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The Role of B2B and B2C Communications in Enabling Access Based Fashion Business Models
Karina McGowan, Eileen Conlan, Danielle Moran

In fashion, consumers and brands must work together to extend the product lifecycle by focusing on access as opposed to ownership-based models (Arrigo, 2021). Consumers are adapting their consumption practices in favour of circularity (Business of Fashion and McKinsey and Company, 2022). Mintel suggests that while one in 10 consumers have rented fashion items in the last year, there is scope for expansion (Mintel 2021). Over a third (34%) of young people, who are more accustomed to the sharing economy, are suggested to be interested in renting fashion items (Mintel 2020).

The interest in circular models has shifted not only consumer – brand power dynamics but in many ways reshapes the relationship between fashion brands and consumers (Ellen McCarthur Foundation, 2021). Fashion rental platforms have given rise to the platform economy in fashion (Brydges et al 2020) - businesses based on enabling value-creating interactions through an open, participative infrastructure (Parker et al, 2016). Many businesses have shifted from the ‘pipeline’ structure to the ‘platform’ structure where complex relationships emerge; producers, consumers, and the platform itself enter a variable set of relationships (Parker et al, 2016). To facilitate this shift and satisfy consumers, established brands, retailers and rental platforms are also developing new B2B relationships with businesses capable of helping them to fulfil their new circular business models. Partnering with a fashion rental/resale fulfilment specialist allows them to adopt a product-as- a-service model or product-service system (PSS). PSSs are suggested to be promising as value creation stems not only from tangible products, but also from intangible services (Khitous et al 2022). Within these systems it is suggested that focus may be on supplementing products with additional services such as repairs, or use-oriented PSSs, where the product remains central to the offer, but is kept under the provider's ownership such as fashion rental (Khitous et al 2022).

The authors of this paper are currently involved in a multi-stakeholder knowledge transfer partnership (KTP) with the UK's largest fashion rental and resale fulfilment centre. This short paper presents an initial research conceptualisation. The authors intend to explore the role of B2B and B2C communications in enabling access -based fashion business models focusing on some key questions that have emerged from within their current action research project. These include:

How should a combination of B2B and B2C communications be developed to best engage consumers in these models beyond the niche markets that are currently favourable?

How can B2B and B2C communications best be utilised to encourage fashion brands and retailers to adopt a product- as - a service model?

Given growing demands from consumers surrounding transparency, how can B2B and B2C communications be used by fashion rental and resale fulfilment specialists to better inform consumers regarding the sustainability of their processes?

How should the use of B2B and B2C communications be adapted by fashion brands and retailers within these new ‘access’ models to align with the relationship expectations of consumers?


Mintel (2020) Retailers partner with fashion rental disruptors, Accessed on February 03, 2022; available at: https://reports.mintel.com/display/1008630/?fromSearch=%3Ffreetext%3Dfashion%2520rental

Mintel (2021) Fashion and Sustainability- UK -2021; Accessed on January 03, 2022; Available at https://reports.mintel.com/display/1049485/?fromSearch=%3Ffreetext%3Dfashion%2520rental