to retain PO post-access. They recognised that, if they kept ABIs in their virtual closet, they could re-access them, regardless of their real desire to access new items. Most participants were keen on accessing new items, but the ability to keep positively charged and meaningful ABIs helped them to retain QPO. For example, Megan alludes to

the notion that keeping expensive items in her virtual closet gives her a sense that her extended self remains, even when the item has been returned:

I actually rented items more than once because the item gave me this really good feeling about myself. Or I got a lot of compliments, so I know that the items [are] a hit, I know I look great in it... There's also some items on here [...] more expensive items. There's an item that I rented. It was a jumpsuit. I think it retails for 1,200 dollars. (Megan, 22, Unlimited user, Interview)

This feeling contributes to the extended self in a more enduring way, which is a new form of PO. For example, when Megan refers to items in her virtual closet, “some items on here”, this gives her a good feeling about herself. Keeping these expensive items in her virtual closet continues to give her QPO when the items are no longer physically possessed. When asked about expecting to keep meaningful loved items available for when they are needed, Emelia responds: “*No, no, no, no, definitely not. I just saved them. Because sometimes I like to save them. That way I can come back and look at [them]*” (Emelia, 47, Single rental, Interview). Emelia wants to validate her QPO through this ritual. By emphasising keeping loved ABIs post-access, the participants try to exert control over the ABIs to signal their QPO in a more enduring way. Any gesture of controlling an item is considered to be the most prominent evidence of PO (Furby 1978). When feelings of access are as efficient as enduring ownership in terms of accessibility, users will develop ownership feelings. As Pierce and Jussila (2011) argue, accessibility has a significant role in making potential items candidates for ownership feelings. Thus, the participants leverage their psychological appropriation through this transition ritual of virtually accumulating ABIs post-access, regardless of their desire to actual re-access them.

A feeling of ownership towards ever more ABIs due to the visual representation is very likely, as there are limited burdens of psychological appropriation and no accumulation constraints. Critically, the accumulation of ever more ABIs in one's virtual closet might increase the probability of users having the enduring feeling of the items being quasi-theirs. These documented PRs of ABIs move the participants more towards an experience of having (e.g., the virtual closets make the items feel present and accessible, not only before but also after they have been accessed).

Although owned items can contribute to the extended self, which depends on the person's association with the physical items (Belk 1991), in ABC, the participants can keep a digital representation of an ABI. Such PRs of keeping allow the development of an accumulated extended self. This is an important point, as the concept of PO builds on

extended-self theory (Peck and Shu 2018). It has also been proven that control is linked to the act of bringing the controlled item into the self (e.g., Prelinger 1959; Belk 1988). Various studies have found that, when an individual has control over or could manipulate an item, it is highly likely that the item will be perceived as part of the self (Liu et al. 2012). Consideration of the ability to virtually accumulate a specific ABI is another important turning point in the development of QPO. The participants thought that the PRs of digital accumulation signified that they had obtained PO, similar to that when physically possessing an item.

6.2 Chapter summary

The post-access stage focuses on divesting but keeping, which is the last set of PRs. This stage distinguishes the act of physically rotating ABIs, rather than actively keeping them, as an indication of QPO. The act of physically rotating signifies the end of physical control over an item. Divesting is especially critical in the ABC context, where items must be physically divested of, and when many participants expressed mixed feelings (i.e., sadness vs happiness) about sending their ABIs back. The excitement of ordering the next item was found to revoke any sadness at returning an item. The rotation is distinct from traditional divestment. Returning an item automatically opens up opportunities to acquire new items. Hence, the participants felt they were just rotating the items between their physical and virtual closets, perhaps, rather than genuinely divesting themselves of them.

On the other hand, virtually keeping ABIs in the virtual closet represents psychological appropriation, in which a user signals QPO. Virtually keeping is seen as a transition ritual, observed for sentimental and practical reasons. This appropriation also reminds the users that their role in the ABC is to extend the ABI's biography and promote its continuity. Finally, digital cues helped the participants to maintain QPO post-access. Chapter 7 discusses the findings concerning the research questions constructed in this thesis.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The empirical findings reported in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have addressed each of the research questions posed in Chapter 2 (see Table 7-1), providing new insights into how PO manifests itself in ABFC (answering RQ1), how users use PRs to achieve a sense of PO over accessed items (answering RQ2) and how feelings of PO can influence users' interactions with ABI (answering RQ3).

Theoretical gaps	<p>Extant theories assume limited PO over ABIs (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; 2017).</p> <p>Limited knowledge of the nature and form of PO in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Morewedge et al. 2021).</p> <p>Recent research has called for more studies of the relevance of PO in ABC and for exploration of whether and how PO is experienced towards ABIs (Morewedge et al. 2021; Morewedge 2021; Fritze et al. 2020).</p>	<p>An object can become 'mine' through PRs (McCracken 1986b; Holt 1995).</p> <p>Ritualistic behaviour appears to stimulate the feeling of PO (Pierce et al. 2003).</p> <p>Research to date has not yet explored whether and how users engage in PRs in ABC.</p>	<p>PRs and PO theoretically hold power to influence user-item relationships in ownership-based consumption, but their impact on ABC has received little attention (McCracken 1986a; Pierce et al. 2003; Jussila et al. 2015).</p> <p>Scholars have called for more research on the consequences of PO in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Wirtz et al. 2020).</p>
Research questions	RQ1: How does PO manifest itself in ABFC?	RQ2: How do users achieve a sense of PO over accessed items?	RQ3: How do feelings of PO influence users' interactions with accessed items?
Key findings	<p>PO takes different forms based on stages of access: quasi-PO (QPO) is experienced pre-access, temporary PO (TPO) is experienced during access and QPO is experienced post-access. QPO refers to the sense of ownership that users experience with digital representation of items, even though they do not possess their physical counterpart. TPO refers to a sense of ownership wherein one feels that an item is temporarily 'mine' during possession of the physical item.</p>	<p>PRs were observed at all three stages of ABC: pre-access (planning and accumulating), during access (appreciation and cherishing) and post-access (divesting but keeping).</p> <p>The interaction between PRs and elements of PO was documented, highlighting the manifestations and developments of TPO and QPO.</p>	<p>QPO and TPO over ABI led to different motivational, attitudinal and behavioural consequences such as accumulated extended self, newness, enduring ownership reduction, pride, satisfaction, high responsibility, perceptions of meaningfulness and cherished possessions.</p>
Theoretical contribution	<p>Whilst PO is experienced in ABC, it can take different forms and provide insights into how these distinct forms of PO are experienced.</p>	<p>Users engaged in PRs in relation to ABIs and their digital representations that enabled them to experience QPO and TPO. PRs enhance QPO and TPO because they require greater involvement.</p>	<p>QPO and TPO have clear positive outcomes and help overcome all challenges related to ABC.</p>

Table 7-1 Summary of the study's findings and theoretical contributions in relation to previously discussed theoretical gaps and research questions.

The findings shall be discussed based on research questions constructed in Chapter 2 and presented in Table 7-1. This chapter begins by defining the constructs of Quasi-PO (QPO)

and Temporary PO (TPO), uncovered throughout the three documented stages. The second part of the discussion introduces the effects of PRs on elements of PO, showing the vital link between the two in the realms of ABC and its impact on the development of TPO and QPO. Lastly, the chapter presents how PO influences users' interactions with ABIs.

7.1 RQ1: How does PO manifest itself in access-based consumption?

This thesis demonstrates that users of ABC can develop QPO and TPO. Considering the thesis findings, and incorporating a view of PO as a form of item attachment that emerges in the user–item relationship at digital and physical level, the following definitions of QPO and TPO are proposed:

TPO is a sense of ownership wherein one feels that an item is temporarily 'mine' during possession of the physical item.

QPO is a sense of ownership that users experience with the digital representation of items and the items they represent, even though they do not possess their physical counterparts.

Both TPO and QPO are linked to an item and yield enduring attitudinal and behavioural consequences that benefit all relevant parties (users and providers). This study advances the theoretical work of implicit and explicit PO in ABC (Morewedge 2021) empirically and finds that implicit PO reflects in QPO and explicit PO in TPO. These definitions also corroborate the ideas of Peck and Shu (2018), who suggest that PO in ABC might facilitate an enduring extended self and feelings of having. These are facilitated by QPO, with the way paved by TPO. Furthermore, Fritze (2020) has suggested that formation of PO might vary at different stages of ABC, but does not explain how it varies. This study fills this gap, finding that TPO develops during the access stage. TPO applies to items that are physically possessed. Participants showed an awareness that the relationship has a time limit, leading them to treat ABIs differently.

While QPO develops at the pre- and post-access stages, both give a sense of the importance of the ABI for the user. QPO exists with digitally accumulated items – this is theorised as the quasi-endowment effect in enduring-based consumption (Heyman et al. 2004; Groening et al. 2021). QPO develops with ABIs that users anticipate accessing, with this sense of PO felt towards digital representations of ABIs and the items they represent. Adding ABIs to the virtual closet (Chapter 5) and keeping them digitally post-access

(Chapter 7) arguably improves expectations of accessing items in the future. This expectation can elicit QPO and result in a higher likelihood of accessing an item. However, the roots of both TPO and QPO lie in possessiveness and psychological ties to items.

7.1.1 TPO and QPO

TPO and QPO can emerge as a result of single or multiple elements of PO, rooted in specific PRs. TPO has positive effects and outcomes during the access stage (appreciation and cherishing). In contrast, QPO has positive effects and outcomes in both the pre-access stage (planning and accumulating) and the post-access stage (divesting, but keeping). Users arrive at these temporary and quasi-states by travelling multiple routes of PO. For example, TPO is felt through the extent to which a user invests themselves in, experiences physical control of, or intimately comes to know, an ABI. Fulfilling these elements helps to demonstrate and display TPO and facilitate QPO. Both TPO and QPO produce some social–psychological and behavioural effects and directly impact users’ attitudes (e.g., responsibility and attachment). Temporary feelings link to the temporary nature of access – however, participants were keen to extend this feeling, part of QPO during the post-access stage, through memorialising and digital retention.

Some participants had a sense of PO but contradicted themselves, claiming that there is never a sense of PO. However, this is not a contradiction because, when participants say that items ‘are not theirs’, they refer to legal ownership (see Sections 7.1.1 and 7.2.1). Participants often provided frank and straightforward statements of PO, but only temporarily – for example, ‘They’re kind of mine for a certain period of time’ (Zoey, 25, unlimited user, digital diaries – diary voice note) – or quasi – for example, ‘... I feel the dresses are mine. It’s more like an upcoming closet and upcoming event closet to me’ (Emelia, 47, single rental, interview). Indeed, language of possession was used when the right spaces were identified to store items (Section 7.1.3), thereby reflecting TPO. Participants reflected on QPO using the confirmative language of ‘having’ when planning their access (Section 6.1.1) and adding ABI to their virtual closet (Section 6.2.2), as well as phrases incorporating possessive pronouns (e.g., ‘my items’, ‘I have’, and ‘my dress’). This apparent language of QPO is also evident when physically rotating ABI (e.g., ‘owning’ and ‘having’) (Section 8.1.1). Language that incorporates possessive pronouns manifests PO over the target of ownership (Kou and Powpaka 2020; Johar and Weiss 2013).

such progress.

TPO and QPO are part of attachment: attachment is a process underlying psychological appropriation for objects (Beggan 1992). Evidence of this process is apparent

from the participants' evoking of several emotions, including attachment. PO directly links to attachment and can contribute to loss aversion (Shu and Peck 2011). Participants reflect on 'a living relationship' (e.g., Section 6.2.1) and use strong language of attachment. Meanwhile, stronger feelings of connection, affection, love and passion (Sternberg 1986; Shimp and Madden 1988) are evident throughout the findings chapters. Participants tried to add permanence to these feelings throughout the access stages, reinforcing their attachment and signalling a feeling of continuous possessiveness over ABIs. It was clear that participants distinguished between different kinds of PO at different stages of access. For example, at the pre-access stage, attachment was vigorously sought by gathering intimate knowledge from other users and planning use, resulting in QPO. Attachment narratives were shared at group level during the access stage to exhibit TPO. In the post-access stage, participants digitally kept items, symbolising attachment and thus QPO.

Although participants were aware that items were ABIs, these items remained in the possession of single users during the access stage or were kept digitally at other stages. There is an undoubted abundance of opportunities to possess different ABIs and most participants showed a desire to be able to psychologically own them. Thus, despite no change observed in how participants grant importance to feelings of ownership, analysis of participants' feelings showed a shift in the way PO is perceived. This is different from previous accounts of PO (Pierce et al. 2001) and, in turn, helps to establish whether PO in ABC can be felt. Taking into account 'liquid consumption', Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017, p.585) state that, 'In liquid consumption, access is valued in comparison to ownership and possession', also noting that individuals may access this 'in order to escape or not carry the economic, physical, emotional, and social obligations of ownership'. On one hand, the findings provide evidence of participants seeking to avoid the burdens of ownership via access, as well as participants engaging in variety-seeking facilitated by access (consistent with Bardhi and Eckhardt's argument). However, this thesis specifically shows that, throughout the stages of access, participants developed different forms of feelings of ownership over ABIs, representing a different experience from those already documented by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) and Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012). These distinct forms of PO arguably occur because of the ABC context, different to owning possessions (Belk 1988). For example, the fact that users know that ABIs need to be returned leads them to develop TPO, and consequently to treat the items differently. Thus, PO is not a single-sided phenomenon, as Bardhi and Eckhardt suggest, but complex and multifaceted. Indeed, the study reveals that liquid consumption is highly relevant to the self and such ABIs convey identity and enhance the self, directly contradicting claims on this.

This study provided an important opportunity to advance understandings of narratives of access-based users in which their ABIs become meaningful possessions, related to users' PO. Although PO has been acknowledged to develop in ABC contexts, no work has looked at how it might be experienced differently because of the ABC context. For example, other work only measures PO on a scale (Lee et al. 2019). Following any route to PO results in strong feelings of ownership on car-sharing platforms (Fritze et al. 2020; Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2018). However, studies of this have focused on causal relations, not on how this feeling emerges.

7.1.2 Key insights and new developments

Although the concept of PO is relatively new in consumer research (Jussila et al. 2015), it has been of increasing interest in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018). Depending on the form of ritualistic acts, various types of PO (i.e., quasi and temporary) and other consequences of PO emerged. Table 9-2 summarises these types of PO and outlines related key insights that reflect how these finding fits with previous literature and new developments. Pierce and Jussila (2011) have developed a classification of targets of ownership. However, the target of TPO is either physical or digital, and QPO targets the digital representations of items. These findings suggest some transference of PO between digital representations of items and tangible items themselves, which vary depending on stage of access.

These results further support the ideas of Weiss and Johar (2013) that limited legal ownership of items in digital and ABC form does not act as a barrier to PO. Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond (2021) found that, with the advent of ABC, users have begun to shift from 'having' to the importance of 'being with'. Overall, this study strengthens claims that legal ownership and PO are distinct components (Furby 1980; Shu and Peck 2011) and also shows that, despite moves to ABC, PO remains relevant.

Stage of access	Types of PO	Key insights	New developments
Pre-access	Quasi-PO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users developed varying degrees of 'quasi-endowment effect', which develops PO over items within the digital environment (Heyman et al. 2004; Groening et al. 2021). A living relationship is a characteristic of a user-item relationship that involves a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A feeling of QPO (quasi-endowment effect). QPO of items in the virtual closet can shape the TPO of these virtual objects' physical counterparts. Early illusion of ownership over items (quasi-endowment effect). Digital consumption has an impact on material consumption in ABC.

		feeling of having (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QPO adds a living relationship with ABIs.
During access	Temporary PO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endowment effect (Thaler 1980; Reb and Connolly 2007), immediate effects of ownership for newly appreciated ABIs. • ABC increases the importance of PO (Wirtz et al. 2020). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical ABI aids feelings of TPO. • Developing feelings of TPO during access enriches users' experiences of QPO post-access. • Facilitates feelings of having, high capacity to prompt self-expression.
Post-access	Quasi-PO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotating ABI in the physical and virtual closet, rather than truly ending psychological appreciation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accumulated extended self. • Experiences of quasi-PO. • Adds permanence to cherished possessions.

Table 7-2 Key insights and new developments related to RQ1.

This thesis offers important insights into identifying PO forms at three stages reflecting the user–item relationship. The combination of digital and physical ritualised acts (as summarised in Section 7.2) serves as a foundation for elements of PO (i.e., control, self-investment and intimate knowledge). Participants in this study appreciated, assimilated and personalised physical items leading to TPO during access, as well as their digital representations. This led to QPO in the pre- and post-access stages, as noted in Sections 6.2.2 (5.2.2) and 8.1.2. (7.1.2) Participants reflected on these ritualised acts, allowing them to provoke these two feelings. QPO of items in the virtual closet during the pre-access stage can therefore shape TPO of these virtual objects' physical counterparts. Lastly, developing feelings of TPO during access (physical PRs) enriches users' experiences of QPO post-access. For instance, high levels of QPO expressed pre-access tend to be linked to high levels of TPO during access, because the combination of TPO and QPO adds permanence to cherished possessions, facilitating enduring feelings of having an accumulated extended self, even if such items are no longer possessed. These forms of ownership allow some participants to consciously consider their feelings of ownership (e.g., 'I feel the dresses are mine'). Most participants' reasons for engaging in ABC were consistent with the basic motives of PO in that such items appeared to facilitate feelings of having. TPO and QPO became stronger because these items also tended to be included in the category of the self (where the item became mine (Pierce et al. 2001) and me (Weiss and Johar 2018)).

Users might have more or less PO at different access stages because of the degree to which QPO and TPO influence each other. As reported, users do not develop this feeling with all items – however, the user–item relationship must evoke feelings for an ABI, helping to smooth expressions of having. As a result of the transformative nature of clothes and the centrality of clothes to identity (Roux and Korchia 2006), making such items mine is an important feeling. Its absence could result in an incredibly traumatic experience (Price et al.

2000; Tian and Belk 2005). Items that do not reach TPO during the access stage are immediately returned smoothly to the provider, and users remove these from their virtual closet.

Although limited comparable work on ritualised access exists, some elements of PO have been observed in other access-based contexts, including control, intimate knowledge (Gruen 2017) and self-investment (Danckwerts and Kenning 2019). The findings of this study offer no support for Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2017) argument for a completely new logic of consumption, moving away from accumulation, appropriation and inclusion to fluidity, limiting the user–item relationship and motivations to have it. In contrast, the results in this thesis show that PRs such as accumulation and appropriation can take a different form in ABC (e.g., digital accumulation), with a clear relationship between ritualised access acts and elements of PO. Some participants were found to lack TPO (e.g., Sophie, a single-time user), often altering their behaviours (e.g., being cautious during use). This is different from the liberated consumer portrayed in the concept of liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). A lack of PO leads users to a less enjoyable experience of access, with users fearful that they might damage the item – developing PO can free the user from this. However, most participants overcame this burden of access and treated ABIs as theirs. For example, all types of identified controls contrast with previous studies that have suggested that ABC lacks the enabling of control, preventing it from becoming the prevalent culture (Halme et al. 2006). Indeed, ritualised physical and digital controls were found to be significant for users, and consequently their TPO and QPO.

Pierce and Jussila (2011) demonstrated that ownership targets could take different forms. In this context, there are fewer differences between participants' PO feelings over a physical ABI and its virtual representation. They used both methods of appreciation (i.e., digital and physical) to balance any loss in one domain by asserting their appreciation in another. For example, at the end of their access, users had QPO through digitally accumulating ABIs (Section 6.1.2), a process reinforced by keeping photographs of ABIs (Section 5.2.2). This enabled a sense of continuity of access to items, even if the physical item is no longer in the user's physical possession. They felt that they still had evidence of the item, and their virtual closet offered the possibility of future access. Thus, QPO's higher level of permanence helps to address the impermanent nature of TPO.

Although previous literature has suggested that material and non-material possessions can characterise individual consumption, nearly all existing digital vs material theories have treated these acts in isolation. Existing theories often focus on the digital object itself as a possession (Belk 2013), rather than a digital representation of a physical

possession that can be accessed. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) contend that digital consumption differs from material consumption and consider the digital space as a place for actualising daydreams and fantasies for experimentation. The merging of the digital and physical enables actualisation of daydreams and experiments with new styles not tried before. In such reported ritualistic acts, users created a ‘self-representation’ that is homogeneous and integrated with who they are in their physical world. Less well understood is the psychological basis of such digital appreciation of physical ABIs (Peck and Luangrath 2018) because ABIs are physical. Still, there is a digital element to these pre- and post-access. Most research considers appreciation of physically accessed (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012) or digitally accessed items (e.g., streaming services, digital books or digital virtual goods) (Atasoy and Morewedge 2017; Helm et al. 2018; Sinclair and Tinson 2017; Watkins and Molesworth 2012; Danckwerts and Kenning 2019). The design of the ABC platform plays an important role in facilitating PO, specifically in enabling the more enduring QPO that can occur either side of (and also enhance) the more fleeting TPO.

Thus far, the first question has addressed that (1) PO can occur in ABC; (2) PO may exist in distinct forms that have not previously been recognised – QPO and TPO; (3) these forms of PO are related and complementary, and together can facilitate an enhanced experience of PO in ABC; (4) the design of digital platforms, particularly digital wishlists with representations of ABIs, can facilitate PO in ABC as interactions with these digital representations can facilitate QPO towards their physical counterparts. In addition to providing insights into how PO was experienced in ABC, it was found that users actively engaged in PRs, enabling them to experience these forms of PO, which will be discussed in next section.

7.2 RQ2: How do users achieve a sense of PO over accessed items?

Existing work considers how PO is developed in ownership-based contexts and acknowledges the importance of PRs. However, research into ABC has provided little insight into whether or how consumers might attempt to establish PO over ABIs. PO results from performing PRs in which users develop meaningful relationships with ABIs before, during and after access. The findings chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) provide rich insights into how users interact with and experience ABIs as theirs. The theory of PO suggests that feelings of ownership emerge as a result of ritualised acts (Pierce et al. 2003). A meaningful and habitual sequence of practices (McCracken 1986b) was identified and linked to routes to PO. Identified ritualised acts are much more than mere routine behaviour – i.e., participants actively employ various PRs to appropriate these objects as their own and thus

experience them as ‘mine’. Thus, ritualised access can be defined as repeated interactions between a user and a physical/digital item with a set sequence involving digital and physical actions. The set sequence tends to have a fixed order with clear pre-, during and post-access stages. Reported PRs have a recognisable structure, but participants tend to personalise them. This thesis generates fresh insight into highly complex PRs, which are linked to elements of PO. For PO to emerge, it is necessary to engage with any form of the target (Pierce and Jussila 2011; Peck et al. 2013; Kamleitner 2014).

In relation to the role of PRs in PO theory (McCracken 1986; Pierce et al. 2003; Belk 2014), this thesis also supports the importance of PRs for developing TPO and QPO. The findings demonstrate that ritualised access helps participants associate items as their own personal property and transform them into meaningful possessions, leading users to prefer ABIs over owned items (Chapter 6). Enjoyment of access was higher when the user actively engaged in these PRs rather than only using items. PRs were goal-directed actions, closely related to elements of PO. Users therefore enjoyed engaging in PRs during all stages of access because they reinforce the pleasure of consumption (Sections 6.1.1, 7.1.1, 7.2.1, and 8.1.1) (5.2.1, 6.1.1, 6.2.1 and 7.11). Furthermore, PRs were found to reinforce enjoyment when they require greater time and effort (Sections 6.1.1 and 8.1.1) (5.1.1 and 7.1.1). These results support previous research in this area, which links PRs to increased enjoyment and satisfaction (Vohs et al. 2013). Such positive affect experienced during consumption can increase PO (Thürriidl et al. 2020). This is in contrast to Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2017, p.593) argument that PRs are related to legal ownership, which is being liquefied rapidly in ABC, leading consumers to ‘live with enduring insecurity’. Indeed, users who are consistent in their PRs experience much joy because their PO is turned on for long enough to experience owning with evident pleasure. Table 7-3 summarises key insights that reflect how PRs fit with previous literature and new developments.

Stage of access	Ritualistic acts	Key insights	New developments
Pre-access	Digital (PRs via actions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two phases of PRs – planning and accumulating. • Observing PRs of others elicits psychological effects similar to the actual performance of those actions, previously conceptualised (Ackerman et al. 2009). • Features of the ABC platform can remove potential barriers to appropriation (Gruen 2017; Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018). • Transforming the meanings of possessions by adding, categorising, updating and sharing ABIs and the capacity to evoke pre-access attachment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRs work with digital representation of items to manifest elements of PO in ABC. • New developments of contamination management and relevance of items’ previous biography as source for intimate knowledge. • Important role of possession ritual related to virtual closet.
During access	Physical (PRs via object)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two phases of PRs: appreciation, cherishing. • Physical PRs transferring items to meaningful possessions were previously conceptualised in a traditional context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divestment logic is about rotating the items, clearly distinct from traditional divestment.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory attributes of items influence consumers' feelings previously identified in traditional context (Peck and Childers 2003; Krishna 2012). • Intergradation of physical ABIs into their life. • Physically touching an item leads to greater perceptions of controlling it. • Taking, keeping and sharing photographs while wearing ABIs to appropriate them as 'mine'. • Taking and keeping photos, as appropriation rituals were previously conceptualised (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing PO can free user from a less enjoyable experience.
Post-access	Digital (PRs via actions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A phase of PRs: divesting but keeping. • Sharing photos in social media to demonstrate appropriation were previously identified as a way to form PO (Karahanna et al. 2015). • Physically rotate but virtually accumulate ABIs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital memorialising and sharing rituals add permanence to their cherished ABIs. These are found to be significant PRs for sense of control and self-investment. • Virtual closet becomes an active link to the item. • Unexpected findings concerning legitimising their possessiveness after divestment.

Table 7-3 Key insights and new developments related to RQ2.

The findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) showed that the nature of a ritual and narrative helps to identify the relationship between ritual thematic elements (i.e. particular dimensions of a possession ritual), routes and manifestations of PO, as summarised in Figure 7-1 and Table 7-4. The results revealed a shift in the primary function of PRs and addressed why users engaged in such PRs. Furthermore, this placed a particular focus on the liquidity of ownership targets. The ritualised act can be performed via an object and actions (physical and digital), meaning that the liquidity of ABC does not prevent development of user-item relationships. Many identified pre- and post-access PRs where participants bond with an item and develop feelings of having arguably support this point. Indeed, the findings on

ritualised acts and evidence of key routes to PO indicate that participants experienced different forms of PO.

These PRs (see Table 7-4) refer to and include a subset of rituals that deal with planning, accumulating, appreciation, cherishing and divesting but keeping. The symbolic

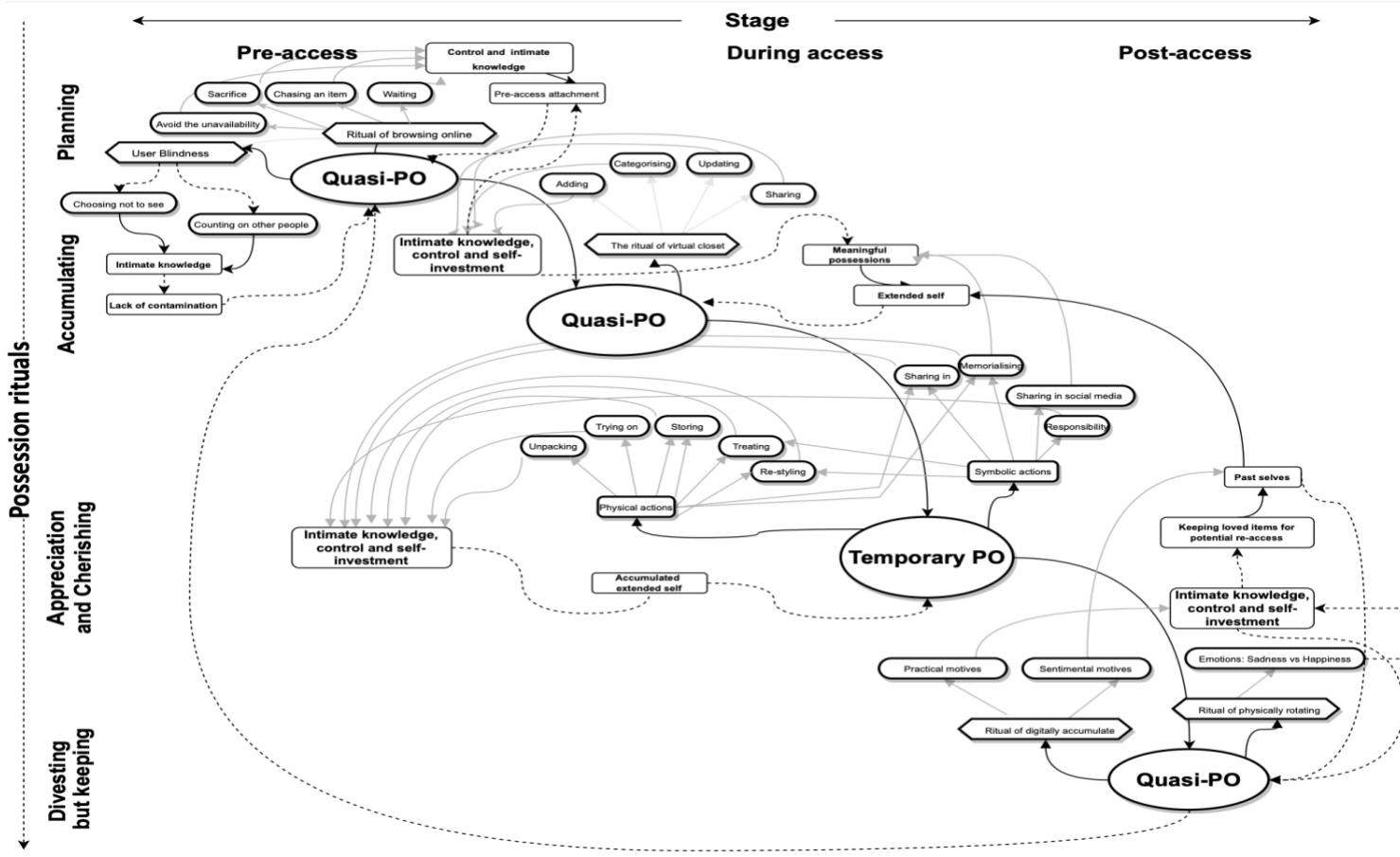


Figure 7-1 capturing the crux of the research.

role of PRs deals with claiming feelings of ownership, attempting to stand out from other users who also make the same claim. Users develop and attach individual symbolic meanings to ABIs, performing possession and divestment rituals, which agree with ownership-based consumption (McCracken 1986b). The findings confirm this for ABC, as many reported ABIs are acquiring symbolic and emotional meanings for participants. The findings showed that PRs created a situation at some or all of the access stages, somewhere between TPO and QPO. This was evident when one piece was followed through all access stages via digital diaries – for example, Zoey’s dresses or Natalie’s jackets (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). This indicated that users of ABC can and do go through PRs to make ABIs feel like their own, resembling the PRs of owned items. These results reflect those of McCracken (1990), who also found that renters embrace PRs to make their rented homes or used cars feel like they belong to them. Other researchers (e.g., Makkar et al. 2020) have suggested that an access-

based home (e.g., Airbnb) can temporarily feel like home through conducting certain appropriation rituals.

Stage	Possession ritual	Ritual thematic elements	Routes to PO	Manifestations of PO
Pre-access	Planning			
	Researching	Evaluating Considering Accounting	- Intimate knowledge	Lack of contamination
	Relying on the item's biography		- Control	
	Dealing with unavailability	Via digital actions	- Contamination - Intimate knowledge	
	User blindness		- Intimate knowledge	
	Accumulating			
	Adding ABIs to the virtual closet	Assimilating Personalising Appreciating	- Intimate knowledge - Control - Self-investment	Pre-access attachment
	Categorising ABIs to the virtual closet	Via digital actions	- Intimate knowledge - Control - Self-investment	Aids feelings of enduring control; maximises capacity to prompt self-investment
	Updating ABIs to the virtual closet		- Self-investment	
	Sharing what they have in the virtual closet		- Self-investment	
Appreciation				
Unpacking	Appreciating Integration	Intimate knowledge, control and self-investment	Perceiving items as 'new'	
Trying	Via physical actions	Control and self-investment		
Storing		Control and intimate knowledge		
Cherishing				
During access	Wearing	Appreciating Personalising Socialising	Intimate knowledge, control and self-investment	Accumulated extended self
	Memorialising	Via physical and digital actions	Control and self-investment	
	Sharing		Control and self-investment	
Divesting but keeping				
Post-access	Physically rotating ABIs	Personalising Evaluating Appreciating	Control and self-investment	Retaining private meaning
	Virtually accumulating ABIs	Via physical and digital actions	Control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge	Active keeping

Table 7-4 Ritual, elements, routes, and consequences.

From this analysis, evidence suggests that ritualised access satisfies routes to PO regardless of the access stage. Furthermore, some evidence infers that one ritual was more effective at satisfying a particular route than another. This is consistent with Pierce et al.'s (2003, p.95) argument that 'The three routes to psychological ownership (i.e., control,

intimate knowing, and investment of self) are distinct, complementary, and additive in nature.’ They also indicated that any single route could result in feelings of ownership independent of others. In this thesis, all the routes were evident throughout the stages of access. For example, the knowledge route was obvious at the pre-access stage, the self-investment route dominated during the access stage (appreciation and cherishing phases), and the control route was influential in most PRs but was most significant for digital accumulation, whether this took place before or after access, as well as in memorialising. However, routes were conceptualised as not always having multiplicative relationships. For example, an individual’s feeling of ownership can result from travelling a single route (e.g., intimate knowing). However, PO is stronger when an individual develops this feeling as a result of going through multiple routes (Pierce et al. 2003). Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2018) found that users of ABIs (car) who followed more of the three routes to PO subsequently developed stronger feelings of ownership.

This thesis deepens understandings of user–item relationships, examining the link between ritualised access and elements of PO in ABC. This relationship has been proposed mainly in conceptual and anecdotal papers (Morewedge et al. 2021; Rogers 2021; Baker et al. 2021). Consumers engage in similar PRs when acquiring newly owned items – e.g., rich appropriation and personalisation practices (McCracken 1986b). Indeed, users engaged in ritualised access acts believed that their ABI had better value than other items, developing a strong attachment. If participants carried out limited PRs with a specific item, the narrative about elements of PO was also limited. The lack of impact on PO might result from PRs being unable to fully satisfy PO’s elements. Furthermore, the findings suggest that participants did expect to reach TPO and QPO when carrying out those PRs – participants desire more control, feel they need to know and stimulate self-identity based on ritual types. As seen in the findings chapters, consistent with many theoretical suggestions in wider research (Pierce et al. 2001; Jussila et al. 2015), varying elements of psychological ownership, as a result of the ritual nature, do not prevent feelings of ownership and do not impede its positive outcomes.

Performance of these PRs arguably leads to greater understanding and capacity for ABI appreciation. These items become means to constructing a feeling of having (Pierce et al. 2003) because the symbolic significance of the ritual’s thematic elements (Holt 1995; Cheetham and McEachern 2013) integrates with elements of PO (Pierce et al. 2003). Such integration is implicit in nature as it is incorporated within PRs. All PRs are complicated, especially with fashionable objects (McCracken 1986b) – that is, those associated with possession of ABIs were found to be psychologically complex and intense. As all stages of

PRs require not only high immersion behaviour but also psychological involvement, considering them as merely routine is a misjudgement, as the findings in this thesis suggest. Corroborating the ideas of Morewedge et al. (2021), who suggested that bundling physical items with digital items evokes feelings of ownership in ABC, they argued that digital items might be able to serve as indexical reminders of meaningful possessions if they were previously featured as orders and digital photographs. The present study provides new empirical evidence that PRs involving digital representations can impact users' sense of PO towards their physical equivalents, and vice versa. PRs such as accumulating (e.g. adding ABIs to the virtual closet) and cherishing (e.g. memorialising) clearly impact development of PO.

Previous research examining PO has looked at how ABIs are appreciated, but, in addition, this thesis demonstrates that evaluation, consideration, accounting for, assimilation, personalisation, integration and communication (Holt 1995) about ABIs are additional PRs that can assist in the development of PO, specifically QPO and TPO. Such ritual thematic elements can be as significant as appreciation in eliciting PO (e.g., Moreau et al. 2011; Franke et al. 2010). These were also identified as distinct phases of access with specific PRs, where different ritual thematic elements were determined for each phase. Purposiveness is a significant element of defining a ritual (Holt 1995) – all documented PRs go beyond their own functional scope and have higher symbolic meaning.

Ritualistic behaviour stimulated a strong affective response compared to habitual behaviour (Warner 1975). Ritual consequences, as seen in ritual theory, tend to focus on affective (Hobson et al. 2018; Vohs et al. 2013), cognitive (Belk et al. 1989; Rook 1985) and social (Holt 1992; Hobson et al. 2018) change. Affective change (e.g., reducing a tense access experience) and cognitive change (e.g., change in meaning and extended self), as well as behavioural outcomes (e.g., responsibility), was evident in this thesis. Existing ritual theories often emphasise one or two of these changes (Tetreault 1990; Ratcliffe et al. 2019). However, TPO and QPO are a combination of all these changes and represent the ultimate consequence of reported PRs. The evidence from this study suggests that TPO and QPO evolve as a function of the scope and way in which users engage with ABIs. Affective experiences as a result of ritualised access play a role in the forces needed for PO to emerge. PO can arise in response to affective experiences of control over an ABI – for example, adding an ABI to a virtual closet helps to develop QPO and storing it in a home wardrobe facilitates TPO. This demonstrates that the dynamic nature of digital spaces pre- and post-access creates stimulating conditions for PO, resulting in an increased likelihood of access and re-access. Different PO manifestations were reported for each stage. It is essential to

consider that these manifestations of PO could be mechanisms through which TPO and QPO can be felt. The following subsection discusses manifestations of PO on PRs.

7.2.1 Manifestations and development of TPO and QPO in ritualised access

In several cases, participants did not feel PO as a result of ritualised access at a specific stage, but they reflected on it in another stage. This might be because some participants focused on a particular stage when they shared their experiences, or, for some, the feeling of ownership is more relevant in a particular stage. For example, pre-access attachment is important in making the other access stages smoother. Some tend to focus on points relevant to pre-access PRs; others tend to pay more attention to transforming items into meaningful possessions during other stages. Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of PRs in ABC. All the stages of access – pre-access, during access and post-access – are important to feelings of ownership. However, the literature primarily focuses on the appreciation phase (during access), neglecting the other stages (Pham 2013; Peck and Luangrath 2018). Focusing on all the access stages, the findings highlight something so far overlooked in PO in literature relating to ABC (Morewedge et al. 2021; Morewedge 2021): the significance of understanding users' feelings of ownership pre-access and post-access for involvement in ABC, and the possibility that PO can be developed before or after access. Manifestations of TPO (e.g., lack of contamination) were evident through all stages of access enabled by PRs.

- **Pre-access possession rituals**

During pre-access PRs, the ability to see other users' experiences and knowledge enabled by technology is a key determining factor in the appropriation process (Kirk et al. 2015), part of coming to know an ABI through other users (Belk 2013). Kovacheva (2018) suggests that such ability to learn from other individuals' experiences via an online platform offers users the chance for 'co-construction of self', which can be done through constructing an accumulated extended self and affirming the self in a digital world. Contrary to expectations, this thesis found that meaningful shared knowledge of an item between users has a robust effect on the preferences of an ABI. Planning PRs arguably allows participants to interact with ABIs encouraging them not only to evoke early feelings with ABIs but also to invest themselves in researching and reducing any sense of contamination. Previous consumer research has looked at the notion that ownership targets might be valued through psychological closeness resulting from physical association (Baumeister and Wangenheim 2014). Contamination is linked to physical association with others. However, contaminated targets could contribute to contagion or sympathetic magic (Argo et al. 2006a; Belk 1988),

leading individuals not only to incorporate the traits of another but also to pass memories and shared group identity (Belk 2013; Belk 1988). Lack of contamination can be maximised through habituation, forgetting or encroachment of the profane (Belk et al. 1989). Consistent with Karahanna et al. (2015), this thesis found that participants experienced intimacy through knowing an ABI, even without physical possession. Participants felt that they knew an item intimately from digital content at the pre-access stage, providing items' previous biographies as a source for intimate knowledge. However, within this context, intimate knowledge from other users arguably transforms perceptions into a lack of contamination, assuming they are new (User blindness, Section 5.1.2).

This finding contradicts previous studies, which have suggested that individuals are more likely to feel infringed upon by others signalling ownership over the same target (Kirk et al. 2017) or by other reviewers claiming to have more intimate knowledge (Valsesia et al. 2016). Negative contamination is the norm for all second-hand clothes (Argo et al. 2006b; Roux and Korchia 2006). Indeed, rather than creating negative contamination, access to these user reviews facilitated intimate knowledge of ABIs before access, enabling QPO to develop (Chapter 5). These results are in accord with Seo and Park (2021), who indicated that intimate recommendations of digital items leads to higher PO.

Users can learn new PRs when observing other users' PRs (Ward 1974) during the planning phase, and develop ways to affirm elements of PO through these PRs. For example, participants arguably learn how to signal their control and intimate knowledge, or express investment of the self. The ritualistic aspects of the planning stage contribute to socialisation, either through active or passive exchange of information (Comer 1991; Ahuja and Galvin 2003). Some participants consider themselves part of a community. A possible explanation might be that QPO develops as a result of a continuous socialisation process whereby users internalise the PRs and behaviours of other users on the platform (discussed in the planning phase). For example, participants observe a behaviour from previous users' reviews (e.g., personalising an ABI). This might trigger psychological appropriation identical to what would result from carrying out the behaviour themselves. Self-signalling and social signalling are important aspects of PRs, indicating that something of significance has been done (Hobson et al. 2018). These findings offer extended support for how different forms of ABIs provide valuable opportunities for identity to be communicated to others (Belk 2013). Participants learn new PRs and conduct various others, seeking to develop feelings of ownership.

The most interesting finding of the accumulation phase is that users engage in digital PRs before even accessing the items, pushed by a desire to appropriate the object pre-

acquisition. This interaction helps develop a symbolic sense of ownership, although users only possess a visual representation of that ABI in this phase. Developing PO before getting hold of an item fits with Ericson and Fuster's (2011) findings, which showed that individuals who expect to own an item in future display signs of PO for it. This reaffirms the importance of early digital engagement with ABIs to facilitate triggering of elements of PO. This finding is consistent with Kirk et al. (2017) and Moreau et al. (2011), who found that modifying a component of a digital target implies that individuals self-invest in that item, increasing feelings of ownership towards the item (e.g., giving it a unique name when categorising it in the virtual closet). This is also in line with Baxter et al. (2015), who found that users create a personal list in which to invest their own identity and express through the platform. These results corroborate the evidence of Watkins and Molesworth (2012), who suggested that individuals are attached to digital possessions in virtual worlds. This sense of the accumulated extended self within ABC in digital spaces was supported by Belk (2013; 2014). Digital technologies and digitalised markets allow for 'new realities of ownership and possession' (Watkins et al. 2016).

One unexpected finding was control at the pre-access stage that users have over ABIs and the ability to transform them into meaningful possessions from the early stages. In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that the role of design is important in enabling users' appropriation practices in the context of ABC (Gruen 2017) as they emphasise how platform design aids users with their self-expression and feelings of control. PO sets in long before an ABI is delivered for some participants because of the design features of the RTR platform. This thesis shows that development of any type of PO through ritualistic access enabled a special relationship between a user and an ABI. For example, PRs related to virtual closets can replace traditional methods of storage used to reflect possession and control of owned items. It has been demonstrated that individuals regularly develop meaningful relationships with digital commodities (Belk 2013; Denegri-Knott et al. 2012). Within the literature on online shopping, several studies have found a positive relationship between the virtual environment and an optimal flow state, where users reach self-efficacy, leading to psychological immersion (Mathwick and Rigdon 2004; Hoffman and Novak 1996) – significant routes to the development of feelings of ownership (Jussila et al. 2015).

- **During access possession rituals**

The analysis of the second stage (Chapter 5), including both the appreciation and cherishing phases, shows passionate acquisition feelings because PRs incorporate elements of PO. Such

instant appreciation rituals align with the traditional concept of the endowment effect (Thaler 1980; Reb and Connolly 2007). More specifically at this stage, participants performed PRs in relation to physical ABIs because they wanted to satisfy higher levels of PO elements while the ABIs were physically with them. For example (Section 7.2.1), PO meta-perception bias was evident and relates to some of the cherishing rituals, corroborating the ideas of Kirk et al. (2017), who suggested that individuals with specific personalities expected others to be more aware of their feelings of ownership. However, some participants felt that this bias did not respond territorially to other users even at different stages. Most participants also reported that they would be more likely to post a selfie with their ABI on social media, attempting to back their TPO by showing their own claim to ownership. Although appreciation and cherishing rituals can still be considered an ordinary consumption process because they represent appropriate behaviour in any given consumption situation, these PRs enrich PO. Thus, such PRs affect user–item relationships because they represent a form of meaning transfer (McCracken 1986b; Holt 1995). For example, PRs surrounding the cherishing phase (Chapter 5) generate a change in meaning in the ABI and the user’s accumulated extended self because of memorialising rituals. TPO means that this can occur, paving the way for QPO post-access.

The second stage also shows that the feeling of ownership that came with these PRs was often described through a sensorial assessment using all the senses. The sensory attributes of this ritual were found to boost elements of PO. This finding is consistent with those of Peck and Childers (2003), Peck and Shu (2009) and Shu and Peck (2011), who found that the sensory attributes of objects influence consumers’ feelings of ownership and endowment. PRs during access thus serve as a form of distraction, obstructing any possible negative thoughts about ABIs – participants focusing on a series of action sequences shifted attention away from negative emotions towards how to make an item ‘mine’.

According to Krishna (2013), individuals use all their senses to learn some associations and affect them both at rational and emotional levels. These associations lead to emotional responses (Polanyi and Sen 2009) and are found to trigger elements of PO, corresponding to feelings of having or not having. Participants ritually used all their senses to consider, evaluate and appreciate feelings associated with ABIs.

- **Post-access possession rituals**

The findings offer little support for McCracken’s (1986) conceptualisations, suggesting that possible confusion related to meanings associated with consumer goods encourages the use of the usual divestment ritual. This is when consumers relinquish meaning associated with a

previous owner before using it or erase any personal meaning invested in an item before disposing of it. Neither divestment ritual was noticed in ABC for several reasons: user blindness, unpacking items and post-access PRs. The observed usual limited divestment rituals could be attributed to experiences created by the provider (e.g., virtual closet, packaging material, standard scent) and PRs performed by users. In this context of ABC, users' divestment logic has changed – it is about exchanging old for new. What is surprising is that divesting becomes the rotating of items, clearly distinct from traditional divestment. Returning an item automatically opens opportunities to acquire new items. Users feel that they are just rotating items between their physical and virtual closets, rather than truly divesting.

This notion of rotating has not been documented in prior work on ABC. Indeed, Belk (2014) only mentioned rotating to explain the process of ABC. Dispossession was made easier through the transition ritual act of digitally accumulating ABIs after access. This ritual helped users protect private meanings – a unique method to divest ABIs instead of simply returning them to other access-based platforms. Some participants tend to place items in special categories within their virtual closets for easier divestment in an effort to decouple their cognitive and emotional attachment. This is similar to the cooling-off practice before divestment proposed by McCracken (1986) and akin to the placing in the garage described by Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005). Participants arguably needed to reconcile inconsistencies between their past, present and possible selves before being able to let go of possessions. Photographs of these items were also perceived as iconic repositories for the meanings carried by the items, as argued by Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005). However, Pierce et al. (2003) assert that a PO state over a particular target does not necessarily last forever; such feelings can vanish when the target is no longer part of the extended self.

Consistent with Pierce et al.'s (2003) argument, the end of TPO and QPO can be explained by going through divestment rituals to break with their cognitive and emotional attachment with the ABI when such items are deleted from virtual closets. However, while this is done with some items, others are virtually accumulated (see Chapter 5). These results contrast with the idea of slower forms of consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). Participants do not appear to have sought out oases of deceleration (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019) in their ABFC. However, these developed feelings (i.e., TPO and QPO) can help the slow fashion movement, which emerged in opposition to fast fashion (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013), as many users can place more holistic emphasis on QPO based on digital representation of the same items. As this thesis has explored (Section 6.1.1), ABIs can become part of the user self and free some from

associated guilt, offering more sustainable ways of being fashionable by extending product lifecycles and using high-quality, durable fashion items.

7.2.2 How time shapes TPO and QPO in ritualised access

The interplay between time and PRs is important in understanding the lifecycle of PO over an item. Consumer research lacks a focus on the time dimensions relating to PO in this context (Peck and Luangrath 2018). This demonstrates the importance of time dimensions, including the timing of PRs during all the access stages. In addition, the duration and sequence of these PRs within each stage and when and how the PO might be given up are consistent with Baxter and Aurisicchio's (2018) lifecycles of PO. This thesis investigated these aspects and how they correspond to digital acquisition, actual access and divestment of an item. Participants set out straightforward narratives of TPO at different stages of access. For example, some participants expressed their feelings during the pre-access stage, others during the access stage. Participant disparity at PO level was more about the time of occurrence. Although ABC could make participants feel that they live a lifestyle that is not their true reality and focuses on ephemerality, most feel otherwise. They embraced TPO and QPO as their reality and enjoyed it much more than ownership-based consumption. Ritual performances were typically consistent over time when participants reflected on multiple access points. Thus, when users reported/discussed different means of access, they followed the same PRs in the same sequence, also reflected in the narrative about elements of PO and its manifestations.

A strong relationship between time and ritual has been reported in the literature (Rook 1985). This was evident when ritual performances were documented using digital diaries – showing how each ritual satisfied elements of PO. The sequence of these PRs also marks specific times as more important, because participants behave in a ritualistic manner during specific times, seeking TPO and QPO. These results support previous research in this area, which links design of the ownership experience with time, focusing on the entire access lifecycle, in which motives and routes to PO must be considered (Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018). The PRs identified tend to occur repeatedly and in a sequential pattern over time for each item. Thus, the ritual episode starts at a fixed time and moves through a series of events until the item feels 'mine' and beyond the access time to build up an accumulated extended self. Ritualised acts notably took a cyclical form. That is, participants sometimes understand their TPO with an ABI in the context of previous ritualised experiences of access. The time between PRs was significant to evaluate, and thus understand, their feelings. For example, participants experienced PO through the process of describing their ritualised acts and

reflecting on stages of access from planning to physically rotating ABIs. Participants also reflected on the process of thinking about ABIs – they understood their feelings as TPO or QPO.

The duration of some PRs, such as storage (Chapter 6), was relevant to stimulating PO, consistent with Lee et al.'s (2019) findings. Waiting a long time for access to an item was seen as investing time and energy in an item, as discussed in the pre-access stage (Chapter 4), which is contrary to previous research into waiting time as a significant stressor, causing consumer irritation, anxiety and tension (Miller et al. 2007). This investment also includes searching for items, reading their reviews, adding them to the virtual closet and appreciating and cherishing them during access. Time on these ritualised acts is a construct involving exchange of elements of PO. Though limited time pressures users to shorten PRs, anticipation and excitement remain part of ritualised access (see next section). Time invested in PRs can significantly affect consumers' experiences (Cotte et al. 2004). The participants implicitly and explicitly pointed to time as a ritual structure that affects the ways it evokes elements of PO. Time dimensions were necessary to perform rituals appropriately and develop feelings of ownership.

PRs might differ between new users and those with low experience levels; the ways in which they interact with PRs change over time. Processes might vary as a user becomes more familiar with an item through repeated PRs. The findings account for these changing dynamics. For example, for new users, more caution was required to complete ritualistic acts properly. Over time, though, with more access, such users become skilled. The symbolic purpose of the PRs was important for both types of users. Thus, participants became familiar not just with the item but also with the PRs that made them believe an item to be different from other identical pieces (Section 6.2.1), facilitating PO (Pierce et al. 2003). Analysis shows that participants who have invested more time, effort and emotions than others during their ritualistic access demonstrate their TPO and QPO and their narratives more clearly. However, a considerable conceptual overlap with such PO (mine vs not mine) and attachment (me vs not me) narratives is apparent. There are contradictions within the same participants' narratives because of involvement disparity in the reported PRs. For example, a participant might show strong language linked to PO in the post-access and during access stages but not in the pre-access stage. Other participants might show the opposite.

Time has more value because of the nature of PO and ABC. Thus, timed sequences of PRs within each stage and specific duration of PRs are necessary for PO. Some participants evidently went through PRs, sometimes unconsciously. However, conscious and unconscious PRs were observed and recognised as important because performance of both

PRs was arguably consistent over time. Given the influence of ritualised access on PO, it is surprising that no studies have explored its influence on users' interactions with ABIs. As such, the following section discusses the consequences of developing PO in ABC.

7.3 RQ3: How do feelings of PO influence users' interactions with accessed items?

The outcomes of PO in this context have, until now, remained a blind spot (Sinclair and Tinson 2017; Peck and Luangrath 2018; Wirtz et al. 2020; Morewedge et al. 2021). All the fundamental outcomes reviewed in Chapter 2 that are associated with PO in terms of motivational, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Pierce et al. 2003) were evident throughout participants' narratives in this thesis. Previous research found that a sense of PO led to long-term loyalty, stewardship, greater word-of-mouth, feelings of satisfaction, high valuation and positive citizenship behaviours (e.g. Jussila et al. 2015; Pierce et al. 2003; Lee and Suh 2015; Kirk et al. 2015). All were observed within user narratives alongside enduring ownership reduction, high responsibility, pride, newness and a preference for ABI over owned items. The observed outcomes of ritualised access and TPO and QPO are summarised in Table 7-5.

Stage of access	Routes to PO						
Pre-access	Possession ritual (e.g. Storing)	↔	Ritual thematic elements (e.g. Personalisation)	→	TPO and QPO	→	Observed outcomes: Enduring ownership reduction High responsibility Pride Loyalty Perceived as meaningful and cherished possessions Accumulated extended self Newness Satisfaction
During access							
Post-access							

Table 7-5 Observed outcomes related to RQ3.

First, most participants reduced their ownership-based consumption in the context of fashion (i.e., reduced clothes in their possession or almost stopped buying clothes) (Sections 7.1 and 8.1.1) or no longer used their own possessions. Ritualised access and its TPO and QPO reduced participants' desire for enduring ownership. This finding is consistent with Fritze et al. (2020), who found that the direct effect of PO on legal ownership reductions is significant in the context of ABC and high retention. This confirms that PO is associated with a reduction in materialism, which in turn enhances satisfaction (Li and Atkinson 2020). This can be seen as a new kind of minimalism because some participants combine access to new choices with minimalism. In addition, it helps avoid storage, which is also a burden of ownership. PO in ABC could help to remedy lack of sustainability in fast fashion. A note of

caution is needed here as recent research has discussed perceptions of materialism value in ABC (Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021).

Second, as discussed in Chapter 2, responsibility (Parker et al. 1997; Pierce et al. 2001) and pride (Tracy et al. 2009; Griskevicius et al. 2010; Kirk et al. 2015) can be components and outcomes of PO. Thus, when users develop a TPO, they tend to have a moral responsibility to other platform users because they want their fellow community members to try and appreciate great items. Although brand communities initially concentrated on consumer product markets, their relevance to ABC platforms has also been illustrated in some types of access (Schmitt et al. 2015; de Rivera et al. 2017; Albinsson and Yasanthi 2012). This is also a desire to extend an object's biography because of commitment to ABC. When users feel ownership, they want to show control by helping other users. This finding corroborates the ideas of Baker et al. (2021), who suggested that the outcome of PO in ABC is sharing for the benefit of others. Li and Atkinson (2020) and Jami et al. (2021) also argue that PO can directly relate to consumers reporting acts of altruism and pro-social behaviour. Although this is an expected consequence of PO (Pierce et al., 2003), it is interesting in ABC. These results differ from Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) study on responsibility but are broadly consistent with Schaefer et al. (2016), who report that an increase in communal identification between users leads to responsibility (Chapter 5). Lee et al. (2019) found a positive role for PO towards citizenship behaviour for both host and provider among Airbnb users. As TPO can lead to these positive outcomes, the findings of this thesis are beneficial to those engaged in increasingly competitive ABC. Mistreatment of ABIs is a major obstacle for ABC platforms (Schaefer et al. 2016). Creating TPO might assist with this issue.

Pride is the third observed outcome. TPO and QPO relate to users' desire to express the feeling of their own self, particularly in the form of pride. This feeling was observed as an outcome of several PRs, including organising virtual closets, memorialising and sharing photos. It is important for users to establish TPO as this enables them to experience pride in accessed objects. Participants also reported feeling proud of their consumption style – i.e., proud users. Despite participants' income or status, they tend to show a high and excessively high opinion of their ABC. Not only are they proud, but they also have different manners in how they implicitly or explicitly express this pride. These results differ from Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), where access-based users did not feel proud, and from earlier research into renting, where renters lacked a sense of security typically linked with ownership and suffered from stigma associated with less financial power and status (Durgee and Colarelli O'Connor 1995). A possible explanation for this might be linked to the nature of the context (i.e., the

tendency towards luxury items) and the lack of negative contamination (due to platform design (RTR)) could be another cause for feeling pride rather than any stigma or shame.

Fourth, TPO and QPO were found to have an effect on ABC and re-access retention (Section 7.1.2). Pino et al. (2022) found that a sense of PO over ABI enhances users' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. For example, PRs of divesting but keeping allow participants to retain QPO after access. Such feelings clearly related to the intention to re-access ABIs in the future. TPO and QPO increase users' positive effects, including satisfaction and enjoyment. In turn, this boosts users' responses that signal enduring ownership reduction and high responsibility. Participants did not mention negative outcomes such as feelings of defensive territoriality (Kirk et al. 2017), but some (Section 8.1.1) reflected on difficulties when returning items (Hulland et al. 2015). However, they managed this by promising themselves re-access. These results are in accord with recent studies indicating the direct effects of PO on ABC. Lee and Chow (2020) examined PO as a user attitude that influences perceptions of access-based fashion using the Theory of Reasoned Action. They found that more robust PO directly linked to greater intention to use ABFC.

Next, both TPO and QPO can strongly influence and serve as expressions of self-identity because access-based users are impacted by the ephemeral aspect of liquid consumption, especially the use of ABIs as self-creators. As these items simultaneously provide a means of self-discovery (Section 6.2.2) and self-expression, they help to reinforce continuity in their identity (Section 7.2), in agreement with Niklas and Gianneschi (2022). Some participants explained that ABIs helped them feel better about themselves and described how accumulating these items in their virtual closets produced positive feelings and contributed to self-development in the pre-access or post-access stage. ABIs can be objects of self-extension – indeed, most participants regard them as more effective in self-extension than owned items (Chapter 6). Thus, self-investment is not threatened under ritualistic ABC because of the possibility that they are perceived as meaningful and cherished possessions. This is because such ABIs and their meanings can easily be part of the 'aggregate extended self' (Belk 2013, p.486). Such identity management is typical in fashion consumption, but has been created and exhibited differently in ABC. For example, virtual closets and digital memorialisation becomes an active link to past, present and possible selves. Digital ritualistic acts facilitate an enduring feeling of having, adding permanence to cherished possessions.

These results further support the idea of the aggregate extended self in ABC (Belk 2010; Belk 2013), but a much broader sense of extended self. As Belk's focus was on dematerialised possessions, this thesis found that the ABI's digital and physical counterpart

can be integral to the user's extended self. There is an interesting link to PO and the extended self in terms of participants' sense of a huge closet that is easily accessible. Previous work examined routes to PO for specific items via control, knowing and investment of self (Belk 1988; Pierce et al. 2003), but, in ABC, users feel a broader sense of ownership towards the provider as a whole through a sense of accessibility and availability, in agreement with Pierce and Jussila (2011) and Jussila et al. (2015). For example, this was facilitated by the virtual closet and how it led users to develop QPO.

Finally, there is a sense of anticipation, excitement (Belk et al. 2003) and desire where participants enjoy the novelty of new items during the three stages of access, representing a way to include this type of consumerism within their lifestyle, focusing on PRs that help them to do so. This thesis demonstrates that items are perceived as 'new' during unpacking PRs (Chapter 5) and physically rotating ABIs, exchanging old for new (Chapter 6). Physical touching in those PRs led to a rapid association with newness. Using an item or physically touching it is known to produce explicit ownership effects (Peck and Shu 2009; Belk 1988; Wolf et al. 2008). Additionally, imagined ownership (Huang et al. 2009) of new items took place during the planning phase (Chapter 4), where the illusion of newness made PRs during planning phase feel like shopping. The illusion of newness about an item in a virtual closet indicates that the observed feeling happened at all stages, even in the absence of physical touch. Thus, psychological appropriation accelerates and strengthens the feeling of newness – it was reported that TPO over ABIs felt much better than for owned ones. The feeling of newness was found to be a motivator for engaging in ABC (Lawson et al. 2016; Edbring et al. 2016).

The following chapter concludes this thesis. It summarises the contributions, identifying implications for access-based providers, the limitations of this study and potential areas for future research, further enhancing existing knowledge of the development of PO in ABC.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this chapter, the contributions of this study are examined from three different perspectives: theoretical, methodological and managerial. Finally, the study's limitations are recognised, and future research directions are suggested.

8.1 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to recent discussions surrounding PO in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Fritze et al. 2020; Morewedge 2020), identifying TPO and QPO as distinct forms of PO that can emerge. These two distinct forms of PO result from the nature of the physical ABI and its virtual representation. First, previous research often dismisses PO as irrelevant in the context of ABC. This thesis find that this is not the case and users still desire establishment of PO, although it can take slightly different forms. Users experience different but related forms of PO. QPO is experienced pre-access, TPO is experienced during access and QPO is experienced post-access. These feelings pave the way to one another (e.g., QPO becomes TPO and TPO becomes QPO). Because users' PRs create QPO and TPO, and these PRs are filters through which they experience owning. As well as positive affect, the pattern of continually experiencing PRs that compound their effects make users feel QPO and TPO. As explained (section 7.1), participants reflected on these ritualised acts, allowing them to provoke these two feelings. QPO of items in the virtual closet during the pre-access stage can therefore shape TPO of these virtual objects' physical counterparts. Lastly, developing feelings of TPO during access (physical PRs) enriches users' experiences of QPO post-access.

This extends understandings of ABC beyond the traditional viewpoint (Fritze et al. 2020). Looking at liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) through the lens of PO (Pierce et al. 2001) helped explore change in the user-item relationship, enriching understandings of changes in fashion consumer mind-sets and realities but also the growing range of ABC. This resulted in conceptualisation of TPO and QPO, which are demonstrated to be sufficiently distinct forms of PO. Although PO theory has already predicted that targets of ownership take different forms (Pierce and Jussila 2011), this study provides a more profound insight, theorising and empirically examining PO over digital representations and physical possession of the same items. This reveals more about aspects of the new mode of consumption, little documented to date in terms of the user-item relationship.

Second, previous research has produced inconsistent and contradictory findings on how users come to experience PO towards ABIs (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Fritze et al.

2020), ignoring the role of PRs in exploring possessiveness and PO in ABC. The focus on PRs helped to recognise ABI movement within and between different stages of access, and between other actors. This thesis found that PRs (McCracken 1986b; Holt 1995) at different stages of access, the theory of PO (Pierce et al. 2001) and the interaction between these components were helpful in contextualising theory within the user–item relationship. This is helpful in approaching the living relationship between users and ABIs. Interaction between PRs and elements of PO offers a means of developing a feeling of having, which users seek as part of consumption (Dabadie and Robert-Demontrond 2021). This feeling is driven by a desire to fulfil the motives of PO (i.e., efficacy and effectance, stimulating self-identity and the need for home) and is recognised through accompanying PRs and routes. Baxter et al. (2015, p.6) suggests that ‘access-based schemes threaten the motives for PO and help explain why consumers prefer ownership rather than access’. The findings here are contrary to this suggestion, perhaps because of the context difference. All identified PRs are closely associated with PO motives and routes. These results provide further support for hypotheses that PRs have a strong influence on the PO process (Pierce et al. 2003) and that QPO and TPO emerge as the result of single or multiple elements of PO rooted in specific PRs. Research in the field of ABC, although mainly conceptual (Morewedge et al. 2021; Morewedge 2021), proposed links between PRs and elements of PO, but this thesis advances understanding by empirically investigating the role of PRs in establishing temporary or quasi forms of PO.

This work also contributes to existing knowledge of PO, suggesting that different ritualistic acts (i.e., digital and physical) can affect these forms of PO. This is because PRs help transfer meaning from goods to consumers and appropriate them as ‘mine’ (e.g., McCracken 1986; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Vohs et al. 2013). This thesis also demonstrates that PRs can be applied to understanding how feelings of ownership emerge during the access lifecycle, thus contributing to and expanding the literature of PO to PRs (Pierce et al. 2003). This thesis explored all stages of access to systematically understand the effects of different ritualistic acts on eliciting elements of PO, consistently observing that an element of PO was more evident during or after a ritual than it would be otherwise. Ritualised acts were found to go beyond its ritual scope. More ritualised access was found to increase capacity to cultivate feelings of ownership.

Next, beyond contributions to PO literature, expanding its application to both physical and digital representations of ABIs rather than physical items (McCracken 1986b; Holt 1995), and to access literature, suggesting PRs are closely associated with elements of PO, this thesis provides some insights into how QPO and TPO over ABIs lead to different

motivational, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes – for example, the diffusion of responsibility (Pierce and Jussila 2010) instead of customer misbehaviour in ABC (Schaefers et al. 2016). This advances the highly impactful nature of the theory of PO in ABC and can overcome all the barriers commonly behind the attitude behaviour gap. Previous research has frequently claimed the absence of PO and its positive outcomes – e.g., Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012). This study goes beyond confirming the existence of PO to show the manifestations and outcomes of different forms of PO. For example, ABIs are perceived as substitutes for owned items, consequently leading to reduction in enduring ownership. This adds to the body of literature suggesting that PO can affect user–item relationships (Peck and Luangrath 2018; Li and Atkinson 2020; Morewedge et al. 2021; Pino et al. 2022). ABC was celebrated as the end of the ownership era (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Still, it is necessary to understand which specific meanings, concepts and imagined constructs are going to be disturbed.

The key theoretical contribution of this thesis centres upon TPO and QPO, highlighting the nature of these feelings and manifestations and how they can be constructed: these are deeply rooted in PRs. Although ABIs are seen as fluid possessions, users still develop TPO and QPO. While constructs of TPO and QPO have applications across consumer behaviour research, the anticipation for this study, focusing on ABC and physical and digital PRs, contributes most to consumer culture theory, as this study unravels the complexities of consumer culture within a specific context and explores symbolic aspects of consumer behaviour such as possession meanings, identity projects and PRs (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Arnould et al. 2019).

8.2 Methodological contribution

This study has added to knowledge in a new way, contributing to literature on PO in ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018) through taking an interpretivist multimethod approach (i.e., netnography, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography) to obtain rich, detailed interpretations. Narratives from these methods are used to deepen and widen the research scope and as a means of attaining trustworthiness, credibility and triangulation (Jick 1979; Bryman and Bell 2011). This study contributes by documenting the development of PO through users' perspectives at various stages of access (pre-access, during access and post-access), clarifying the importance of data collection triangulation, and thus providing critical accounts of the user–item relationship. In contrast to much ABC research relying on one-off interviews (e.g., Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012) or cross-sectional surveys (e.g., Fritze et al. 2020), this study generated data from three exploratory methods designed to explore users'

experiences of PO in ABC and their interactions with ABI. This is also one of the earliest works to use ritualistic acts to understand users' PO in ABC.

Another contribution of this alternative methodological approach is in its demonstration of the combination of visual and verbal narrative methods to explore discontinuities between talk and action. Users might say one thing but do another. These types of discontinuities between what users claim and how they behave helps to understand their genuine feelings (Martens 2012). This approach overcomes knowledge barriers between thought and action (Kozinets 2015; Pink 2004) related to feelings of ownership (Dawkins et al. 2017; Olckers and van Zyl 2017). Utilising different methods helped to aggregate a deeper understanding of the PO elements that accompany digital and physical ritualised acts. The different stages of PRs presented are not proposed as generalisations about the access-based user population – instead, these PRs represent the nature of psychological appropriation characterisation. Focusing on ritualistic acts and using a combination of visual and verbal narrative methods is significant in studying PO in ABC. Given the importance of PRs to facilitate further the process of PO (Pierce et al. 2003), consumer research on PO is scarce in relation to that into ABC (Peck and Luangrath 2018). The use of a multimethod approach provides empirical and methodological support to advance consumer research on the complex ABC phenomenon. Thus, this approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between ritual thematic elements, ritualistic acts and manifestations, and the development of different PO forms.

8.3 Managerial implications

As users develop PO over ABIs, leading to different motivational, attitudinal and behavioural consequences, access-based providers are therefore likely to benefit from a clear understanding of which forms of PO were experienced (QPO and TPO) and which types of consumer experience contributed to development of such feelings. This thesis sheds light on both matters.

First, as PO is a predictor of users' attitudes towards ABC (Lee and Chow 2020), providers need to help users elicit this, even before access, because having elements of it makes users want to access their items. This can be done in various ways. By incorporating design features that facilitate PRs, ABC services can enable consumers to develop PO, thus impacting their behaviours. Users engage in such PRs to incorporate ABIs, potentially resulting in TPO and QPO. For example, if an access-based platform is well designed or competent enough to empower TPO and QPO, which can take place at any stage of access, it is likely that users will experience ABI as their 'own', leading to desired attitudinal and

behavioural implications. Table 8-1 shows specific design features that support QPO and TPO.

Stage of access	Platform design	Description	Forms of PO	Implications
Pre-access	Enable high user interaction	Allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content such as reviews, photos about ABIs and intimate information about previous users.	QPO	Lack of contamination
	Enhanced browsing experience	Produce similar enjoyment felt during traditional shopping (e.g., augmented reality, allowing them to personalise the experience).		Pre-access attachment; Aids feelings of enduring control; Maximises capacity to prompt self-investment
	Tracking features	Features that prevent disappointment about unavailability, allowing users to eliminate unavailable items from search results or closets. For example, providing tracking features – if the item is unavailable, when does it become available, where is the item now (has it been returned, being processed for the next user) – reducing uncertainty and providing feelings of control.		
	Wishlists/virtual closet	Involving the ability to save items to personal wishlists, and to categorise, customise, update and share their wishlists.		
During access	Speed of access	Speed of access is important to the sense of ownership in ABC. Different options for delivery, collection and returns.	TPO	Aids feelings of enduring control
	Packaging material and use of labels	An experience designed to smooth appropriation rituals in the during access stage – for example, experiencing newness.		Perceiving items as 'new'
	Sensory attributes	An experience designed to smooth appropriation, such as standard scent.		
Post-access	Keep and update a record of what the user accessed in their account	Allowing users to maintain a sense of continuity of self-identity over time. A record becomes an active link to the item post-access.	QPO	Retaining private meaning; Active keeping; ABC retention; Re-access retention

Table 8-1 Specific design features that support ritualised access during the pre-, during and post-access stages

This thesis identifies a typical directionality of routes to PO between the user and the ABI. Providers facilitate related PRs for users to achieve control and self-investment – typical outcomes of key PRs. However, intimate knowledge has two directions: from and to users. Users perform PRs to come to know an item from others and pass their knowledge to others. Recognising these directions helps shape different related PRs and their thematic elements to enhance TPO and QPO. The more a platform creates opportunities for ritualised experiences through technologies, the greater the feeling of ownership. New technologies

may be better utilised to pave the way for elements of PO using tactics such as augmented reality and livestream shopping (Huang and Liao 2017). Users will feel more control and fulfil their need for intimate knowledge. The opportunity also exists for new access-based initiatives to better facilitate QPO and TPO paths and maximise the living relationship between users and their ABIs throughout the access stages. The observations reported in all PRs lead to an important implication for providers – the design of access-based platform features must allow users to travel to PO via multiple routes. For access-based providers, it is significant for users to have a form of PO at any stage of access. As such feelings positively affect ABC retention, re-access retention, satisfaction, word-of-mouth and enduring ownership reduction, this is consistent with the literature (Asatryan and Oh 2008; Shu and Peck 2011; Jussila et al. 2015).

Second, the findings serve as a call for access-based providers to shift their focus on promoting the easing of ownership burdens (Moeller and Wittkowski 2010; Schaefer, Lawson, et al. 2016) to TPO, potentially reinforcing user–item relationships positively. This can be done by encouraging ritualised access and designing marketing communications, with providers thus required to promote PO (Garretson et al. 2012; Harding and Schenkel 2017) instead of opposing the desire for actual ownership. ABC can be promoted as an avenue for reducing the overall production and disposal of consumer goods by fostering TPO and QPO. Policymakers also need to refine their approach in promoting ABC to the public and advocate for a sense of PO alongside sustainability. The focus should not be on sharing items but on inducing temporary ownership as an alternative – you can own without burden. This implication is broadly in agreement with other studies in this area linking pseudo-ownership advertising appeal with the development of brand PO, favourable attitudes, purchase intentions and brand choice (Kou and Powpaka 2020). ABFC contributes to sustainability as long as this mode of consumption substitutes for the purchase of new clothes instead of just adding to this process (Fogel et al. 2017).

This thesis provides new insights into why users prefer ABI over owned items, because participants perceive a sense of ownership over the former. Providers could design effective communications that evoke PO (Garretson et al. 2012) (as RTR does) and facilitate the pursuit of ritualistic access throughout all the stages of access. Thus, TPO and QPO are important for access-based providers, and should focus on creating conditions where ritualistic access is stimulated to maximise these feelings for users. In other words, design experience can be used to nudge ritualistic access – from using to having – to be more meaningful. Ritualistic access might serve as a hidden means to let users feel more of what makes an ABI become ‘mine’.

As discussed, this feeling can be induced among users through PRs, including touch, imagination, knowledge and design (Spears and Yazdanparast 2014; Huang and Liao 2017; Peck et al. 2013; Reb and Connolly 2007; Baxter and Aurisicchio 2018; Rogers 2021). For example, providing opportunities for user–user interactions and sharing of experiences with others enables them to know ABIs intimately, making higher PO levels more likely. This kind of orientation is based upon inducing elements of PO, and has been broadly adopted in ownership-based consumption contexts and found to have positive outcomes (Vohs et al. 2013). As this thesis has demonstrated in relation to ABC, offering users the opportunity to carry out or perform PRs (e.g., unpacking, delivery and returns mechanisms) could enhance users’ TPO during the access stage. The experience induced feelings that such items were new and also extremely important for achieving maximum appreciation. Providers should design a more transparent ritualistic access experience at all stages of access so that users can elicit elements of PO (e.g., exercise control) over the ABI.

Providers need to acknowledge that the greater the element of PO linked to a ritualistic act, the stronger the effect on users’ feelings, and the easier it is to develop feelings over an ABI. Whether such an act takes place in the pre-access, during access or post-access stage, these ritualistic acts can be performed with the physical item or digital representation. It is therefore important for providers to maximise validity, even if an item is intangible/digital at both the pre-access and post-access stages. It may be necessary to ensure that users are perceived as controlling, knowing and having invested time and effort on items in these two stages. As accessing involves participants using instrumental acts as a way to utilise an ABI symbolically, a provider with a particular solution can help establish this symbolical ritual and facilitate the appropriation of ABIs rather than necessarily destroy the user–item relationship at the post-access stage. This is somewhat consistent with the idea of the extended self with physical and digital objects (Belk 2010; Belk 2013). There is a need to maximise feelings of accessibility and availability, which are clearly linked to eliciting QPO. Maintaining the illusion of the always accessible ABI is helpful in paving the way for both QPO and TPO. These outcomes advance understandings of digital tools by suggesting that providers will benefit from users’ use of digital space (e.g., the virtual closet). They need to strategically manage users’ digital ritualised acts with their ABIs to stimulate PO. Considering ritualistic acts and PO routes also provides insight into successful platform design and directions for creating PO.

Finally, the influence of PO on users’ interactions with ABIs addresses why the provider would want to enable this sense of PO (Section 7.3). TPO and QPO impact the ABC user’s responsibility and create inherently biased outcomes. As PO involves an

investment of self into the item, a user with any form of PO cares about extending the item's biography and commitment, which is beneficial for platforms. Users with such feelings did try to make items look like theirs. Still, this activity is also compatible with the provider's interests as users may view items as extensions of themselves. As such, TPO and QPO eliminate the need for strict regulation. Many platforms focused on governance strategies such as sanctions (Hartl et al. 2016) without considering promoting PO in relation to platform success. Previous studies such as Hofmann et al.'s (2017) work suggested that trust is fundamental to dealing with relevant parties in ABC. However, when PO increases for users, responsibility and stewardship behaviour naturally increases (Peck et al. 2021). ABIs are, by nature, ephemeral, and might seem to threaten motives and routes to PO (Baxter et al. 2015). However, users have feelings of PO over ABIs as long as they have the ability, motivation or opportunity to explicitly show their ownership status (Morewedge 2021). The data revealed that users care for what they access, and ownership is viewed more psychologically than legally as users only have fragmented ownership in this kind of context.

8.4 Limitations

Despite the methodological triangulation, this study has some limitations. As in any qualitative research approach, this work remains conditioned by the contexts chosen – i.e. the nature of the ABI, platform and user type. The question of PO is, then, framed by the lifestyles of access-based fashion users, which were explored. This impacts the generalisability of the findings, limited by the unit of analysis in this study. These participants are arguably largely 'enthusiastic' users of ABFC, lovers of fashion and the provider (i.e., RTR). They tended to speak favourably about their experiences, but this can be attributed to the nature of the items in question and their high involvement and interest in fashion (i.e., fashion-oriented users). Those non-enthusiastic about fashion are unlikely to become users of such ABC platforms. However, it is clear that, within ABFC, there are different levels of users: low-involvement (or single-time) users and high-involvement (or unlimited) users, who are usually passionate. The latter have clear and established appropriation rituals – this study's main unit of analysis. The use of RTR is also quite expensive – and impacts the type of user.

This study had a relatively small sample size for interviews and an even smaller number of digital diaries. The data collection was impacted by Covid-19 as, because of lockdown and worries about Covid, some participants did not follow through with diaries, and other participants were lost. Although interesting themes have already emerged, the study would have benefited from collecting more data from a wider variety of RTR users.

Further, the samples in this thesis are limited to users living in the USA, the research was based in the UK and collecting data remotely was challenging. Social and cultural differences can considerably affect how feelings toward one's possessions are formed (Furby 1980). Future researchers are advised to select a unit of analysis that is more generic, representing all access-based users from different walks of life with other interests. Another limitation of this thesis was the use of a single ABC platform – RTR. Although RTR's users are prominent access-based users, this platform and its related ABIs might not be most representative of the target population in a broader ABC context. More replication is suggested in other contexts, as explained in the next section. PO was explored at item level (e.g., ABI), not provider level (i.e., RTR). Future research should explore the interplay between the emergence of PO at both levels.

The reported data highlighted meaningful PRs that emerge from participants' access experiences. Sometimes only one ritualistic theme emerged from a narrative as that is what participants remember at that moment; at other times a participant would reflect on several PRs as relevant for their access journey throughout the interview. As discussed in the methodology chapter, reported PRs are based on exploratory research design following the abductive approach, to generate this order of PRs. To further explore ritualistic access in other contexts, it might be possible to use a structured interview outline when interacting with users and approach the study of PRs around the existing framework to understand the PRs proposed by Rook (1985), taking into account how Holt (1992) clustered various definitions of PRs when doing so. This will help researchers focus on ritualistic access as an important mechanism worth exploring early in any further research into ABC. However, gaining more insight into PO or any user feelings might not be achievable because not all participants express their feelings. Nonetheless, if this research interview guide was more structured, focusing on exploring PO in ritualised access, such methods might provide additional fruitful insights into PO, despite the collected data showing that it is hard for participants to put their feelings into words. The advantage of exploring PO in the context of PRs, though, is that the data helps give an account of emerging PO in the user-item relationship.

The hermeneutics approach was beneficial in assessing participants' PRs, but a few questions remain to be answered. The results presented here are mainly subjective user experiences based on memory. With the exception of visual ethnography, it was difficult to distinguish between PRs and some habits that lack emotional components (Holt 1992). Although I engaged in subjectivist reflexivity, as outlined in Section 3.2), the researcher's values, knowledge, experiences and perceptions represent another limitation. Thus, another

researcher with a distinctive circumstantial set of theoretical tools might take the same data and generate very different analyses (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Miyazaki and Taylor 2008; Smith and Shinebourne 2012; Berger 2015). My background as a male and my culture might have influenced the ways in which I collected, analysed, interpreted and wrote up the data. Specifically, I did not use ABFC, and my fashion ownership experience is limited. This lack of experience had an impact on my analysis and interpretation. Given that data collection was before the Covid 19 pandemic outbreak, it would also be interesting to explore the impact of this on the findings from this thesis.

8.5 Future research directions

This thesis has revealed several potential areas for future research into ABC and PO. The feelings of ownership debate remains an area for more in-depth exploration – one interesting area relates to understanding how outcomes of TPO and QPO develop over time and any changes in user behaviour brought about because of such developments. Future research also needs to investigate how PRs vary between user segments (e.g., old vs new users or high-involvement vs low-involvement users), and how specific ritualistic elements relate to such individuals – for example, whether old users tend to have collective PO instead of TPO and QPO. High-involvement users might experience PO in a way that leads them to alter a ritual. In addition to comparison of different user segments, a longitudinal study might impact how user PO changes over time, and whether the PRs they engage in change.

Another user categorisation – the environmentally conscious – emerges in data analysis as not having legal ownership (Section 5.2.1). Such users might feel TPO, QPO or collective PO but communicate these in ways that conform to an environmentalist code. Yet, data on this was limited and further research might therefore explore the effects of sustainable attitudes in eliciting these forms of PO because users' motivations for using ABC might impact PO. Potential motivations include sustainability (Hartl et al. 2020), fashionability (Ferraro et al. 2016; Strähle and Erhardt 2017) and finance (Schaefers et al. 2018).

Future research could explore other access models such as peer-to-peer platforms, exploring whether PRs and consequently types of PO in peer-to-peer platforms might take another direction. For instance, such users might have more fear of contamination (Edbring et al. 2016; Becker-Leifhold and Iran 2018), which could impact PRs.

Future research should explore whether users experience similar levels of PO over ABI in other product categories (e.g. private vs public meanings (Richins 1994). Clothes are highly visible to others (particularly clothes that RTR users access, which tend to be for

social occasions). It may therefore be more important for users to establish a sense of PO. Would this be the same for less visible categories (e.g. items that are consumed privately, within the home)? Luxury possessions are used to either inflate the ego or display wealth (Tynan et al. 2010). Thus, luxury ABIs represent a common means to PO. Further work needs to be done to establish whether users are motivated to strive to achieve a level of PO in a non-hedonic context. If so, would users strive for PO to the same extent when accessing low-cost items with fewer symbolic meanings? Does the potential for contamination and/or the proximity of accessed fashion items to one's body make people more likely to strive for PO? Argo et al. (2006b) and Armstrong et al. (2015) highlighted proximity and contamination as key issues in fashion consumption.

Other determining elements such as gender and societal culture also merit further research. The social dimension of PRs can be explored in other ABC contexts. PRs might have additional benefits to PO in a rich social context (Rossano 2012). Such benefits might enhance the positive outcomes of PO. Some cultures and contexts also differ with respect to the salience of the different elements of PO (Pierce et al. 2003).

While many specifics probably do not generalise, some of the main findings have broad-based applicability. For example, it is anticipated that TPO and QPO would emerge in other contexts where there opportunities exist to engage in PRs. However, future research is needed to expose types of facilitators. For example, users can develop a form of PO when there is a lack of contamination. Would negative contamination also translate into PO? Would it affect how PRs can be carried out? The data collected is not enough to make assumptions. Thus, scope clearly exists for future research. Lastly, the move to distanced personal interactions accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic was important. If such behaviour is the future of consumption-related activities, how will concern about contagion affect PO? Will users feel less PO for their ABIs?

Other possibilities for future research relate to PO. It would be interesting to explore whether affect enhances PO equally across all routes to PO (knowledge, investment, control). Types of PO experience most likely to improve with PRs could also be explored. During access, PRs (such as unpacking) can boost knowledge, investment and control, important determinants of which ABIs were felt as 'mine'. Experiences aid PRs, and boosting experience facilitates PRs. Research into the potential of experience (e.g., unpacking and sensory attributes) to intensify PRs would be useful. In addition, in the context of this study, items were mainly kept for a short time. Future research could potentially explore PO in contexts where items are accessed for longer periods, given that PO might be constant. How might TPO/QPO be experienced differently in such contexts?

It will be useful to explore further how users navigate between ABC and ownership-based consumption. Disposal of owned items and clear enduring ownership reduction were two of the dominant themes that emerged (Section 7.3), raising a question relating to how PO over ABIs affects relationships with items owned, specifically enduring ownership reduction.

Finally, the construct of TPO discussed in this thesis could be examined for its validity in quantitative research to draw more general conclusions. There is a need for future quantitative studies to confirm PRs and examine the importance of each ritual for PO. For example, going through one of the reported PRs could result in a higher degree of PO (further examples are: Does the way users store ABIs during access have a link with the degree of PO? Would introducing a virtual closet function lead to a higher degree of PO before, during and after access? Is the ability to customise and edit virtual closets important? Is it beneficial to be able to customise personal folders within the list?) Research into other ABC contexts could confirm these results for, for example, rental of baby clothes, toys or tools. For example, if a platform such as a library of things develops a virtual shed where users can categorise their tools, sports equipment, lawnmowers and bicycles, how effective would this be for developing TPO and enduring ownership reduction of these items? Although the concept of PO is relatively new in ABC literature, this construct is likely to exert empirically detectable effects on different aspects of the user–item relationship for the benefit of users, providers, society and all relevant parties.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A (Interview guide)

Interview guide

This interview guide will be used to facilitate data collection. This online interview takes a semi-structured interview approach.

Research goals of the interviews:

The questions covered in this interview will include a biographical narrative of how the users' interest in access-based fashion have developed, how they feel about the items they have accessed, how accessed items interact with users selves, what type of attachment they have had with accessed items, and how they are participating in accessed fashion-related communities. Interviews will end with a reflection on what the interviewee thinks about user-item relationship in the accessed fashion sector.

The interviews aim is to explore consumers' experiences in access-based fashion consumption_around these questions:

- How do user-item relationships take place in the accessed fashion sector, and do consumers develop feelings of ownership towards accessed objects?
- What object or service characteristics may impact consumers' sense of psychological ownership over accessed fashion objects?
- How do accessed objects relate to consumers' sense of self/identity and how does this compare to owned fashion items?
- How does consumers' sense of psychological ownership impact how they interact with or feel about an accessed object?

Interviews plan:

1- Introduction, questions related to the general use of Rent the Runway - the first 15 minutes:

- Welcome.
- Provide instructions regarding the interview and ensure obtaining the consent.
- General questions related to the user's experiences in the access fashion consumption. Allowing them to share their experiences before going to specific agendas. Such as:
 - Could you tell me when and how you first heard about Rent the Runway?
 - How long have you been using Rent the Runway?
 - Why do you use Rent the Runway? What motivates you to switch to rent clothes instead of buying?

- Have you faced any issues in relation to your rental fashion consumption experiences?
- Can you tell me a bit about your first experience with Rent the Runway?
- Have you ever bought second-hand clothes? If so, can you describe how your experience with second-hand goods compares to rented goods?
- How renting clothes have affected your life?
- I will ask about their recent accessed items from Rent the Runway, then I will keep referring to them throughout this interview, will ask about how frequently do they access, and what types of users' subscription do they use?
- **I will ask for details of relevant information interviewee has mentioned so far:**
e.g., What do you mean by that....? Can you give me an example...? Could you say more about that....?

2- Move to a number of open questions - These questions will guide the rest of the interview and will take about 45 - 60 minutes:

- **Combinations of antecedents elicit different strengths of psychological ownership.**

Does fashion context produce positive contamination, pride and lack of embarrassment:

- How do you feel about wearing Rent the Runway items?
- Can you describe how you choose your Rent the Runway items from the website?

Role of users' reviews in access-based consumption:

- Can you tell me why do you write reviews about your rental item?
- How important for you to go through other users' review, rating, photos before making your choice? If positive response, can you explain how these help you to pick your outfit? Is important to check out what kind of occasion other users used the outfit for?
- What do you feel when seeing other users wearing an item that you might be the next person to use?
- Can you tell me if you encouraged someone to use Rent the Runway? Any story?
- Do you share your photo wearing RTR items on social media sites? Can you tell me if you say that what you wearing is a Rent the Runway item?
- What came to your mind when you used a Rent the Runway's item? Did you think about its history? Who wore it? The journey of the item?
- What do you feel about items that have no reviews?
- Which one do you rely on when making choices, photos uploaded by users or official Rent the Runway photos? Why?
- Pre-order, What do you feel when seeing others wearing item you intend to book?
- How do people comment on your Rent the Runway items? Did you tell them that it was a Rent the Runway item, or you did not? (Will pursue based on the responses) (Compliments)
- Have you ever been asked where did you buy a Rent the Runway item? What would your answer be?
- Do you openly talk with your friends, colleague, and relative about your rent of fashion? Using Rent the Runway services? (If no? why not?)
 - If positive response, will you be outspoken about your second-hand purchases as well?

- Have you shared your photos wearing Rent the Runway item within your review? Why so?
- If a friend asks you about what would you wear for an event? Would you share the Rent the Runway link of your intended dress with them? Can you tell me about such a situation?
- Can you tell me if you are aware of the waiting list for the items you are renting? how do you feel about it?
- Would you please tell me whether you would also choose to access low-end brands like New Look, H&M, Target, GAP, and Wal-Mart? And if not why not?

Temporary extended-self and self-transformation:

- Self-concept and feeling of ownership over expensive items -

- How does accessed fashion contribute to your identity/your sense of who you are, and is this similar or different to your owned fashion items?
- Could you describe the motivations that brought you to join Rent the Runway?
- Do you think that your sense of who you are have changed during your rental experience? If so, can you tell me, which has changed, and what led to these change(s)?
- Can you tell me if you think others tend to believe that you own the Rent the Runway item and it is clear to them that you own it? (Psychological ownership metaperception bias).
- What type of people do you think use Rent the Runway?
- How do you see yourself as users of Rent the Runway? (Self-respect).

- Self-transformation (Fashionability, Identity relevance of an item, Try new style) -

- How do you use Rent the Runway to change your look?
- Does Rent the Runway help you to explore new styles? Why don't you rely on the bought items to change styles?

- Temporary extended-self based on accessed objects, the role of access duration -

- Can you tell me what were your initial thoughts and feelings upon sending back an item that you really like? Any story?
- Can you reflect on how you perceived Rent the Runway items in term of keeping them for a short time? How do you feel about the service knowing that you only can keep this stuff for a limited time? Any story about sending an adorable item back?

Users' need for uniqueness:

- Is there anything making you worried when you rent a dress from Rent the Runway?
- What did it feel like to wear a luxurious designer dress from Rent the Runway? Can you describe such a feeling? (Being unique)?

Psychological ownership of items in users' virtual closets 'lists' and photos taken:

- Can you tell me how you organise your virtual closet? How often do you go through your list?
- Do you take many pictures of your accessed item? Why? Can you explain a little more about what did you do with these pictures?
- Tell me more about your feeling with regard to items in your Rent the Runway list? Do you show or share what is in your Rent the Runway list with others (online community, friends)? Why?
- What will you feel when you find out that the item you added to your favourite last is not available?
- Can you tell me who owns the clothes in your Rent the Runway list?

Personal meaning (Indexical meaning)

- What kind of memories do you have with your rented items? Any story?
- Can you tell me if these memories give you a feeling to keep or get rid of a rented item?

- **Other factors related to psychological ownership - Outcomes -.**

Attachment (Attachment anxiety, attachment to brand or designer, want to keep the item, re-wear an accessed item, and intention to re-accessed an item in the future):

- When do you usually send your rented items back? Have you ever kept an item longer? Why?
- Can you tell me if you bought from a specific brand or designer after trying their products through Rent the Runway?
- Have you ever used your RTR member discount to purchase an item? Why did you buy it? What about your friends?
- Which type of item do you tend to keep longer, for example, dresses, and bags? Why so?

Users behaviour:

- Do you have a certain way to deal with Rent the Runway items? For example, do you keep them in the same closet with your own clothes? Do you have a different feeling for Rent the Runway items? Do you feel that you are more or less cautious with Rent the Runway items?
- How does it feel to touch your newly delivered Rent the Runway items? -Anxiety, fear or excitement etc. - Why?
- Do you think other users misuse rented products? Have you ever felt that there is no need to take good care of the items you rented? Why?
- Do Rent the Runway services and the experience of renting make you a happy person? (well-being)

- **These follow-up questions pave the way and directed to obtaining further elaboration of the psychological ownership, and encouraging dialogue.**

- **Direct questions related to psychological ownership and all-previous concepts.**

- Can you explain a little more about whether you feel that rented items (Rent the Runway's item) are yours? How does the experience of such feeling differ from what you actually own?
- Are you aware of the fact that the items are rental when you are wearing them?

- Terminology usage will be framed based on how the interviewee frames and understand issues related to accessed fashion (e.g., rent vs. access and consumers and users).
- I will use indirect questions to further elaboration to avoid influencing the interviewee and imposing my views.

3- Conclusion:

- **Remind interviewee**
 - That they can contact me for follow up, or obtain research finding.
 - That they can withdraw from the study and their data will not be used.

APPENDIX B (Interview participant information sheet)

Informed Consent Declaration – For Research Participants

This study is being conducted by Bader Alkaffary, PhD Student at Cardiff Business School and Cardiff University, under the supervision of Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis who can be contacted via following email address: koenig-lewisn@cardiff.ac.uk.

Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences of renting fashion via Rent the Runway and other platforms. This is an online interview and will take place through Skype or another convenient program for participants, this interview will take about an hour.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Participants may also raise questions at any time and discuss any concerns with either the researcher (AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk) or the supervisor as listed above.

The findings of the study will form part of a PhD thesis, and may be published in academic journals.

All information provided during the interview will be held anonymously so that it will not be possible to trace information or comments back to individual contributors. Information will be stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

Participants can request information and feedback about the purpose of the study and its results by applying directly to the researcher AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk.

Researcher – Bader Alkaffary, PhD Student
Cardiff Business School
Cardiff University

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RESEARCH ETHICS**

Consent Form

I understand that I am participating in a study on rental based fashion consumption. You will be asked to answer some questions relevant to your rental experience with Rent the Runway it and how you feel about your rented items.

I understand that my participation in this project will involve an interview that will take approximately 1-1.5 hours, and I will receive \$25 voucher (Gift card of my choice) for my participation.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason.

I understand that the interview data will be anonymized and that any personally identifying information will be removed, and pseudonym will be used when referring to my contribution. I acknowledge that the anonymized data will be included in the thesis and any resulting academic publications.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I have second thoughts about my participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Email: koenig-lewisn@cardiff.ac.uk.

I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially and securely, and it will not be possible to trace information or comments back to any individual contributors. The data will be retained, however, audio and video recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed and all transcripts will be anonymized. I understand that if I withdraw my consent at any time I can ask for the information I have provided to be deleted/destroyed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

I understand that the interview may be recorded using audio and screen recording in order to more accurately capture my responses, and that I have the right to refuse the audio and/or screen recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes / No

I consent to screen recording: Yes / No

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Bader Alkaffary, AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk , PhD student of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Dr Rebecca Mardon and Dr Carmela Bosangit.

APPENDIX D (Ethical approval for the interview)



Cardiff Business School

Ysgol Busnes Caerdydd

Bader Alkaffary
Cardiff Business School
Cardiff University

10 June 2019

Dear Bader,

Ethics Approval Reference: 1819039

Project Title: **The role of psychological ownership and its consequences on consumer behaviour in nonownership**

I would like to confirm that your project has been granted ethics approval as it has met the review conditions.

Should there be a material change in the methods or circumstances of your project, you would in the first instance need to get in touch with us for re-consideration and further advice on the validity of the approval.

I wish you the best of luck on the completion of your research project.

Yours sincerely,

Electronic signature via email

Dr. Debbie Foster
Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee
Email: CARBSResearchEthics@cardiff.ac.uk

APPENDIX E (The digital diaries protocol)

Instruction

Welcome to your digital diaries, “Your rental fashion”. In these digital diaries, you will help us to better understand user experiences of renting fashion via Rent the Runway. We would like to get more insights into how you interact and engage with your rental fashion, as you would naturally. Along the way, please tell us about your experiences and feelings via digital diary that may include videos, voice notes, photos, mobile screen recordings and written text. We are interested in every step of your journey, and your overall experience.

Please read all the instructions before getting started, so that you fully understand what we are looking for.

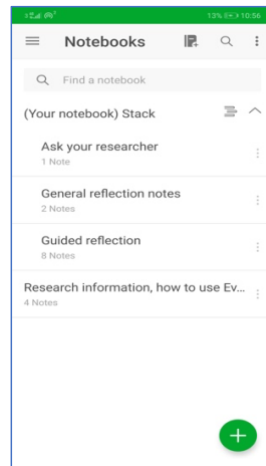


Figure 1 shows the notebook, and how it will look like.

○ **Guided reflection:**

In this section, you will be prompted to reflect on specific points in the rental journey. Please, read and respond to the questions.

- Instruction 1: Placing your order.

What made you choose this specific item? Screen record most important aspects to select your RTR orders? Document your opinion of seeing others wearing those clothes on the website? Screenshots RTR users' reviews that crucial for your rental choice?

- Instruction 2: Receiving your items.

Has the item arrived yet? Take a photo or video to capture the arrival of your RTR order? How did you feel when it was delivered? How did you interact with the object when it had arrived? Take a video or voice note to express your feeling of ownership over this received item?

- Instruction 3: Trying on the item.

Take a photo or video to capture how the item reflect your sense of who you are? How do you feel about wearing this item? Take a photo or video to capture your first time to touch your RTR order?



Figure 2 shows instruction 2, an example of guided reflection notes. Easily add photos, take photos, videos, handwriting, file and audio files directly into notes by clicking the paperclip icon

- Instruction 4: Storing the item.
Take a photo or video showing how you store this item? How do you feel when putting the item in your closet? Take a video or voice note to explain whether you feel that you own this rental item and you treat it in such a way?
- Instruction 5: How you wear the item.
Record voice note to explain how this RTR item does feel compare with other items you bought? How do you treat the item? Take a photo or video to reflect on how RTR items related to your fashion style.
- Instruction 6: While wearing the item.
Take a photo or video to capture what makes you feel comfortable and what makes you uncomfortable? Any different feeling with this item compared to your own clothes in your closet? What/ how do you think of yourself wearing this item? How do you think others see you in this item?) Take a video to reflect on your feeling of ownership over the item?
- Instruction 7: After wearing the item.
Take a photo or video to capture how you hang up your clothes after wearing them? What did you do with the item? Take a video or voice note to express how you value this item compared to other items in your closet?
- Instruction 8: Returning the item.
Take video to explain what you are doing while you about to send items back? how you package it? How do you feel about returning the item?

Please, include at least 2 types of data (e.g. a video, voice note, photos, written text or a combination of them) for each instruction/task

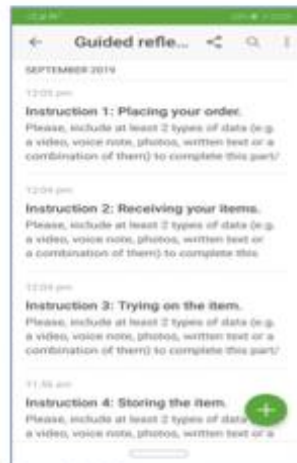



Figure 3 shows the guided reflection notes.

○ **General reflection notes.**

Add your own diaries as you go to share your experiences of renting fashion. This general reflection is for any extra thoughts, actions, and feelings that were not reported in the guided reflection. With these general reflection notes, you can create and organize your notes as you wish. You can start a note with photos, videos, audio, and written text by clicking the green plus icon  on the main page.

- The General reflection can focus on your thoughts, and feelings towards the object over time, you can record the date and your feelings of ownership towards objects throughout the rental process.

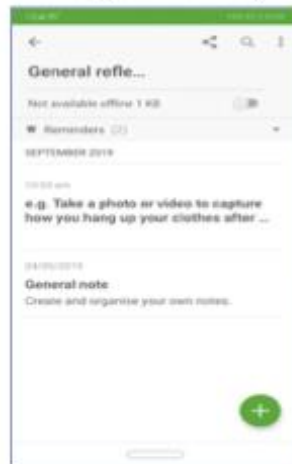


Figure 4 and 5 shows how general diary looks and way to create a new note.

o **Note: Ask your researcher.**

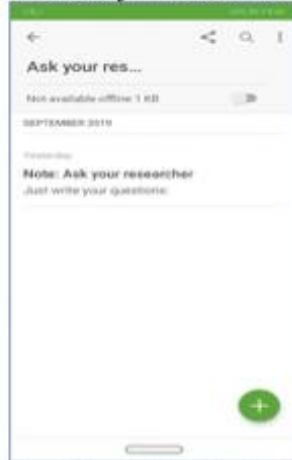


Figure 6 this note to keep in touch with the researcher.

If there are any changes to guided reflection diary, the researcher will be in touch. If you have any questions about completing your diary, be sure to contact the researcher by posting a question on (Note: Ask your researcher). If you have technical issues or questions, you can always contact the researcher at AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk.

How it works:

- 1- Download Evernote on your smartphone (Or if preferred, you can install on your computer or tablet device)
- 2- Use the provided username and password:
Username: user1@rental-project.com
Password: *****
- 3- Start your digital diaries with by completing different notes on Notebook 1.
- 4- Any time you engage with rental fashion, open your note and capture what is going on, with videos, voice notes, photos, mobile screen recordings to written text. You will answer prompting questions about when, how, why, and what you were doing with rental items.

Add attachments to your diary:

You can also add photos, videos, and audio files directly into notes by clicking the paperclip icon in the formatting bar.

Annotate images:

Communicate ideas by annotating images. To do so, tap and hold on an image from inside a note, then select Annotate from the pop-up menu.



Figure 7 Annotate in the pop-up menu.

Reminders

Reminder will be used as notifications. Open a reminder lead to the creation of a new note. Those reminders will appear in a to-do list pinned at the top of your note list where they can be sorted, marked as complete, and more. Once you have completed a task associated with a reminder, check it off in the reminders list.

**APPENDIX F (Visual ethnography consent form)
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL
RESEARCH ETHICS**

Consent Form for unlimited rental

I understand that I am participating in a study on rental based fashion consumption conducted by Bader Alkaffary, a PhD candidate at Cardiff University, UK, under the supervision of Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Dr Rebecca Mardon & Dr Carmela Bosangit.

I understand that my participation in this project will involve recording digital diaries that document my experiences of renting fashion via Rent the Runway. I understand that my participation will involve documenting key processes involved in rental fashion (e.g. researching and ordering items, receiving my Rent the Runway delivery, trying items on and storing them in my home, wearing items, and returning them), as well as describing my feelings towards the rented item before, during, and after the rental, and that I will document this by uploading photos, videos, voice notes, mobile screen recordings and/or written text to the Evernote mobile application. I understand that the researcher has real-time access to my digital diary and will contact me with further questions via the Evernote application, prompting me to elaborate further on my experience. I understand that my participation in the project will last for at least three weeks, that completing my digital diary will likely take between 60 and 120 minutes in total, and that I will receive \$65 E-voucher (Gift card of my choice “Amazon, eBay, or iTunes”) as a token of appreciation for my participation in the study.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason. I understand that if I withdraw my consent at any time, I can ask for the information I have provided to be deleted/destroyed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially and securely, and it will not be possible to trace data back to any individual contributors. All photos, videos, voice notes, mobile screen recordings and text will be retained; the audio and video will be transcribed, and all transcripts will be anonymized.

I acknowledge that my anonymized data may be included in the researcher's PhD thesis and any resulting academic publications. I understand that where data from my digital diary features in such outputs, it will be anonymized, personally identifying information will be removed, and a pseudonym used when referring to my contribution. I understand that videos or photos submitted to the study may feature in resultant academic publications, but that any such content that may potentially expose my identity will be edited to ensure my anonymity (e.g. any visible faces will be blurred). I understand that I will have the option to exclude any specific photos/videos from being used in publications.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time, both before and during the study.

I understand that if for any reason, I have second thoughts about my participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Email: koenig-lewisn@cardiff.ac.uk.

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Bader Alkaffary, AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk , PhD student of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Dr Rebecca Mardon and Dr Carmela Bosangit.

Informed Consent Declaration – For Research Participants

Informed Consent Declaration for **unlimited rental**

This study is being conducted by Bader Alkaffary, PhD Student at Cardiff Business School and Cardiff University, under the supervision of Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis Dr Rebecca Mardon & Dr Carmela Bosangit.

Participants are required to document key processes involved in rental fashion (e.g. researching and ordering items, receiving my Rent the Runway delivery, trying items on and storing them in my home, wearing items, and returning them), as well as describing your feelings towards the rented item before, during, and after the rental, and that You will document this by uploading photos, videos, voice notes, mobile screen recordings and/or written text to the Evernote mobile application.

Digital diaries instructions will be provided, and you will be given flexibility as to what you wish to capture and how you wish to capture it (e.g. what format). You will be given a rough idea about researcher's expectation (e.g. Show us at least two and no more than five moments {use video, voice note, photos, text or a combination of them}, to complete a single action note such as storing rental items.). See the attached file for more information "Instruction". Reminders and planned prompts will be sent at intervals. While there is no specific length to these diaries, you will be encouraged to provide as much detail as possible about your experience of renting fashion items via the digital diaries, which will likely take between 60 and 120 minutes in total.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Participants may also raise questions at any time and discuss any concerns with either the researcher (AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk) or the supervisor as listed below.

The findings of the study will form part of the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be published in academic journals.

All information provided during the digital diaries will be held anonymously so that it will not be possible to trace information or comments back to individual contributors. Only non-personally identifying images, text and videos will be used in academic publications.

If there are significant materials that might identify participants, such part of the image will be blurred, to ensure anonymity. Participants will have the option to exclude any specific photos/videos from being used in publications when they submit them. Information will be stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

Participants can request information and feedback about the purpose of the study and its results by contacting the researcher directly via email AlkaffaryB@cardiff.ac.uk. You can discuss any concerns with Dr Nicole Koenig-Lewis who can be contacted via following email address: koenig-lewisn@cardiff.ac.uk.

Researcher – Bader Alkaffary, PhD Student
Cardiff Business School
Cardiff University

APPENDIX H (Ethical approval for the visual ethnography)



Cardiff Business School

Ysgol Busnes Caerdydd

Bader Alkaffary
Cardiff Business School
Cardiff University

29 October 2019

Dear Bader,

Ethics Approval Reference: 1819055

Project Title: The role of psychological ownership and its consequences on consumer behaviour in non-ownership

I would like to confirm that your project has been granted ethics approval as it has met the review conditions.

Should there be a material change in the methods or circumstances of your project, you would in the first instance need to get in touch with us for re-consideration and further advice on the validity of the approval.

I wish you the best of luck on the completion of your research project.

Yours sincerely,

Electronic signature via email

Dr. Debbie Foster
Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee
Email: CARBSResearchEthics@cardiff.ac.uk

APPENDIX I (Data coding samples for the netnography)

Lack of contamination					
Examples of quotes	Data type	Code	Elements	Feelings	Notes, thoughts and questions
<p>'I read a lot of reviews with complaints about the slip riding up, I did not experience that at all! I have zero complaints about this dress. It was absolutely perfect. You will stand out in this dress and receive compliments all night!' (Anna, 27, 5 stars, wedding).</p> <p>'Love love! I've been eyeing this bag for so long!! I love it. Perfect size for carrying all mom things' (K, 37, 5 stars, everyday).</p> <p>'I've been doing, I've been looking at the website and looking at all the things that might work for me and I've created all Heart's list so I created just some, a list of things that I might like it to try later on with my subscription' (T, YouTube video, posted July 2018, publicly sharing her experience).</p>	<p>Review</p> <p>YouTube video</p>	<p>Role of users' reviews</p>	<p>Coming to know</p>	<p>Lack of contamination</p>	<p>Lack of contamination is the norm for all second-hand clothes. However, knowledge of previous users who have worn accessed items, the details of their accessed items and their storyline with the items provided in their reviews appears to transform perceptions into positive contamination.</p> <p>How do reviews affect users' feelings of ownership? What do users feel when seeing other users wearing an item that they might be the next person to use? What do you feel when seeing others wearing an item you intend to book? Can PO take place during the process of ordering? Is it possible for users to develop a sense of ownership towards selected items in a visual closet?</p>
<p>'... I wanted to like this, I mean really wanted to like this. I was dreaming about this skirt, planning outfits around it, and was so excited to try a leather pencil skirt. ... I uploaded a picture to show how much the slit opens when you sit down. I have pretty average to straight hips and it was still gaping open. Unwearable. Perhaps my worst rental yet. Listen to the other reviews, lesson learned' (S, 31, 1 star, work).</p> <p>'I was in my sister's wedding and for the reception she wanted us to change into something green. I saw this on RTR and absolutely fell in love with it. I was extremely happy with this rental. It fit like a glove and the fabric was perfect for a hot summer wedding' (E, 44, 4 stars, wedding).</p>	<p>Review</p>	<p>Role of users' reviews</p>	<p>Very intimate knowledge</p> <p>Self-investment</p>	<p>Feeling developed for her chosen item, and used words such as dreaming and excited before receiving the item.</p>	<p>The act of reviewing could be linked to showing control and intimate knowledge of the accessed object, signalling ownership feelings. There is no conflict between contamination and the stimulation of PO elements. Expressed various positive emotions about their interactions with digital representations of objects. Expression of happiness and attachment following the first interactions with digital representations of an object What is the role of PO during the planning stage of access? How do users choose their ABIs from the platform? What came to mind for users when they used a Rent the Runway item? Did they think about its history? Who wore it? The journey of the item?</p>
<p>'I looked at this romper SO many times before ordering it and I'm SO glad I did. There wasn't many photo reviews and a romper can be tricky' (E, 30, 5 stars, party).</p>	<p>Review</p>	<p>Role of users' reviews, no reviews.</p>	<p>Importance of coming to know from others before access</p>	<p>Happiness</p>	<p>Users rely on other users' reviews to make their selection. Positive identity contamination prevails because of shared photos of previous owners. What do users feel about items that have no reviews? Does the experience of access make users happy?</p>
<p>'Honestly I use my unlimited subscription so often, rotating pieces in and out, that I am rarely not wearing anything from RTR. People always ask me where I got that dress from, when did I get that purse, etc. and my answer is always "it's Rent the Runway!"' (Sarah, -, 5 stars, everyday, RTR testimonials).</p> <p>'... Everyone at the wedding was asking where I got my dress from, I felt like a RTR spokesperson :)' (Clara, 26, 5 stars, wedding).</p>	<p>Review</p>	<p>Role of users' reviews, pride, positive online WOM, high attachment,</p>	<p>Pride leads to positive offline WOM, high attachment, pride and receiving a compliment</p>	<p>Pride</p>	<p>Pride is apparent in four different behaviours among the users: (1) sharing of photos in their reviews, (2) pride in being part of the Rent the Runway community (offline and online, word-of-mouth), (3) pride in using accessed fashion and (4) interpretation of perceived compliments from others as incidents reflecting pride. Users do sense pride when using ABIs and such pride represents an extension of the self.</p> <p>The higher the feeling of pride over ABIs, the more users appear to be attached to and have feelings of ownership. How do users feel about wearing Rent the Runway items?</p>

<p>'The blue is much more vibrant – more of a cobalt than a navy. I received so many compliments on this dress all night long. The cut, color, and movement of the dress are absolutely stunning. A very beautiful dress! Wish I owned it' (Ava, 25, 5 stars, wedding).</p>		<p>and receiving a compliment</p>		<p>Do users think that others tend to believe that they own Rent the Runway items, and is it clear to others that they own it?</p>
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Temporary extended self

Examples of quotes	Data type	Code	Elements	Feelings	Notes, thoughts and questions
<p>'... Unlimited has transformed my life I now have more confidence, more free time and less stress. ... I've actually found myself going out and seeing friends, shows, plays more often because I don't have to stress about what I'm going to wear. I haven't purchased an item of clothing for almost six months and I truly can't imagine going back to a pre-unlimited life' (N, -, 5 stars, everyday, testimonials).</p> <p>'... This. Dress. Is everything!!! ... Winner!! I will definitely be renting it again, it made me feel amazing and looked fantastic don't hesitate for a second!!!' (D, 45, 5 stars, party).</p> <p>'I went from wasting so much time, money and closet space on items I perceived to be trendy – only to wear them max three times and then shove them into the back of my closet. I love the variety the program offers -- I end up experimenting with designers and styles I would typically shy away from, to being happily surprised by how confident and pleased I feel in my rentals' (R, 5 stars, everyday).</p>	Review	Extended self, temporary, confidence, reliance on ABC	Self-investment	Attachment, Self-expression	<p>User might have different preferences in the context of accessing versus owning. ABIs could also be a means of self-transformation.</p> <p>Having access to fashion allows a more liquid transformation of consumer identity.</p> <p>Users pointed out that such ABIs boost their self-concept and self-esteem.</p> <p>Accessed fashion objects are clearly used to create, foster and develop user identity, which calls for a discussion of existence of the temporary extended self among ABC users.</p> <p>Could users describe the motivations that brought them to join Rent the Runway?</p>
<p>'My wardrobe is always changing, and I never get bored with my clothes anymore – and that keeps me from buying as much stuff! I've been able to try designers that I would never even think of trying because of how much the items would cost' (T, -, 5 stars, work, RTR testimonials).</p> <p>'Rent the Runway unlimited makes it possible for someone on a limited income like me to always be stylish and to realise my love for fashion. Previously, many of the pieces I loved were inaccessible to me because of budget. Now, I can wear gorgeous, stylish pieces and I can AFFORD them! Not only that – I can have new pieces constantly! Rent the Runway is genius' (A, -, 5 stars, formal affair, RTR testimonials).</p> <p>'I signed up for unlimited a few months ago and assumed that I'd only use it to feed my "fashion bug" in a more economical fashion. Boy was I wrong! I'm now wearing unlimited items almost every day of the week – not only do I get to wear high-quality outfits, I'm super excited to show off (seriously, I get compliments every single time I wear an unlimited item)' (N, -, 5 stars, everyday, RTR testimonials).</p>	RTR testimonials	The temporary extended self over expensive items	Self-investment and control	Temporary extended self	<p>The extent to which the self may become temporary, extended into accessed fashion, can be major. The notion of the temporary extended self over expensive fashion items could be a pathway to a feeling of ownership.</p> <p>A variety of perspectives were expressed such as excitement, attachment, fashionability, newness and affordability, in relation to accessing expensive ABIs and the important role this has to play in the temporary extended self.</p> <p>ABIs still strongly reflect the extended self, and the temporality of the extended self might not be relevant for some users – such users end up buying items because they love them and feel attached to them.</p> <p>Users utilise ABIs into an ephemeral experience that emphasises the temporary extended self.</p> <p>Do users use the RTR member discount to purchase items? Why did users buy items? What did it feel like to wear a luxurious designer dress from Rent the Runway? Can users describe this feeling?</p>
<p>'Made me feel even more special at my bridal shower! I wore this for my bridal shower and absolutely loved it! I had a hard time saying goodbye to this beautiful jumpsuit' (B, 30, 5 stars, other).</p> <p>'I couldn't bring myself to return this bag. Used it and loved it for two weeks. It's the perfect size for a wallet, charger and other essentials. I love navy as a neutral and this perfectly paired with so many of my outfits over the last few weeks. I only returned this because I wanted to open up a slot but this is one of my favorite accessories from RTR yet' (N, 23, 5 stars, everyday).</p>	Review	Imagining a loss of self	Self-investment	Temporary extended self, Attachment	<p>Users appear to imagine a loss of self when items are sent back, as objects tend to be part of the extended self.</p> <p>Having feelings of a temporary extended self over these objects can provide a foundation from which users can have perceived ownership.</p> <p>Users express difficulty in being confronted with a quick return and face challenges in rebuilding their sense of self.</p> <p>When possessions are perceived as consistent with individual</p>

<p>'Not. Gonna. Give. It. Back. Nope. This bag is so perfect I want to marry it and vow my allegiance to it for all the rest of my days.' This user went on describing the item and her experience with it, ending the review as follows: 'The biggest con I guess, I MAY have to send it back' (A, 43, 5 stars, vacation).</p>					<p>images of self, separation likely brings sadness if the disposition is caused by lack of financial ability.</p> <p>How do users see themselves as users of Rent the Runway? What were users' initial thoughts and feelings upon sending back items that they really like? How do they do it? Can users reflect on how they perceived Rent the Runway items in terms of keeping them for a short time? How do they feel about the service knowing that they can only keep this stuff for a limited time? How do users usually send their rented items back? Have they ever kept an item longer? Why? Which types of item do users tend to keep longer – for example, dresses or bags? Why so?</p>
<p>'No more worrying about how to afford a new dress for a wedding, far less agonising over whether it is time to get rid of something or wait until it comes back in style, and zero guilt for trying a new statement top that I may never wear again. Now that I'm pregnant, I have an even deeper adoration for RTR, as I try different maternity clothes on my ever-changing body without worrying about buying things that I'll only wear for a few more months. I've enjoyed about two beautiful years with RTR unlimited, and I look forward to many more' (R, -, 5 stars, everyday, RTR testimonials).</p>	<p>RTR testimonials</p>	<p>Identity relevance of a good</p>	<p>Self-investment</p>	<p>Temporary extended self</p>	<p>ABC gives users flexibility with a feeling of ownership, especially for fashion items because this feeling is reached when consumers feel comfortable with the clothes and these match their ideal identity. For example, users might have different preferences in the context of accessing versus owning.</p> <p>Many users show attachment to different styles that they do not normally buy, giving them feelings of ownership over different fashion items and opening them to new styles.</p> <p>How do users use RTR to change their look? Does RTR help users to explore new styles? Why don't they rely on bought items to change styles?</p>

