

# The *Cinderella* moment: Exploring consumers' motivations to engage with renting as collaborative luxury consumption mode

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## Abstract

Past literature argued that the purchase of luxury goods is driven by people's motivation to conform or fit into our economic and social system. In this study, the authors focus on a new aspect of consumption, that is, renting instead of purchasing luxury goods, backed by the emerging opportunities of sharing economy platforms. Drawing upon the analysis of spontaneous consumers' online communications (in the form of tweets), this study aims to investigate the motivations to engage with luxury garment renting within a collaborative consumption context. To this end, a series of automatic content analyses, via two studies, were conducted using the tweets posted with respect to the *Run the Runway* collaborative consumption platform. Results demonstrate consumers' increased willingness to show their social status through renting rather than owning luxurious apparel based on five main motivators (need to wear new clothes for a special event, inspirations created by the products/brands, possibility to explore a new way of consuming luxury goods, need to make more sustainable choices, and to increase the life cycle of each luxury product). The implications of these findings are discussed, while they pave the way for future research in collaborative consumption of luxury retailing.

## KEYWORDS

collaborative consumption, consumer behavior, luxury retailing, sharing economy, status consumption, textual data, Twitter

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 | We can't always afford our clothes, but are always expected to look the part

This is a tweet dated November 15, 2018, indicating the importance of sharing and collaborative consumption (SCC) services for an American woman who cannot afford to cover her needs in professional clothing via purchasing. This kind of service offers an alternative to traditional apparel purchasing and ownership—acquisition and consumption of clothing in services marketing terminology—for delivering the core proposition. This is an increasing worldwide trend. For instance, Reuters (2018) predicted a global online clothing rental

marketing increase of 10% by the end of 2023, while North America dominates the overall market and is expected to achieve a yearly growth rate of 3.7%, followed by Asia Pacific and then the other regional markets. Thus, instead of spending money to own things—in this case apparel—consumers may access goods for a limited time and pay for the experience of temporarily accessing their favorite goods through sharing platforms. As a result, the same garment would be worn or “shared” many times during its lifetime by many different consumers, producing important social and environmental implications for the human and wider ecosystems. This sharing process may positively contribute to counterbalancing the huge consequences emerging from fast fashion and related mass marketing activities.

Literature has already shown a great deal of research in sharing economy services through peer-to-peer communities (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Netter, Pedersen, & Lüdeke-Freund, 2019), while transportation (Uber) and accommodation (Airbnb) sharing has emerged as the main debated topic in the current sharing economy setting. In this vein, previous studies exemplify the concept of “access-based consumption” defined “as transactions that can be market mediated, but where no transfer of ownership takes place” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Scholars also postulate that there is an increasing tendency among consumers to engage with nonownership approaches to consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Yuan & Shen, 2019). Indeed, as consumers are better educated, more sophisticated, and regularly seek variety, they prefer attending events and gain experiences rather than purchasing products (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Consequently, the consumption experience centers on the usage rather than ownership of goods. It seems that short-term access to goods via online platforms is boosted by: (a) the growing demand for premium products, (b) the decreasing purchasing power of middle and working-class individuals, especially in the western world, (c) a desire to consume experiences, instead of goods, especially among the younger generations, and (d) an increasing awareness of the environmental problems and the need to build a sustainable future for the generations to come (Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Stylos & Vassiliadis, 2015).

There are various types of sharing economy, which are generally classified as the access economy, platform economy, and community-based economy (Acquier, Daudigeos, & Pinkse, 2017). Each one of them differs in aim and potential benefits sought. Specifically, in the fashion industry, some notable examples are: *SwapStyle*, which is used by people to swap fashion items globally; *threadUp*, which focuses on reselling kids wear; and *Rent the Runway* (RTR), the most successful sharing economy enterprise in fashion, which provide consumers temporary access to the garments, thus promoting access instead of ownership (Acquier et al., 2017; Pedersen & Netter, 2015). Nonetheless, the majority of studies on the sharing economy has focused on transportation (i.e., Uber; Y. G. Kim, Woo, & Nam, 2018), and hospitality (i.e., Airbnb; Cheng & Foley, 2018; Wang & Jeong, 2018) or on the disruptive consequence of the sharing economy for marketing practice in general (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Yuan & Shen, 2019), while this topic has scarcely been investigated in fashion industry as part of the marketing and retailing literature (Pedersen & Netter, 2015; Perlaia, Duml, & Saebi, 2017). This indicates the need for further studies in this study area with respect to the luxury sector (Athwal, Wells, Carrigan, & Henninger, 2019).

Besides, the growing number of sharing clothing platforms (Reuters, 2018), the increasing abuse of return policy for products (Ulku & Gurler, 2018), and the expansion of the secondary clothing market (Xu, Chen, Burman, & Zhao, 2014) are dramatically affecting this industry in terms of consumption patterns. To this end, the aim of this study is to investigate consumers' motivation to rent luxury goods online within a collaborative consumption context. The research focuses on a specific case of SCC platforms, that is, RTR, devoted to luxury products to understand the antecedents

influencing consumers' engagement with alternative methods of luxury consumption. To do so, spontaneous customer messages were collected via Twitter.

This study makes important contributions to the area of SCC in the fashion and luxury industry. First, it highlights consumers' actual needs which impel them to engage with a fashion-related sharing economy platform, such as wearing new clothes for a special event, need to make more sustainable choices and to increase the life cycle of luxury each product. Second, it reveals consumers' motives in using a sharing economy platform within a fashion industry context, focusing on the inspirations created by the products/brands and the possibility to explore a new way of consuming luxury goods. Finally, it runs a novel research procedure based on tweets' content analysis to extract and refine outputs of improved predictive accuracy and applicability in the specific setting.

Overall, this study attempts to encapsulate consumers' perspectives of utilizing a sharing economy platform and extract useful conclusions with regard to the present and future of these applications. Theoretically, this study makes an important step forward in understanding consumer choice and motivation in fulfilling the need for a fitting outfit via a computational type of analysis of widely available consumers' tweets. From a practical viewpoint, it draws attention to the importance of extracting information about consumers' needs and underlying motivations directly from their own reviews, comments, and feedback on sharing economy applications. Thus, marketing managers may be able to formulate proper marketing strategies and tactics (e.g., creating bundles of services, online communications, and digital advertising) to improve the effectiveness of corresponding product offerings, as a result of capitalizing on consumers' spontaneous communication with others.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 | Motives for sharing versus owning

The latest advancements in information technology and online platforms have formulated an exciting digital environment, in which consumers seem to enjoy online sharing platforms and have a preference for accessing products instead of acquiring ownership of goods (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Matzler, Veider, & Kathan, 2015). Nevertheless, empirical studies on consumer motivation with respect to the engagement with sharing behavior and accessing products via relevant digital applications have not as yet led to clear conclusions so far. Some researchers suggest that consumers' interest in sharing economy applications in transportation and accommodation is mainly propelled by their desire to serve their own interests and increase the utility of available resources and equipment (e.g., Hwang & Griffiths, 2017; Sauv , Bernard, & Sloan, 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). Conversely, other scholars (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2012; Seegebarth, Peyer, Balderjahn, & Wiedmann, 2016) support that in the case of social and cultural events, prosocial values, such as voluntary simplicity,

explain effectively consumers' motivation to actively participate in the sharing economy. Hence, there are different motives that may prompt consumers to engage with sharing, depending on various individual and societal criteria, as well as the types of commodity/service sectors, indicating a variety of sharing consumers profiles and the need to further explore this area (Hellwig, Morhart, & Girardin, 2015).

A distinction has been made between two important types of individuals' goal setting—intrinsic and extrinsic (Truong, 2010). Intrinsic goals refer to pursuits that are personally rewarding, which are embodied in the three psychological satisfaction, that is, individuals' need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Reeve & Lee, 2019). On the contrary, extrinsic goals encompass desires and targets for money, fame, possession of luxury goods, and external appearances. Furthermore, two factors have been proposed as intrinsic motivators, that is, enjoyment and sustainability, while economic benefits as an extrinsic one (Hamari et al., 2016). A similar classification of the types of motivation to engage with sharing economy is offered in Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018), where motivators are classified as utilitarian/profit-driven and altruistic/community-driven ones. In the same study, Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018) postulate that even for those participants that are mainly driven by utilitarian motives, still online socializing, sustainable consumption, and altruistic behaviors via sharing economy platforms are highly valued. Interestingly, the literature suggests that any favorable developments and outcomes created as a result of intrinsic goals attainment provide individuals with more happiness

and a sense of fulfillment than those emerging by achieving extrinsic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 2001).

In this vein, self-determination theory (SDT) seems to offer an integrated approach to human motivation and personality, which highlights the importance of individuals' inner abilities for the development of their personality (Reeve, Ryan, & Deci, 2018). Moreover, a lot of published research that implemented SDT refers to a number of environmental factors that may facilitate or restrict self-motivation, social functioning, and personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2006), which are all key variables within a sharing economy platforms context (Böcker & Meelen, 2017). Table 1 summarizes past literature on the antecedents to engage in social sharing platforms following a motivation-based approach.

## 2.2 | Sharing economy

To date, sharing economy has rapidly grown as an economic, social, and technological phenomenon (Trenz, Frey, & Veit, 2018), which has dramatically changed the traditional concept of attachment and ownership that has been replaced by the idea of access, sharing, and collective usage (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Dellaert, 2019; H. Lee, Yang, & Koo, 2019; Milanova & Maas, 2017). In this context, consumers tend to distance themselves from ownership, as they may find functionality advantageous compared to the possession of goods and the exchange consumption experience more important to the permanent acquisition of tangible items (Chasin, von Hoffen,

**TABLE 1** Individual motivations, related theories, and methodologies in the published literature

Motivations to engage in SCC platforms	Relevant Industry	Methodology	Reference
Economic	Transportation, tourism	Quantitative, literature review	Barnes and Mattsson (2017); Böcker and Meelen (2017); Cherry and Pidgeon (2018); Guttentag, Smith, Potwarka, and Havitz (2018); Hawlitscheck, Teubner, and Gimpel (2018); Kathan, Matzler, and Veider (2016); K. Kim, Baek and Lee (2018); Lutz and Newlands (2018); Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018); Xie and Chen (2019)
Environmental (i.e., sustainability)	Transportation, food and drink, tourism, personal goods	Quantitative, literature review, qualitative	Barnes and Mattsson (2017); Bellotti et al. (2015); Böcker and Meelen (2017); Cherry and Pidgeon (2018); Hamari et al. (2016); Hawlitscheck et al. (2018); Kathan et al. (2016); Lutz and Newlands (2018)
Social (i.e., sense of belonging to a community; finding peers)	Food and drink, tourism, toy library, transportation	Quantitative, qualitative	Bellotti et al. (2015); Cherry and Pidgeon (2018); Hellwig et al. (2015); Ketter (2019); Ozanne and Ballantine (2010); Xie and Chen (2019); Zhu, So, and Hudson (2017)
Hedonic (i.e., enjoyment)	Transportation, personal goods	Quantitative	Barnes and Mattsson (2017); Hamari et al. (2016)
Self-congruence, trust	Transportation, tourism, delivery	Quantitative	Gleim, Johnson, and Lawson (2019); Z. W. Y. Lee, Chan, Balaji, and Chong (2018); Yang, Lee, Lee, and Koo (2019)

Abbreviation: SCC, sharing and collaborative consumption.

Cramer, & Matzner, 2018). Eckhardt et al. (2019, p. 7) explicitly defined sharing economy as “a scalable socioeconomic system that employs technology-enabled platforms to provide users with temporary access to tangible and intangible resources that may be crowdsourced,” while they identified the characteristics of the sharing economy as temporary access, transfer of economic value, platform mediation, expanded consumer role, crowdsources supply, reputation systems, and peer-to-peer exchanges. It has also been suggested that reputation systems and peer-to-peer exchanges are not distinct from sharing economy entities (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Nonetheless, some entities display all of these characteristics, such as *BlaBlaCar*, while others display only a few, like *ZipCar* (Eckhardt et al., 2019). In particular, while both *BlaBlaCar* and *ZipCar* are platforms allowing users to arrange for transportation, in the first case, users provide rides via their own cars (i.e., if going to a certain place and looking for other passengers through a formal economic transaction), whereas in the latter, they subscribe to the car access. However, all sharing economy offerings are temporarily accessed rather than permanently owned (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Thus, sharing economy leads to an increasing number of sharing services and related platforms (Benjaafar, Kong, Li, & Courcoubetis, 2019), which typically mediate the sharing activity to be scaled by efficiently matching providers and users (Perren & Kozinets, 2018).

Although recent literature on the sharing economy is mainly focused on the cases of Airbnb and Uber, these two platforms do not totally reflect the possibilities and diversity of the entire domain. For instance, other sharing platforms offer specific services for looking after dogs during vacations (i.e., *DogVacay*), sharing bikes (i.e., *BikeMi*, *Spinlister*, etc.), sharing home Wi-Fi network (i.e., *Fon*), and so on. More recently, there has been an increasing number of sharing platforms in the fashion industry.

### 2.2.1 | Different types of sharing and relevant business models

During the last few years, the discussion around sharing versus possessing goods has significantly evolved, in light of the latest technological advancements and the relevant opportunities offered. SCC have been propelled by the recent hardware and software advances that moved the collaborative exchange practices online via sophisticated digital platforms (Dowling, Maalsen, & Kent, 2018). Meanwhile, recent developments have led to a debate regarding the truthfulness of some sharing economy models, as some scholars do not accept any collaborative consumption forms that involve reciprocity in the relevant exchanges (Belk, 2014).

The emergence of these new services leads to the development of new business models based on the access rather than possession, where the firms act as fundamental intermediaries in the peer-to-peer market (Razeghian & Weber, 2019). Specifically, the sharing platforms allow consumers to pay for access to product functionalities and product experience over permanent ownership

of the product (possession; Hellwig et al., 2015; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010).

In general, there are two large groups of scholars who take quite distanced positions with regard to the breadth of the notion of the sharing economy and what types of activities this should actually cover. The first group of scholars postulates that only swapping and consigning should be considered as sharing activities and in situations where individuals grant each other access to underutilized goods. The second support wider use of the sharing economy concept to include business-to-consumer rental, peer-to-peer flat systems selling, market-driven transactions, for-profit and non-profit initiatives, peer production, and peer-to-peer selling (Acquier et al., 2017). As both schools of thought are credited with some very convincing arguments, it has been suggested that there is no reason to choose one approach over the other, but rather be explicit on the form of sharing/collaborative consumption mode is investigated and practiced (Schor & Cansoy, 2019).

Besides, it is important to map first the foundational areas of the sharing economy context to then classify the corresponding business models available to the consumers. Acquier et al. (2017) posit that the three areas that demonstrate the sharing economy at large are: (a) access economy, (b) platform economy, and (c) community-based economy, which form a set diagram with four possible logical relations between the three different areas/sets. The first one focuses on sharing underutilized products, the second one offers intermediation of decentralized exchanges between individuals through digital platforms, and the third offers management of noncontractual and nonmonetized forms of interactions. These three areas create three dual-set intersections which represent the following business initiatives; that is, access platforms, community-based platforms, and community-based access. Muñoz and Cohen (2018) offer a similar classification about generic sharing business models: (a) platform corporation model, which aims at a profit maximization; (b) a platform cooperative, which embraces a more distributed profit arrangement and sharing governance; and (c) hybrid sharing models, which combine elements in various mixtures from the first two platform types to create tailor-made combinations.

In a collaborative apparel consumption context, the previous conceptualization of sharing business areas are summarized under two major modes (Chen, 2009): (a) the utility-based nonownership, and (b) the redistributed ownership of apparel. Also, depending on the kind of relationship in collaborative consumption (i.e., consumer-product, consumer-consumer, consumer-business), some factors have been identified that serve as criteria for distinguishing between various sharing economy modes and also between collaborative consumption and traditional ownership at large. Time and product characteristics (e.g., price and perceived quality) are important factors in a consumer-product relationship; sociality in a consumer-consumer relationship; formality-institutionalization, position, and convenience in a consumer-business relationship. Thus, different aspects of each of these factors create four different collaborative consumption types for the apparel industry, that is, short-term renting and subscription-based renting (both come under

utility-based nonownership), as well as swapping and consignment (which come under the redistributed ownership).

Overall, the latest conceptualization of the sharing economy concept does not necessarily preclude alternative forms of collaborative consumption and, actually, the published literature provides wide support to the “umbrella” sharing economy concept, as the variety in business modeling is the result of the evolution of the sharing economy in the marketplace (Hamari et al., 2016). Although this may be regarded as a departure from the original values of the sharing economy concept, in essence, the contemporary collaborative business models represent extensions of the original concept due to the latest technological and managerial advancements.

## 2.2.2 | Clothing sharing platforms

The fashion industry has changed rapidly in the last few years, due to the high demand for new products that push the industry to reduce the time to launch new collections (Cook & Yurchisin, 2017), the opportunities and risks of the new technologies for the fashion industry (Pantano, Passavanti, Verteramo, & Priporas, 2018), and the increasing cost of returns (Yuan & Shen, 2019). For instance, there is a growing segment of consumers who need to obtain apparel just for a special occasion or/and for a specific business/professional purpose. In this case, garments may be regarded as an investment, since individuals' willingness to create the best possible impression may prompt them to turn to luxury brands which in many cases imply top quality, but also unaffordable price tags for middle- and working-class consumers (Watson & Yan, 2013). Indeed, party dresses have a relatively high return rate if compared to other apparel (Yuan & Shen, 2019). Nevertheless, collaborative forms of consumption would be more rewarding for consumers who are indifferent between owing and not owing (Yuan & Shen, 2019). Specifically, the American platform “RTR” is considered a typical example in this sense (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Other similar platforms are also emerging in Europe (such as the Italian *Drexcode* and *DressYouCan*, and the British *FrontRow* which are so far available only in the London area), due to a sort of social contagion phenomenon that pushes consumers to be more attentive to fashion sharing economy platforms (Na, Kang, & Jeong, 2019).

Hence, sharing economy applications may serve as a midway point to overcome the negative effects of either category of fashion products available in the marketplace and improve consumers' satisfaction (Johnson, Mun, & Chae, 2016). Accordingly, relevant collaborative consumption/e-commerce platforms promote an array of various forms of sharing instead of purchasing clothing, which may lead to affordability in product acquisition, consumer satisfaction, and greater utilization of resources—sustainability. Indeed, the demand for sustainable fashion sharing economy platforms means that a new direction in the fashion industry is emerging, implying that consumers make effective consumption decisions taking into account the related resources (i.e., raw materials, energy, impact on environment, etc.) and minimizing the waste in manufacturing the

specific garment (Na et al., 2019). For instance, this new consumption behavior of fashion would specifically reduce the carbon emissions from clothing manufacturing and the waste of unwanted goods (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Therefore, it would be interesting to check whether the sharing economy models and applications available online actually serve customers' contemporary needs and reveal their motivations to engage with sharing economy platforms within a fashion context.

Although past literature attempted to investigate how the emerging sharing platforms redefine the sense of possession in a wider collaborative consumption context (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Hellwig et al., 2015; H. Lee et al., 2019; Milanova & Maas, 2017; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010), in the case of luxury and luxury fashion products, the research is still at an early stage. Since luxury products demonstrate a certain status and a distinct attachment and product importance (Y. Kim, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010; Park & Armstrong, 2019), they require specific investigation. To this end, more studies on the deeper understanding of consumer motivations to join sharing-based practices and platforms have been encouraged (Davidson, Habibi, & Laroche, 2018; Dellaert, 2019; Lindblom, Lindblom, & Wechtler, 2018; Yuan & Shen, 2019).

## 3 | METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

### 3.1 | Context of study: RTR platform

In the US, fashion sharing is a well-established phenomenon, with several companies offering services, and with their main focus being luxury goods. In contrast, this trend is still at an early stage in Europe, with only a handful of companies operating in the sector, such as *FrontRow*, which was launched in 2016 in London as an invitation-only service.

In the current study, RTR online service has been selected as it is the most popular platform in luxury clothes and accessories rentals within a collaborative consumption context. It is a case of utility-based nonownership SCC mode, involving subscription-based renting in particular. The company was founded in 2009 by two Harvard Business School graduates, who initiated RTR as an entire e-commerce enterprise. It started with 100,000 subscribers and has recently reached 10 million customers, 50.7k followers on twitter, and 443.4k fans on Facebook, who may choose from circa 200,000+ items from RTR's wardrobe. Customers can rent a designer garment for a one-time rental of 4- or 8-day period for as low as 10% of the retail price through their traditional platform, called RTR reserve; or they may go with unlimited rentals via membership plans, which have been recently introduced to the online platform. Rental prices include services such as dry cleaning and apparel care.

Moreover, by means of their #RentReduceReuse sustainability movement, RTR implements a set of sustainable behavior initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint; they invest in high-quality designer clothing that is long-lasting, recycling of dry-cleaning bags, use of nonhazardous dry-cleaning solvents, and environmentally friendly



garment packaging. Therefore, RTR has emerged as a unique CSS platform that actively promotes and implements sustainable practices in the fashion industry (Rent the Runway, 2019).

### 3.2 | Data collection and procedure

The aim of this paper is to identify the motivations of using an SCC fashion-related platform through the analysis of spontaneous consumers' online communications in the form of tweets. To this end, the research employed automatic content analysis of the tweets that were found to include the hashtag “#RenttheRunway” (in other words, any post published by consumers online mentioning the name of the company on Twitter). Since many studies used traditional approaches, such as surveys, to understand consumers' motivation with relatively small sample sizes, the current study employs a data mining approach to collect data based on the content analysis of tweets. Recently published research has been increasingly utilizing Twitter as a source of data for consumer research, as this data emerge from the consumers' voluntary expression of interest and attitudes towards specific products and brands (Dindar & Yaman, 2018; Walasek, Bhatia, & Brown, 2018). In particular, content analysis allows for the frequency of certain concepts to be determined and is widely used to evaluate large amounts of online data communication via Twitter (Walasek et al., 2018).

In the current research, *Wolfram Mathematica* software has been employed for data collection. This tool supports data computation, mathematical modeling, and simulation, and has been recently attracting the attention of scholars in the field of marketing and consumer behavior (Pantano, Giglio, & Dennis, 2019). Specifically, the software can automatically download tweets through the “ServiceConnect” function, by using an automatic connection via Twitter API and importing the parameters as required. In this case, the name of the company was introduced as a hashtag—#RenttheRunway. Then, the software generated a database with the full text of the collected tweets and other metadata, such as user ID, to uniquely identify the author of each tweet, date of publication, language, and as forth. In the present study, we only focused on the tweets posted by unique users.

Subsequently, we used *WordStat<sup>TM</sup>* software, which supports the quantitative analysis of textual data (Pollach, 2011). This software allowed the analysis of tweets through automatic extraction of the most meaningful words and phrases, to identify the thematic structures via executing a word frequency matrix. Since the word frequency is generally not enough to understand the most meaningful concepts of a document (in the present case of multiple documents consisting of tweets), the software allowed further extraction of phrases, as the identification of idioms and themes recurrent in the text corpus. In other words, the software, based on machine learning algorithms, scanned the entire text corpus and identified the most frequent phrases (words association with a meaning included in the “categorization dictionary”). Since some words were rarer than others but equally more predictive, it was

necessary to weight them more heavily. Thus, if considering *tf* as the total frequency, and *idf* as *i* word in the document *d* (part of *D* total documents) frequency, formula (1) adjusts the infrequently occurrence of words as (Humphreys & Wang, 2018):

$$tf \cdot idf = [1 + \log(\text{number of occurrences of word in } d)] \times \log\left(\frac{\text{total number of documents in } D}{\text{number of documents containing } w}\right). \quad (1)$$

## 4 | RESULTS

### 4.1 | Elicitation of motivation: Study 1

In total, 1,334 tweets posted by unique Twitter accounts have been collected through *Wolfram Mathematica* between December 30, 2018 and January 13, 2019. By including consumers' opinion before and after New Year's Eve would help us to better understand the impact of company's service on consumers' satisfaction, resulting in more positive or negative opinions. All the collected tweets are in English. In this study, a *phrase* is regarded as the unit of analysis. The software extracted 934 phrases on the first analysis (phrases extraction), as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2 summarizes the word frequency and the percentage of cases in which the single word is displayed, taking into account the *tf-idf* per each word. Similarly, the weighting of each phrase is based on the assumptions that (a) the more often a particular term occurs in a text, the higher its representativeness of its content; and (b) the more text in which the term occurs, the less discriminating it is. To reduce the number of phrases to the most meaningful ones and avoid redundancy, we evaluate the similarities of phrases. To this end, *Wolfram Mathematica* software provides the function “distance,” which allows the identification of the similarities among phrases through a number/weight as the Levenshtein distance between strings, where the higher the number the greater the distance (Levenshtein, 1965)<sup>1</sup> Since the result is a matrix 934 × 934, Table 3 shows a part of the result, by including the evaluation of 13 phrases.

The same table (or matrix) can be represented through the matrix plot (MatrixPlot[ed]; Figure 1), where the darker the cell color (orange), the greater the distance between the words, whereas the lighter the color (light yellow), the smaller the between distance.

To this end, we called for the system to remove the phrases with the smallest distance, thus the resulting phrases do not include overlap. Second, we parameterized the system to consider only the phrases with minimum length of 3 (three words). Thus, from the initial set, the system provided a list of 14 phrases<sup>2</sup> (Table 4).

Few of these phrases express a similar concept with different words, thus we manually grouped these phrases into a set of categories that reflect the main motivators driving users to RTR goods

<sup>1</sup>Levenshtein distance between two words consists of the minimum number of single-character edits required to change one word into the other.

<sup>2</sup>Please note that the system automatically removes the emoticons and pictures associated with the tweets. Thus, they do not appear in our tables.

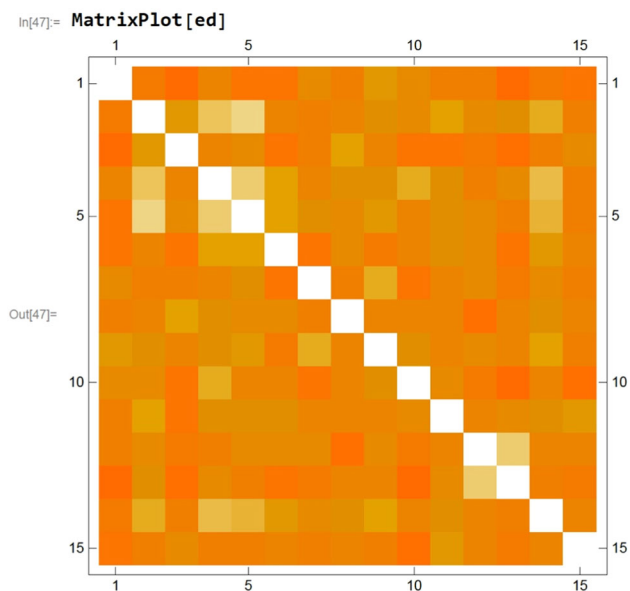
**TABLE 2** Part of the 934 most frequent phrases related to Twitter followers of RTR platform

Twitter followers' phrases	Frequency	No of cases	% Cases	TF-IDF
JENN RTR	292	288	6.32%	350.2
CUSTOMER SERVICE	235	231	5.07%	304.3
RENT THE RUNWAY	132	131	2.88%	203.5
DRESS IN TWO SIZES	102	102	2.24%	168.3

Abbreviations: RTR, Rent the Runway; TF-IDF, term frequency-inverse document frequency.

**TABLE 3** Part of the matrix showing the distance between phrases

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
2	0	23	18	15	26	27	26	24	25	22	25	24	21	27
3	23	0	26	25	29	27	22	26	29	29	28	30	27	25
4	18	26	0	17	22	26	24	24	21	24	27	25	19	27
5	15	25	17	0	22	24	25	23	26	24	25	27	20	27
6	26	29	22	22	0	29	25	28	26	24	25	29	23	26
7	27	27	26	24	29	0	27	21	29	26	25	28	25	27
8	26	22	24	25	25	27	0	26	26	26	30	26	24	26
9	24	26	24	23	28	21	26	0	24	26	25	26	22	27
10	25	29	21	26	26	29	26	24	0	25	28	31	26	30
11	22	29	24	24	24	26	26	26	25	0	26	25	24	23
12	25	28	27	25	25	25	30	25	28	26	0	17	26	26
13	24	30	25	27	29	28	26	26	31	25	17	0	27	28
14	21	27	19	20	23	25	24	22	26	24	26	27	0	26
15	27	25	27	27	26	27	26	27	30	23	26	28	26	0

**FIGURE 1** Graphical representation of the matrix plot showing the distances between the phrases [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

through the platform, corresponding to social, economic, and environmental motivations. Thus, five motivations emerged as: (a) the need to wear a garment for a special event (e.g., wedding, reception with family/friends, etc.), (b) the inspirations created by the products/brands which are shown on the platform, (c) the possibility to explore a new way of consuming luxury goods, as is the case of renting by occasion, (d) the need to make more sustainable (smarter) choices, and (e) the possibility to increase the life cycle of luxury each product (Table 5).

## 4.2 | Confirmation of motivations: Study 2

As suggested in previously published research on spontaneous consumers' communications via social media (Peng, Cui, Chung, & Li, 2019; Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai, & Zhang, 2019), a second study referring to a different period of time would be needed to ratify the outcomes of the first study. Thus, Study 2 has been conducted to test the robustness and generalizability of the results in Study 1. To this end, we collected 4,556 tweets from unique Twitter users between May 10 and June 9, 2019 through *Wolfram Mathematica* software following the same approach as in Study 1. Following Klostermann, Plumeyer, Boger, and Decker (2018), we created a lexicon consisting of the five motivations that emerged in Study 1, emerging from reading and coding the text. In particular, the researchers selected a random subsample from the sum of the tweets to create specific categories using the inductive method. In this way, the Lexicon was used to calculate the frequency of certain words in each tweet of the new dataset as a feature. To evaluate the validity of the lexicon, we used human coders, and hence the lexicon was circulated among three researchers who were unfamiliar with the study purpose; they were specifically instructed to evaluate the words included in the lexicon per each defined motivation. The words that were finally included were only the ones for which there was a match between the evaluations of at least two out of three researchers (Humphreys & Wang, 2018; Table 6).

In Study 2, a stratified random sampling has been adopted to ensure that the motivation categories are reflected consistently across the tweets' dataset, by considering 10–20% of the corpus for qualitative dictionary development (Humphreys, 2010). In this case, 547 tweets (12% of the total number of tweets) have been considered. Thus, the words of the emerging dictionary replace the “similar” words with one word.

The system considered the new database to be analyzed through the lexicon, by first identifying the presence of the word in each tweet; and then assigning the value 1, if the word was included in a certain tweet, and 0 otherwise. Subsequently, the system counted each word from the lexicon appearing in new tweets, with the constraint that each word from the corresponding phrase (category) may appear only once. The results demonstrated that all motivations identified also appear in the new set of tweets with similar (although slightly higher) rates, as:

**TABLE 4** The most frequent phrases related to Twitter followers using the RTR platform

Twitter followers' phrases	Frequency	% Cases	TF-IDF
DESTINATION TO END ALL REAL WEDDINGS	94	7.05%	108.3
INCLUDING A FAMILY CENTRIC SETTING	94	7.05%	108.3
INSPIRED BY THE BRANDS	94	7.05%	108.3
END OF OWNERSHIP	49	3.67%	70.3
LIFESPAN OF THE FASHION PRODUCT	48	3.60%	69.3
PRODUCT IS BECOMING MORE ELASTIC	48	3.60%	69.3
ADDING BENEFITS FOR THIS SEGMENT	47	3.52%	68.3
CENTRIC SETTING TO A RECEPTION	47	3.52%	68.3
RECEPTION PUT TOGETHER BY FRIENDS	47	3.52%	68.3
TIME TO EXPLORE ADDING BENEFITS	47	3.52%	68.3
CARES ABOUT MAKING SMART CHOICES	10	0.75%	21.3
FAVORITE LOOKS I RENTED	3	0.22%	7.9
STARTED THE ONLINE CLOTHING SERVICE	3	0.22%	7.9

Abbreviation: RTR, Rent the Runway.

- (i) the various needs to wear a garment for a special event (e.g., wedding, reception with family/friends, etc.) demonstrate a 11.03% frequency value;
- (ii) the inspirations created by the products/brands which are shown on the platform have a 9.03% frequency value;
- (iii) the possibility to explore a new way of consuming luxury goods, that is, the case of renting by occasion, presents a 3.49% frequency value;
- (iv) the need to make more sustainable (smarter) choices shows a 1.32% frequency value;
- (v) the possibility to increase the life cycle of a luxury product has a 3.65% frequency value.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The SCC apps phenomenon has created a new business environment with new business models mushrooming in various economic sectors and managerial disciplines including retailing and marketing. It has also solicited new challenges that marketing scholars and practitioners need to face to harness the rising opportunities. The breakthroughs emerging in this domain are mainly related to shifting from ownership/possession to sharing/collaborative consumption.

The current research explored the impact of the new clothing sharing platforms in fashion marketing, with an emphasis on the luxury sector. It delineates the phenomenon under a consumer behavior perspective, with the aim of identifying the key motivators of consumers' engagement in collaborative consumption and related platforms. To this end, the present paper collected and analyzed large volumes of spontaneous online communication on Twitter. In particular, Study 1 demonstrated the motivations to rent luxury goods as both utilitarian and hedonic, utilitarian and

altruistic: (a) the desire to wear formal garments in order show more presentable while attending special events, (b) the willingness to explore new forms of luxury goods consumption, for example, renting by occasion, (c) the aspiration to make more sustainable (in this sense smarter) consumer choices, (d) the willingness to support the extension of product life cycle in the luxury category of goods, and (e) the inspiration emerging from the fashionable luxury items recommended on the platform (see Figure 2). The second study corroborated these results with a different set of tweets collected independently. These findings clearly demonstrated the motivations and extent to which consumers are willing to take part in the sharing economy and relevant platforms, adopting a utility-based nonownership model (Park & Armstrong, 2017), supporting the shift from ownership to access, which appears as a key function of the sharing economy (Acquier et al., 2017; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014; Hamari et al., 2016; H. Lee et al., 2019; Matzler et al., 2015; Milanova & Maas, 2017). These findings also confirm the higher value placed on experiences as opposed to traditional consumption (Nelson, 2013).

RTR provides a new consumption experience based on renting items by gaining access to the RTR platform on a fee-based arrangement (consuming collaboratively), rather than owing. Our study confirms this trend, which has also been noted in other high involvement/luxury products indicating declines in car and home ownership (Fry, 2013). Similarly, other research studies show that SCC clothing platforms are very popular among luxury apparel enthusiasts as they offer ease of use and relieve users of the burden and potential risk of ownership (e.g., Habibi, Kim, & Laroche, 2016; Netter & Pedersen, 2019). Past studies also demonstrated that this kind of product consumption is impacted by the sense of ownership and perceived risk involved that can be mediated by consumers' involvement with the apparel product and emotional attachment to apparel (Barnes & Mattsson, 2017; Park & Armstrong, 2019).



**TABLE 5** Motivations emerging from the phrases (including description and indicative quotes)

Motivation	Phrases	Description	Indicative quotes
Desire to wear formal garments to attend special events, such as a wedding or reception (social benefits)	END ALL REAL WEDDINGS	Each wedding celebration should include a dress rented through RenttheRunway for each family member	"EXCITED! I'll have a new dress in hand before my event of tomorrow. Destination wedding I'm coming!"
	INCLUDING A FAMILY CENTRIC SETTING	The family should organize the proper party with all the friends and rent the dress (instead of buying)	"Ready for my family-centric reception with my new dress"
	CENTRIC SETTING TO A RECEPTION	Rent the Runway allows organizing reception by ensuring the best outfit for the event	"My new dress for the reception. I love it"
	RECEPTION PUT TOGETHER BY FRIENDS	Each organized reception is an event for friends, the platform allows avoiding the stress involved in the need to buy something to wear ad hoc	"I have a reception with friends. Thanks to #RTR who saved my life"
Inspiration emerging from the brands recommended on the platform (personal interest)	INSPIRED BY THE BRANDS	The choice of renting a certain dress was based on the inspiration provided by the brands listed in the platform (Rent the Runway)	"I've been inspired by the brands in the list. This is the result" "I didn't know what, by I found the inspiration on #RTR!"
Disengagement from owning luxury items, and engagement with new forms of luxury goods consumption (economic and environmental benefits)	END OF OWNERSHIP	Rent the Runway allows to wear what consumers' want without effectively own	"Renting, no more own! This is the end of buying luxury"
	STARTED THE ONLINE CLOTHING SERVICE	Consumers advises friends that they successfully started using the system (and are enthusiast of the result)	"My closet when I started the service. My closet now" "I started with #RTR 1 year ago and I never stopped"
	ADDING BENEFITS FOR THIS SEGMENT	Consumers with more limited financial resources can now afford to wear luxury products	"I feel more benefits in renting than buying"
Willingness to support the extension of product life cycle (environmental benefits)	LIFESPAN OF THE FASHION PRODUCT	Some fashion products are worn just once and then thrown away. Renting the products allows increasing the lifespan of the fashion products increases because the consumer is able to wear the product once and then give to another one who will wear again	"Lifespan of fashion product is becoming longer" "Longer live to luxury products"
	PRODUCT IS BECOMING MORE ELASTIC	Product can be rented to wear just when needed	"Life of product is becoming more elastic. I love this"
Aspiration to make more sustainable and overall smarter consumer choices (environmental and economic benefits)	CARES ABOUT MAKING MORE SUSTAINABLE CHOICES	The rental system allows consumers to make more sustainable choices	"I care about making smart choices" "Renting (not buying) is a smart choice"
	TIME TO EXPLORE ADDING BENEFITS	Companies should follow the example of Run the Runway and consider the segment of consumers who would like to wear luxury clothes but they cannot afford	"All brands should provide the option to rent" "Why purchase only? We also want rent only!"

Furthermore, SCC platforms contribute to affordable choices, as renting luxury goods for one occasion gives the possibility to demonstrate a certain social status without the cost of possessing the specific products, allowing the usage of an even wider range of luxury products. Indeed, the access of SCC platform users to a wide range of fashionable luxurious garments at a lower cost compared to

actual purchase/ownership has been empirically ratified as a strong motive in various studies (Hamari et al., 2016; Lang & Armstrong, 2018). In this case, RTR users do have more choice, they get inspired by the brands they were always dreaming of and feel that their financial standing does not prevent them from wearing even the most expensive garments. Yet the current research unveils individuals'

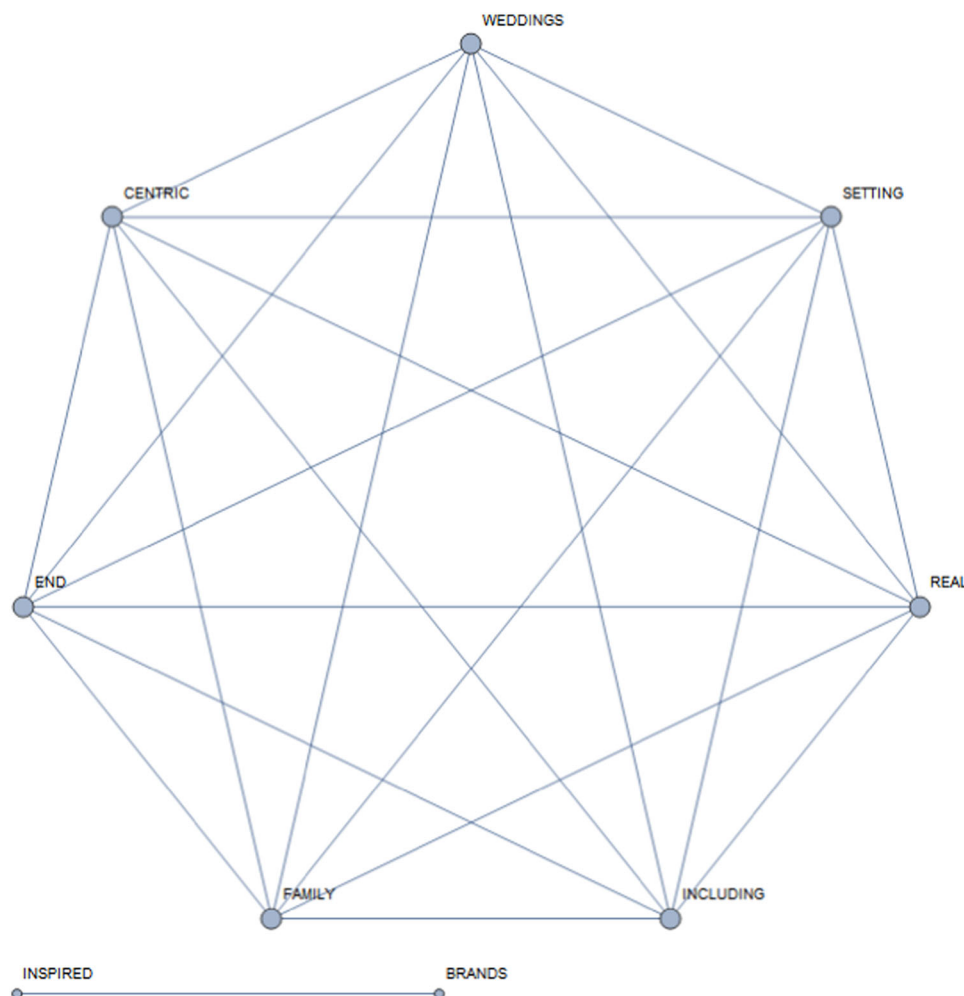
**TABLE 6** Lexicon developed for the confirmatory analysis

Motivations	Lexicon
The desire to wear a garment for a special event, for example, wedding	Wedding, occasion, event, trip, night out, party, vacation, holiday, picture day, visit, fly, mother day, birthday, date, cocktail
The inspiration created by the products recommended on the platform	Inspired, inspiration, suggestion, recommendation, discover, discovering, brand offer, advice
Disengaging from owning luxury items, and rather engaging with new forms of luxury goods consumption	New way, consuming, consumption, renting, exploration, sharing, rental
The aspiration to make more sustainable (smarter) choices	Sustainable, sustainability, smart, smarter, climate action, eco friendly
The willingness to support the extension of product life cycle	Lifespan, lifecycle, life, longer, long, lifetime, durable, reusable

motivations to engage with a particular type of collaborative consumption by implementing a novel methodology of automatic content analysis for consumer research.

Drawing upon Chen's (2009) multilevel consumption framework, our findings provide additional explanations to the clothing sharing economy phenomenon such as the desire to make more sustainable choices in the consumption of apparel (i.e., renting products would increase the lifespan of clothes). This is in accordance with Niinimäki and Hassi (2011) who found out that consumers—especially the

young generations—are very much concerned about the environmental impact and ethical aspect of frequent replacement of wardrobe items and the associated increasing textile waste, and they are interested to engage with behavioral patterns that mitigate this negative impact. Our findings reveal users' willingness to make further use of luxury items via renting, which contributes to extending their product lifetime. This outcome responds to a previous call for studies on consumers' engagement in sustainable luxury consumption (Athwal et al., 2019).

**FIGURE 2** Graphs of co-occurrences, where each word co-occurred at least 90 times [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.21345)]

Indeed, RTR further represents a new access economy model providing sustainable solutions by offering a more intensive usage of products (Acquier et al., 2017). In other words, this alternative model of clothing consumption would potentially make the fashion industry more sustainable (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Na et al., 2019). Accordingly, this is one of consumers' emergent motivations, founded on the need to make more sustainable (smarter) choices, and as a result of the prospect of increasing the life of each luxury product.

## 6 | CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study of consumers' needs, motivations, and antecedents of decision making in relation to the business models and new media communications that have been recently introduced within the sharing economy context are crucial for understanding their expectations, attitudes and future behavioral aspects (Pera & Viglia, 2016). The present study scrutinized consumers'/sharing platform users' motivations to engage with a popular e-commerce platform of the fashion industry, and some very interesting insights were extracted that clarify their motivations—based on certain needs and occasions—which make the RTR platform an attractive alternative to purchasing apparel.

The extraction of the five motivations from the analysis of individuals' spontaneous communications who engage with SCC luxury clothing platforms shows the high importance consumers place on the environmental impact of their choices in addition to branding aspirations. These also refer to the rental practice through RTR as a means to make more sustainable choices. They also demonstrate a greater level of affordability of luxury apparel achieved through SCC platforms, occurring through the usage of luxury clothing and accessories (as the one available on the platform), rather than the ownership of these products. Indeed, the unaffordable price tags for middle- and working-class consumers (Watson & Yan, 2013) become now much more affordable for larger segments of the population. Similar outcomes have been found in other sharing economy research fields such as accommodation (Cheng, 2016; Lutz & Newlands, 2018).

Furthermore, in line with the relationship between the demand for nonownership services and the low importance of possession (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010), consumers involved in this study show that having access to luxury goods works well for them as they can now afford to wear luxury items that would not be able to possess. Indeed, this study exemplifies a new type of sharing, where consumers do not share personal (luxury) belongings, but only the access to the specific (chosen) goods, which goes beyond the forms of types of sharing proposed by Hellwig et al. (2015), who referred to the sharing/swapping of personal belongings rather than the access through renting. Thus, consumers accessing RTR services establish new kinds of relationship experiences with luxury apparel, thus reducing the need to possess where it is possible to share without owning.

Our study further extends past studies with respect to redefining emerging sharing platforms and challenging the traditional standard of goods possession (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Hellwig et al., 2015; H. Lee et al., 2019; Milanova & Maas, 2017; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010); this study was conducted with empirical evidence originating from the luxury industry and luxury fashion products in particular. The relevant analyses suggested that there are potentially more aspects of sharing economy practices that should be considered to shape a full view of the relevant business applications and their relevant effectiveness. Further study of transmedia techniques including digital storytelling could reveal additional aspects of how the sharing economy has been developing from a communications viewpoint (Pera & Viglia, 2016). In this context, online platform managers could inform their digital marketing strategy, formulate better SCC service propositions, and more effective marketing activities to ultimately strengthen the users' engagement with the relevant platforms and increase the revenue cycles.

As with all studies, this study has also some limitations that need to be reported. First, the study has drawn data from a specific social media (i.e., Twitter), regarding a particular type of sharing economy (i.e., rentals). Future studies could base their analyses on different types of platforms that would potentially offer different outputs. A comparative study could also be considered to analyze consumers' communications through various online platforms. Notwithstanding the emergence of luxury sharing platforms also in Europe, the present study refers to the US consumers only, thus new studies in other countries could potentially indicate different motivations between users of different origins, which may potentially identify cross-cultural relevant similarities or differences.

Also, our analysis was not able to measure the risk consumers might perceive in the adoption of this kind of service via the renting platform. The fact that this topic did not emerge spontaneously as an issue in their tweets does not mean that it is absent. Future studies could account for any risks considered by the consumers while using collaborative consumption applications.

Finally, the present research might represent a starting point for future investigation on the consumption behavior in the second-hand luxury sector. Although second-hand consumption is a global and emerging trend (Athwal et al., 2019; Parguel, Lunardo, & Benoit-Moreau, 2017), this aspect needs a more thorough investigation to further develop the concept of second-hand and sustainable luxury consumption towards the definition of new sustainable luxury retail practices.

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