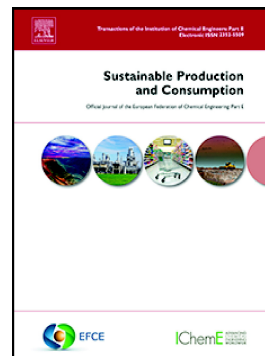


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Title: Understanding consumer lock-in mechanisms towards clothing libraries: A practice-based analysis coupled with the multi-level perspective

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Understanding consumer lock-in mechanisms towards clothing libraries: A practice-based analysis coupled with the Multi-level Perspective

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Abstract

Current consumer practices in clothing seem somewhat *locked in*: despite the presence of a collective awareness of the need to adopt more sustainable modes of consumption, the appeal of personal ownership still prevails. This may explain why alternatives to fast fashion like clothing libraries are struggling to recruit and retain consumers.

Drawing on an analytical framework coupling the Multi-level Perspective (MLP) and Social Practice Theory (SPT), the aim of this paper is to thoroughly depict the relative depth of different lock-ins currently preventing consumers from using clothing libraries and thereby broadening the thinking on their wider uptake.

This study draws upon the findings from a focus group with Belgian women concerning their current clothing consumption practices. Insights from the workshop shows how the MLP can reinforce SPT through revealing two distinct levels of lock-ins: shallow lock-ins which relate to the ingredients of the practice of individuals and deeper lock-ins which are linked to socio-cultural constructs. The results notably point to the importance of society's perception, price representation, the perception of oneself and the projection of a (better) self as shallow lock-ins. The findings also underline deeper lock-ins among which the purchase driven by desires (instead of needs), the pleasure of purchasing as a driver of clothing consumption and the projection of an achievement through the consumption of clothing.

Accordingly, it is only by considering and adapting to these lock-in mechanisms that clothing libraries will be able to enhance their attractiveness.

1. Introduction

In the clothing sector, the current production systems facilitated the development of fast fashion, a model that is intended to create and respond quickly to new fashion trends through the frequent update of the clothes available in stores (Zamani et al., 2017). This model tends to promote the rapid renewal of consumers' wardrobes (Buzzo and Abreu, 2019) even though the clothes could have been worn longer. In practice, while the worldwide clothing production has nearly doubled in the last 15 years, the intensity of clothing use has declined by nearly 40% (Johnson and Plepys, 2021). The fashion industry is considered to be the second most polluting industry according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (Villemain, 2019).

Studies on transition towards more sustainability (see in particular Smith et al., 2005; Stirling, 2011; Geels, 2011; Markard et al., 2012; Avelino et Wittmayer, 2016) have shown that new economic models can foster the kind of changes that are required in the clothing sector to make it

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more sustainable. Among these new economic models, clothing libraries are particularly innovative and promising: the consumer buys the use of a garment for a specific period of time. There are two main types of clothing libraries: clothing libraries offering clothing for a specific occasion such as evening gowns or suits and clothing libraries offering subscriptions for everyday clothes. Both type of clothing libraries are an implementation of Product Service System (PSS) in the textile sector. A PSS is "*a system consisting of tangible products and intangible services designed and combined so that they jointly are capable of fulfilling specific customer needs*" (Tukker, 2004, p. 246). More precisely, clothing libraries can be considered as use-oriented PSS (see also Borg et al., 2020) whereby access to the use of a product is sold instead of the good itself.

Since the ownership of the good remains with the company, the latter has a financial incentive - in addition to a sustainability or regulatory incentive where applicable - to improve the product's life cycle and make it the most efficient product possible so that it can serve many consumers (Stahel, 2006). By making goods available to more than one consumer, in space and/or time, this economic model intensifies the use of a same good, thus potentially contributing to a systemic dematerialization of the economic activity (Tukker, 2004; Borg et al., 2020).

However, PSS-related offers are not intrinsically more sustainable than conventional ones (see Roman et al, 2020; Kjaer et al., 2016; Mont, 2002). This is also true for clothing libraries (see especially Johnson and Plepys, 2021; Piontek et al., 2020; Sandin and Peters, 2018; Roos et al., 2017, Zamani et al., 2017). Moreover, clothing-related PSS can only be sustainable and foster transition if it is likely to involve enough consumers to induce systemic change. Thus, even if these new alternative models to fast fashion were sustainable, other difficulties arise from their current weak ability to recruit and retain consumers.

In Western societies, the number of consumers stating that they want to adopt more sustainable clothing consumption practices is increasing but this evolution is only partially translated into practice (Joshi and Rahman, 2017, Becker-Leifhold, 2018; Diddi and Yan, 2019). While some collective awareness of the impacts of our lifestyle exists, there is a real difficulty for individuals to translate their awareness of the direct and indirect effects of their consumption practices into concrete action (Young et al., 2010; Joshi and Rahman, 2017).

Although when it comes to PSS-related offers, this difficulty in translating an intention of more sustainability into concrete action might be partially explained by the additional effort required to bring it about (i.e. an increase of the mental burden), it more generally raises the issue of changing deeply anchored practices.

In contrast to other types of more sustainable clothing consumption (such as bartering, second hand or clothes designed more sustainably in circular chains), the consumption of clothes from PSS-related offers does indeed require deeper changes in consumption practices. For example, the purchase of second-hand clothing has been made easier in recent years, notably by the development of online platforms (Reike et al., 2022) or the marketing communication (Kovacs, 2021). These improvements are linked to specific supply-side obstacles, whereas the adoption of PSS-related offers requires overcoming not only supply-side obstacles, but also consumption-side obstacles: switching from purchase to purchase of use, losing of ownership, integrating of

pick-up and drop-off logistics, etc. These amounts to breaking from practices in this domain that seem well entrenched, and which could be qualified as somewhat *locked in*. This may show through the practice carrier displaying a reduced propensity to search and switch of practice due to routinization (Zauberman, 2003; Maréchal and Holzemer, 2018).

A significant number of papers have identified barriers and levers to consumer adoption and retention to PSS-related offers (Tunn et al., 2019). However, there is still a lack of studies on the reasons for the relative importance of barriers to consumer adoption (Tunn et al., 2020, 2021), on the causes of these locked-in current practices.

Bearing this in mind, there is a need for an in-depth study of the factors that contribute to the perpetuation of these practices and prevent them from changing. As the consumption of fast-fashioned clothes is indeed widespread in Western population (Volonté, 2019), it seems necessary to study it from the perspective of *social practices* (see Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Thornquist, 2018; Skjold, 2016; Nairn and Spotswood, 2015; Klepp and Bjerck 2014). Furthermore, there are “*few studies exploring why people would engage or not in practices that help slow and narrow material flows using this theoretical approach*” (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019, p. 280).

Accordingly, this paper draws on the coupling of the Multi-level Perspective (MLP) to the Social Practice Theory (SPT) to highlight two different levels of lock-ins: lock-ins requiring changes that can be made at the individual level and those that require a common evolution at the wider level of society. Exploring the issue of practice change required by clothing libraries is a stepping stone to demonstrate the necessity of identifying lock-ins mechanisms. To become more attractive, PSS-related offers must take those lock-ins mechanisms into account. With these elements in mind, the aim of this paper is to offer a reading grid of the lock-in mechanisms present in the current consumption practices in the clothing sector.

The clothing sector is particularly interesting in the study of consumption practices and their lock-in mechanisms since (1) it has a high environmental impact, (2) everyone consumes clothes and this consumption lies somewhat “in-between” (as it is neither daily like food consumption, nor punctual like the purchase of a car or a house) (3) it is a consumption with a high degree of expression of social status (Veblen, 1899).

This paper is structured as follows: the next section introduces the SPT and the MLP, respectively, describing their main features and the initial intuitions of contrasted levels of lock-in that emerge from their coupling. The methodology is then presented, followed by the description of field results. The paper closes with a discussion and a conclusion that lays out the implications of our results for improving consumer adoption of clothing libraries.

2. Theoretical approach

2.1. The Social Practice Theory

The Social Practice Theory (SPT) is one of the approaches that allows for the analysis and identification of factors determining consumption practices. The basic premise of this conceptual framework is that “*both social order and individuality result from practices*” (Schatzki, 1996, p.

13). It thus follows that, within this approach, it is at the level of practices - and not of the individual - that the social order is reproduced (Shove (2003, 2012, 2015; Warde 2014; Mylan 2015, Volonté, 2019).

A widely used definition of a practice is the one proposed in Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) where it is seen as *"a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, state of emotion and motivational knowledge"*.

SPT scholars then break down the spatially and temporally ordered practices into two notions: *practice as performance* and *practice as entity*. **Practice as performance** is implemented by practice carriers, who interpret and integrate this practice (Warde, 2005). It is performing and reproducing a practice that makes it meaningful to the practitioner. This social reproduction of practices *"guarantees a certain degree social stability since most individuals understand, know and accept, to some extent, the way practices must be performed to be socially convenient"* (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015, p. 229).

In the clothing sector, this practice as performance encompasses the wearing of clothes, the selection of clothes adapted to every life event. The way carriers of practice perform the practice, the way they dress according to the circumstances and their use of clothing depends much more on society-wide dress codes (and their own perception of those) than on whether they buy their clothes outright or buy their use from a clothing library. To attract consumers, clothing libraries should therefore at least offer the prospect of meeting dress codes as well or better than store-bought clothing can.

However, the purchase of clothes is only a tiny part of clothing-related practices. Implementing a practice usually requires using a set of various artifacts, elements, or ingredients (Røpke, 2009). This ensemble constitutes practice as entity. **Practice as entity** is composed of a set of interdependent, observable **ingredients**, that govern appropriate conduct within a given practice and confer a sense of entity to that same practice (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015).

Although generally similar, the categories of ingredients vary subtly among authors (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015). In a recent case study of clothing consumption practice, Camacho-Otero et al. (2019, p. 281) defined the three categories of ingredients as follows:

- *"Competencies and skills, refer to the knowledge required to operate the materials, perform the practice and evaluate the outcome. In the case of dressing, competence could refer to the knowledge about the size that fits oneself, the instructions for taking care of the garment, and the appropriate dress codes in specific social settings. »*
- *"Materials as the physical entities that are used when performing a practice such as clothes in dressing."*
- *"Meanings indicate the images the practice evokes for people, that is, "the social and symbolic significance" people give the practice. In dressing, specific types of garments could be associated with power positions or social occasions."*

However, these definitions of categories of ingredients apply to both fast fashion and clothing libraries. This categorization is therefore insufficient to highlight the blocking elements to move from one to the other.

This is partly because the empirical applications of the SPT to the clothing sector are still limited compared to what the approach has to offer. In 2005, Warde already highlighted this problem by showing that the SPT develops reflexively in a way that is disconnected from the field and that theoretical advances, particularly those related to the analysis of practice change, are not much used in empirical studies.

A quick glance over the SPT literature shows that this problem still holds true to some extent. More particularly, practice-based studies dealing with the consumption of clothes (see Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Skjold, 2016; Nairn and Spotswood, 2015; Klepp and Bjerck, 2014) seem to only resort to a partial use of the SPT as a method of field analysis. Despite citing seminal authors (such as Schatzki, Reckwitz, Shove, Panzar, Walker or Warde), these studies mostly rely on a broad understanding of the SPT building on the *practice as entity* construct. By neglecting the other conceptual elements of the SPT such as *practice as performance* or the idea of social order as origin and outcome of practices, the dynamic aspect is overlooked.

There exist conceptual contributions which make the SPT more suited for the analysis of effective practice change (see Pantzar and Shove, 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2011; Hargreaves et al., 2011; McMeekin and Southerton, 2012; Hargreaves, 2013; Busse et al., 2019; Little et al., 2019; Seyfang and Gilbert-Squires, 2012; Laakso et al., 2021). But it appears that those contributions are only marginally mobilized by authors subsequently using the SPT as an analytical framework. As a result, empirical analyses using the SPT consist of mere photographs without much processual elements. There is therefore a need to strengthen the analytical framework that is to be used for empirical analysis of clothing consumption.

One of the reflexive advances in this field lies in the *habitual practices*' framework, which allows to understand that there are lock-ins that prevent moving from one practice to another. Consumption practices become habitual practices through the force of *routinization* which render them more difficult to change (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015). Accordingly, the categories of ingredients (i.e. the network of doings and sayings that make up a practice as entity, as defined by Schatzki, 1996) will be borrowed and adapted from this framework. In the remaining of the text, the categories of ingredients will thus be the following: social interactions, material context, and attached meanings. In line with the very idea of habituality, this is complemented with a focus on routinization processes and temporalities (see also Southerton et al., 2012).

The habitual practices approach thus allows us to understand that lock-ins exist as a consequence of the routinization of intertwined ingredients of practice as entity. This entanglement constitutes the lock-ins that prevent the practice carriers from moving from fast fashion consumption to more sustainable consumption practices. A fine understanding of these lock-in mechanisms can also reveal some *grips*. These are forms of constraints on which habits depend and that represent the level to which each ingredient is entrenched in consumption practices (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2018). For example, carriers' clothing practices may be conditioned by their work

(company-specific dress code) or by the place where they live (in the country or in the city, clothing consumption diverges according to the accessibility of stores). The activation of these grips (after a moving, a change of profession, an illness, a modified morning routine, the purchase of a new device, ...) can potentially modify established processes, break routines, and introduce a new linkage – entanglement – of practice ingredients. By being activated, these grips thus become potential leverage points for changing practices. As Røpke (2009, p. 2494) said “*practice innovation is about making new links between existing or new elements*”.

Though, it seems that there are other lock-in mechanisms linked to performing the practice. For instance, in the clothing sector, it is just as possible to perform a practice, to meet a dress code or to express social status (Veblen, 1899) with fast fashion clothes as with second-hand clothes or clothes from clothing libraries. Even if some ingredients of the practices change as a result of a shift from fast fashion consumption to clothing library consumption, the social order represented by the dress codes and the capacity of expression of a social status remain unchanged.

There thus appears to be two distinct categories of lock-ins: *shallow lock-ins* which relate to the ingredients of the practices and *deep lock-ins* which are more related to social order. Obviously, these two categories are mutually connected, and their clear delimitation is difficult as will be shown in the analysis.

2.2. The MLP to approach deep lock-in mechanisms

Transition studies are centered on the major ruptures, the changes in the social order, which are the core of the deeper lock-in mechanisms. This is the case of the Multi-level Perspective (MLP), one of the approaches that allows to grasp part of the complexity of the changes necessary for transition. More precisely, the MLP explains transitions, how environmental innovations emerge and how they can replace, transform or reconfigure existing systems (Geels, 2011). It highlights how this transition develops within a so-called socio-technical system (Geels, 2011). Within this system, different elements of technical (use practices, accessible technologies...) and social (groups of actors, institutions, beliefs, rules...) nature are constantly interacting (Maréchal, 2012; see also Kölher et al., 2019; Merkard et al., 2020; Geels, 2020).

The MLP views transitions as non-linear processes resulting from the interaction of developments at three analytical levels (Geels, 2011): the *niches* - the locus of radical innovations -, the *socio-technical regime* - the locus of established practices and associated rules stabilizing existing systems - and the exogenous socio-technical *landscape* - the context that influences the dynamics of the niches and the socio-technical regime (Rip and Kemp, 1998 in Geels 2011). This landscape consists not only of the technical and material backdrop that sustains society, but also demographic trends, political ideologies, societal values, and macroeconomic patterns (Geels, 2011). Niche and socio-technical regime actors are not able to influence the socio-technical landscape in the short term due to the sheer weight of the factors that make it up. To explain transitions, the MLP emphasized the fact that changes conducive to a sustainable transition result from concomitant pressures from niches (environmental and social innovations) and the landscape (for example external factors such as global warming) on the dominant regime. External pressure from the landscape legitimizes certain niches in their

innovations, reinforces their potential for development and heightens pressure on the existing regime

This framework of analysis contextualizes the current supply of the clothing sector as a socio-technical construct resulting from the development of our modes of production, the result of a set of practices inscribed in a complex system that makes its modification difficult (Maréchal, 2012). Companies within that *socio-technical regime* have developed the phenomenon of fast fashion. This phenomenon arose as a result of the internationalization of the textile industry, competition wars and the subsequent price decline, the globalization of trade and logistics, etc. These are elements of the *socio-technical landscape*. To face the issue of fast fashion, some companies – the *niches* – have put radical innovations forward aiming to reduce the environmental impact of the production and consumption of clothing. These include clothing libraries.

However, the MLP approach has several flaws (see Geels 2011). Among these is its difficulty to take consumers into account (Shove, 2012; Stirling, 2011). Indeed, it focuses mainly on the most visible actors in innovation systems such as producers (Stirling, 2011). Therefore, it is not well suited to study in depth the lock-ins that are hidden behind established practices (rules of the socio-technical regime).

Nevertheless, the MLP does highlight that alternative practices (niches) are created in response to the established practices of fast fashion (socio-technical regime). These niches in turn, like the companies of the socio-technical regime, evolve in a socio-technical landscape that influences them.

2.3. Coupling the MLP with the SPT

It follows from the brief account exposed above that combining the SPT and the MLP could be fruitful in that these two analytical perspectives display different merits. The SPT allows for the in-depth analysis of a practice but does not necessarily make it possible to highlight the lock-ins linked to practice change. The MLP highlights that there are deeper and common lock-ins, those relating to the landscape. These deep lock-ins, unconscious for the carriers of practices and common to all practices of clothing's consumption whether they are sustainable or not, would prevent usual leverage points, (a change in price, communication around a new business model, marketing, more accessibility, etc.) from being the driving force behind the unlocking of a practice of fast fashion consumption.

Coupling the MLP with the SPT has been mentioned in few publications (Busse et al., 2019; Hargreaves et al., 2011 and 2013; Laakso et al., 2021; McMeekin and Southerton, 2012; Pantzar and Shove, 2006; Seyfang and Gilbert-Squires, 2019), but always by using the SPT to strengthen the MLP framework. The value of this coupling is indeed pointed to in the *Agenda for sustainability transitions research: State of the art and future directions* (Kölher et al., 2019). However, what is proposed in this paper is to show the value of a reverse coupling, that is one which strengthens a practice-based perspective through resorting to elements from the MLP.

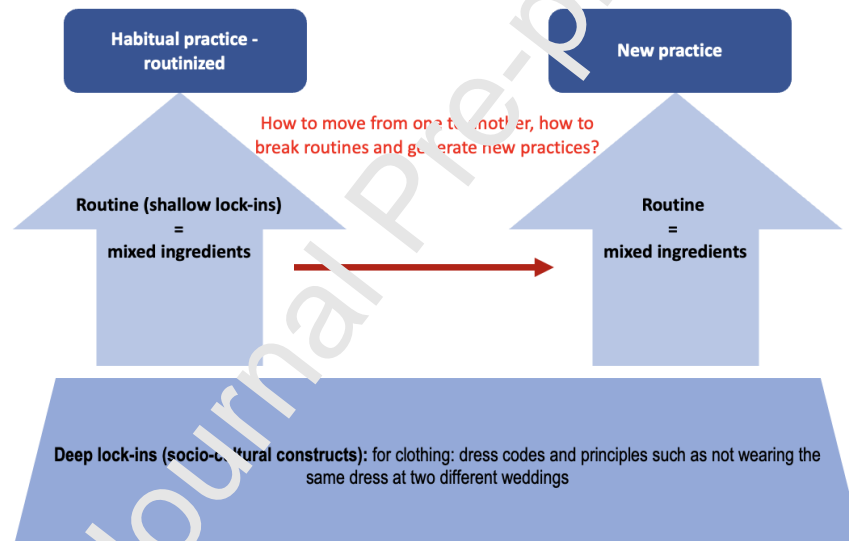
Indeed, the MLP sheds light on the habitual practices approach. It enables us to understand that the consumption of clothing is deeply locked by the perpetuation of the social order. We call

these lock-ins linked to the social order *socio-cultural constructs*: they are not situated at the level of the carriers of practice but at the societal level, at the level of the landscape, and the way in which the carriers of practice respond to them depends on their culture. The deep lock-ins of practices are dependent on these socio-cultural constructs, the deconstruction of which requires a modification of norms, which is difficult to achieve in a very short term. In the clothing sector, these constructs are evidenced by dress codes – socially prescribed ways of dressing – or in the display of social status through clothing.

Thus, we identified two distinct levels of lock-ins: the entangled elements that routinize practices and those more systemic over which there is less grip, at least in the short term. These two levels of lock-ins can be described and represented as follows:

- **Ingredients mix level:** set of entangled ingredients of the practice, shallow lock-ins.
- **Socio-cultural constructs level:** all the elements over which the carrier of practice has no grip, deeper lock-ins. These elements exist independently of them, at the societal level.

Figure 1: visualization of the two levels of lock-in



3. Methodology for identifying deep and shallow lock-in mechanisms

3.1. Data collection

A qualitative methodology in the form of a workshop with 21 French-speaking Belgian women was set up and carried out in December 2020 to identify the ingredients of habitual practices as well as shallow and deep lock-in mechanisms. The session lasted 2.5 hours via videoconference and aimed at identifying the existing barriers to changes in clothing consumption practices. To encourage the participants to talk about their practices, we opened the session by asking them to recall their last clothing purchase and to recount their practice. We thus conducted the session in line with the unit of analysis of practice theory, which is situated on the practice and not the individual, the practice carriers (Shove, 2003, 2012, 2015).

The first part of the session was focused on identifying the ingredients, the mechanisms of final consumption (purchase) of clothing and what they address in terms of clothing needs. Participants were asked to retrace the steps of their last clothing purchase, the steps that led them from the emergence of the desire or need to the final purchase of the garment. They were given 8 minutes to individually draw or write down these steps. They then had 40 minutes, in 5 groups of either 4 or 5 women, to each present their steps and discuss together what led them to the purchase of a specific garment.

The second part of the session focused on the underlying reasons for buying clothes, the desires and needs that are met by the practice of buying, using and building a wardrobe. To do this, the participants were divided into groups of 3 and had 20 minutes to dig into the question of why they bought a piece of clothing. Each participant was prompted to answer the question "Why did you buy this garment?" Once she gave her answer, the other participants would ask her "why" or "why this answer". The process was repeated 5 times. Then the other two people in the group followed the same procedure. After this section, the 21 participants returned to the virtual plenary and shared what they had just experienced and discovered.

This collective qualitative methodology was chosen in order to characterize and understand the tacit aspects and unconscious influences of habitual practices. Indeed, the *confrontational* aspect of group methodologies allows for the emergence of elements, such as socio-cultural norms and constructs (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2018), that would not necessarily be grasped in the more traditional framework of individual interviews. Indeed, an "in-group" and "talk-based" method is "*a suitable research strategy for studying habitual practices in that they create new data on social conventions, meanings and various material and social influences*" (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2018, p. 23; Browne, 2015, p. 203). Moreover, this focus group was conceptualized and animated by professionals with the aim of bringing these unconscious influences to the forefront by setting up animations which directly approached the consumption of clothing and indirectly its unconscious basis.

3.2. Description of the participants

Women were recruited on social networks and through word of mouth. The panel of female consumers consisted of 11 women living in the 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region and 10 women living in Wallonia. These women were from all age groups. 4 women were between 18 and 25 years of age, 6 were between 25 and 35 years, 7 were between 36 and 45 years, 3 were between 46 and 55 years, and 1 woman was over 65 years of age. Regarding their income, we asked them to rate their income on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being very low and 10 very high. 4 women rated their income at 5 or 6 (middle income), 15 at 7 or 8 (high income) and 1 at 9 (very high income).

The literature highlights that beyond incentive mechanisms, there are key moments for change (Schäfer et al., 2012). These key moments can be linked to life moments (beginning of parenthood or moving) but also to temporary misalignments (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015 and 2018) such as acquiring new knowledge like learning to sew, a specific dress code imposed, making a mistake and staining all one's laundry, etc. By selecting consumers who are at different

stages of their lives, it may therefore be possible to compare their lock-ins/unlock-ins to changes in consumption practices and the impact of these life moments on them.

3.3. Analytical process

As the session was conducted virtually, we recorded all exchanges, both in groups and in subgroups. 6.5 hours of discussions were recorded (5 recordings of 40 minutes in sub-groups, then 5 recordings of 20 minutes in sub-groups plus 1.5 hours for the whole group). These recordings also include the opening statement, the closing thoughts, the breaks, the guidelines for the exercises, the time given to everyone to think about their answers and formulate them in the form of bullet points, etc. That is the reason why the transcript is just over 50 pages. This transcript was systematically coded, without any software other than word processing. The themes were created according to what could correspond to elements of shallow lock-ins – entangled ingredients of usual practices – and deeper lock-ins – socio-cultural rules and constructs.

It follows from this methodological account that the generated data and the ensuing results should be treated cautiously. The participants have a homogeneous socioeconomic and cultural profile as they belong to middle to high socio-economic class population groups. In addition, this workshop's groups were intended to explore the two levels of lock-ins and could therefore only be carried out in small groups to allow a long period of expression for each participant and group emulation. Altogether, this means that the results cannot be generalized to all segments of the population and that other studies should be undertaken to confirm or generalize the results of this paper.

4. Results

The following section lists different themes identified during the analysis of the session transcript that may be related to lock-ins preventing practice change. The themes that were identified are of two kinds. On the one hand, those related to the determining factors leading to a purchase and which encourage consumers to continue consuming fast fashion. They relate to the shallow lock-ins. On the other hand, the themes that characterize the elements of projection of the use that the consumers will have with the clothes that they buy. These latter themes reveal deeper lock-ins.

It is worth noting that while the animations were designed around these two distinct elements, the participants mixed the ingredients of the practices, the shallow lock-ins and the deep lock-ins in their answers. Indeed, when they talk about their consumption of clothing, the consumers mix the criteria for selecting a particular garment when making a purchase and the projection of the uses they aim to have with this garment (dressing for a wedding, a date, at work, etc.). The practices with which it is necessary to break are therefore located on two different levels: the consumption of fast fashion in itself and the socio-cultural constructs that push consumers to overflow their wardrobes with clothes.

Table 1: main themes within the different topics that are described by the participants

Ingredients mix level: shallow lock-ins	Category of ingredients: social interactions - Moment of sociability and influence of relatives and friends - Importance of society's perception	Category of ingredients: material context - Representation of what the price should be - Influence of the fast fashion's low prices - Garments' quality - Accessibility	Category of ingredients: attached meanings - Representation of oneself - Projection of a (better) self
Socio-cultural constructs level: deep lock-ins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase driven by desires - false awareness of one's practice - Satisfaction as a purchase driver - The projection of an achievement through the consumption of clothing 		

4.1. Themes related to the ingredients of usual practices

4.1.1. Social interactions: moment of sociability and influence of relatives

The purchase of clothing is often a moment of sociability, with family or friends. Various participants expressed the fact that they are influenced by their family and friends in their consumption choices and that they appreciate having their opinion before buying a piece of clothing. In addition, one participant said that she does not buy the same type of clothing depending on whether she is shopping with her mother or with friends. This influence can go further than the family circle or close friends and the consumer can be influenced by models or influencers.

« When I go shopping with my mom, I know she will buy me clothes that I want at any price, as long as they are of good quality. However, when I am alone with my boyfriend or close friends, I am often tempted to buy whatever I love, even though the garment is not ethical nor timeless. »

4.1.2. Social interactions: Importance of society's perception

The influence of society's perception – how we are perceived in the others' eyes – has an impact on clothing consumption practices. Participants expressed that on certain occasions, clothing offers a desirable aura to the wearer that it exudes confidence and well-being. They thus seek to attain the same level of confidence and well-being by replicating an outfit or copying a style of clothing.

This acknowledgment of the importance of society's perception, and the fact that being dressed fashionably can result in a positive perception by the people around them, encourages the participants to seek this positive perception and creates a perceived need to be dressed fashionably. This knowledge of the perception by others can lead to a need to be fashionable or to wear the latest novelty, which can go so far as to push the consumer to buy a garment for a single occasion.

« I was the type of person who would buy new clothes for a single party. Every New Year's Eve, I had to have a new outfit. I would do so for every event. Whenever there was a big party or a birthday, I had to find the new hip thing. »

« I always had a friend in mind who had a great pair of pants when I was younger, black and kind of mid-rise and when she danced it looked great and I definitely wanted it too. It looked great on her, and I felt like it gave her more grace when she danced. »

4.1.3. Material context: Representation of what the price should be

Price is often considered as one of the main elements related to a purchase decision. The SPT highlights that price is only one ingredient entangled among others (see Schatzki, 2002; Reckwitz, 2002 or Shove, 2003). The analysis of the workshop has the same outcome: consumers often weigh price against other ingredients of the practice such as the quality of the garment.

However, it also appears that consumers have their own representation of what a garment should be worth. This representation is subjective, it does not depend on tangible factors such as quality, brand or material used but is also based on a projection of their image wearing the garment, what it represents for them. For example, a consumer is ready to spend more for a pair of pants because they have difficulty in finding pants which best fit their morphology. Others unconsciously evaluated the price they think is right for a garment or rate the price according to the projected use of the garment: the same garment is not worth the same price, according to them, if they plan to wear it once or often, at work or during formal occasions.

« It's so hard for me to find pants that fit that I often pay a high price. »

« I sometimes think that "oh no, the price makes me uncomfortable" »

« We don't want to spend 300 euros for a dress that we are going to wear only once. For me, I think it's a bit too expensive for what we're going to do with it, for the use we'll have of it. »

« I have a job that makes my clothes very dirty and damaged, so I don't want to buy very expensive clothes to work and have them be worn out very quickly. »

4.1.4. Material context: Influence of the fast fashion's low prices

Consumers almost unanimously express that fast fashion lowering prices makes them want to consume more. Scientific studies (see Frizzo and Abreu, 2019; Sull and Turconi, 2008, among others) confirm this phenomenon: lower clothing prices lead to higher consumption. This also impacts the consumer's likelihood of adopting sustainable practices and use clothing libraries: it is difficult for consumers not to succumb to the temptation to give in to fast fashion because of its low price. Some consumers go as far as to not let themselves go to this kind of store to avoid being tempted.

Brands have understood the influence of prices on the other ingredients of the practice and use it with great efficacy especially during sales. Lowering prices changes the consumer's perception of a garment and unlocks entangled ingredients, leading them to increase their consumption of clothing.

« Talking about [a fast fashion store], when it opened, I swore to myself that I would never go, that I would never even see what was in that store because I think it's actually very tempting. If I go in there, there is no way I am not going to buy anything. »

« From the moment I receive a notification telling me that an item [pre-selected via a clothing sales application] is on sale, well... I'm not saying that I always buy it, but the fact that it's on sale is certainly an important factor. »

4.1.5. Material context: garments' quality

Another important ingredient of the material context is the quality of the garment. Consumers look at the quality of the garment but also at the material it is made of. Whether it is for

environmental reasons or for comfort reasons, for example to make sure that the material is not sweat inducing.

Some consumers do not care about the quality of the clothing they buy but are aware of this "quality" ingredient since they explicitly say that their clothes are not of good quality. However, they do have other criteria as to whether a garment is right for them.

« I never buy expensive shoes, top quality shoes. Yes, I feel good in them so once I find a good model, I buy different colors to match them. So, it's true that my boots are all the same brand but the color is different and I know I feel good in those shoes. »

In this quote, it appears that the felt quality, the feeling of the consumer is more important than the fact that it is recognized as being a quality garment by society (a big brand, expensive-feeling materials or a garment from a brand widely recognized for its quality).

This discrepancy between the expected quality of a garment and the one felt by consumers is present in another example: some consumers expressed that the general quality of clothes is lower today than it was in the past. This decrease in quality pushes them to rethink the quality/price ratio: a higher price does not necessarily mean a higher quality anymore.

« I find that the argument of paying more for a garment because it will last longer is no longer true for most brands. They all produce their clothes in the same workshops. What shocks me is the fact that French brands, for instance some lingerie brands, have kept the same prices and pretend that they have the same quality as before. They have kept the same prices while having their products made in Asia and decreasing their quality. In truth, they have just increased their profits. »

4.1.6. Material context: accessibility

Another ingredient of usual consumption practices is accessibility: are stores nearby, either in the physical world or online. Some consumers feel the need to touch the clothes so as to be able to personally rate their quality, to try the clothes on before buying them. In their case, having a store nearby will be more important and will have more weight among their entangled ingredients than for other consumers.

On the other hand, selling clothes online can also offer some advantages. Some consumers will have many articles of clothing delivered to them so as to try them on, keep the ones that fit and send back those that did not.

« I cannot fathom buying a garment without trying it on first. I hate buying clothes online, I always have to try on a lot of different clothes. Out of 10 clothes that I take with me to the fitting room, I am fine with having only one that fits. »

« I ordered clothes on [website of sale of clothes]. I treated myself and bought 5 dresses that I was able to try on at home. I ended up sending 3 of those back. »

4.1.7. Attached meanings: representation of oneself

In their consumption of clothes, consumers also pay attention to the style of the clothes, to the fact that they are right for their body type, to the fact that they enhance their appearance or fit certain dress codes. This is because clothes are a part of the representation that they have of themselves and that others have of them.

« I bought this dress because it made me look good, because it suited my body type. »

« I have a well-defined style and I'd better stick to it. When I work on instinct, it's always a disaster. »

« It was the dress code of the evening, to be chic, sexy, a little more formal than we are used to be, it was the perfect occasion to dress that way. »

4.1.8. Attached meanings: projection of a (better) self

Clothing consumption is also about the projection of the garment, the meaning it has and can bring to the consumer. Its role is broader than its primary function of dressing. It makes it possible to emphasize one's body and thus heighten the consumer's confidence.

« I never try on clothes. I choose my clothes by looking at what the mannequins in the store wear or the pictures in the catalogs. I chose this garment because I saw a picture of someone wearing it among autumn leaves and I found it very beautiful. »

4.2. Themes related to deep lock-ins

The themes presented in this section are linked to elements that condition clothing consumption, but which are not identified as ingredients according to the usual practices approach. These are the themes that we identified in the transcript as deep lock-ins, lock-ins that cannot easily be categorized by the SPT.

The lock-ins previously discussed can be unlocked by grips linked to the ingredients presented. For example, a consumer might move towards an alternative offer to fast fashion if this offer meets their criteria of value for money, the store is more accessible, or the clothes match their style. The lock-ins and grips are tangible and at the level of the practices' carriers.

The following themes relate to elements that make up lock-ins that are less tangible and that go beyond the scale of the individual, to socio-cultural constructs. To unlock them, grips on a societal scale must be put in action. The rupture point is thus located at another level and the identification of these lock-ins is all the more important to curb the overconsumption of clothing.

4.2.1. Purchase driven by desires - false awareness of one's practice

During the session, the consumers spoke a lot about the desires and needs related to their consumption of clothing. During the two hours-long discussion, "desire" was used 78 times and "need" 99 times. In addition to this high occurrence, it appears that consumers have trouble identifying whether they buy clothes out of need or desire. In other words, the necessity of these clothing purchases can be questioned.

Buying and wearing clothes has an anchor that goes beyond simple function of dressing oneself. Part of the explanation may come from the fact that consumerism and marketing train consumers to consume (see Illouz, 2019; Illouz and Cabanas, 2019). As mentioned above, wearing clothes also is driven by the issue of recognition in everyday life or at work. All these elements are factors that push consumers to buy clothes they do not necessarily need. But those are also more anchored elements contributing to lock in the practice change.

For some consumers, their desire to consume clothing has taken priority over their needs. So much so that their consumption has mostly become about satisfying their "*coup de coeur*" and no longer their need to dress.

« At the time, I told myself I didn't need the garment because I was in lockdown and I wasn't getting dressed anyway, but I felt the urge to send a message asking if it was still available. The saleswoman told me that it was available and that I could pick it up at her house on Thursday. On

Thursday she sent me a message to tell me she had to reschedule for the next week, and I felt frustrated. »

This differentiation between desire and need is difficult for the consumer and leads some of them to have a false awareness of their clothing practices. In a rather recurrent way, the analysis of the exchanges shows that there is an ambiguity in that certain consumers claim to seldom shop in an impulsive way whereas the only purchases they are able to speak about are made in an impulsive way.

For other consumers, this is illustrated by the fact that they report it being more difficult to find the clothes they need than making impulse purchases. It seems that their consumption practice is more measured when they have a real need than when they have a desire.

« I rarely go shopping impulsively, so it was quite impulsive that day. I didn't buy only this garment, unfortunately, so it cost me more than I planned. It was winter and it's true that I bought a lot of comfortable and warm clothes. »

« I had been looking for a black skirt for years. I am not easily satisfied with what I find but there, finally, I found the perfect skirt, which was in my size, which was not too expensive, I found that it had a good value for money, that I could wear as much in winter as in summer, that I could wear to go dancing, because I dance salsa and it was going to make a nice dance movement. It was perfect. »

4.2.2. Satisfaction as a purchase driver

Consumers also spoke 21 times about satisfaction during the session. Women consumers are conditioned by consumer society and marketing to think that buying products makes them happy (Illouz, 2019; Illouz and Cabanas, 2019). During the workshop, this notion of pleasure linked to the purchase of clothing was evoked.

« Sometimes when I overthink, I can't buy anything. Sometimes I force myself to say, no, go ahead, you can, treat yourself. »

« There were a lot of great things that are not at all sustainable fashion, but I just needed to treat myself. »

« Did I really need it...? But I thought it was beautiful and I wanted to please myself. »

Satisfaction and emotions could be classified as ingredients of practice as entity since they are characterized in the category of ingredients of "tele-emotional" structures by Schatzki (1996). However, in this case, it is not an emotion linked to a particular garment that is being discussed (unlike, for instance, buying a wedding dress to put on only once and keeping it to remember the emotions experienced while wearing it). The pleasure is linked to the consumption itself, independent of the garment. Consumers buy to experience well-being. According to Bengier Alaluf (2019), this may be explained because any act of purchase could be seen as an emotional promise of happiness related to novelty, because buying something new allows for a break from everyday life. And this is also true for other consumer goods. This shows that the pleasure linked to the purchase of a good has a more important place in the consumer's thinking than the ingredients identified in the SPT.

« We enjoyed ourselves, we said to ourselves, we are in lockdown, our expenses are down... So, I ended up buying two dresses that I have never worn. »

Also, this source of pleasure can be an offset for issues at work. Some consumers admit to visiting clothing sales sites during working hours to escape a stressful moment or out of boredom.

4.2.3. The projection of an achievement through the consumption of clothing

The habitual practice of consuming clothes is a source of pleasure. It is seen as a way to fulfill desires but also the opportunity to shine among one's peers. There is a strong belief that a nice outfit will make one feel more confident at an event or even at work. The practice of consuming clothing can be the beginning of a motivational boost. This can be observed in concrete situations such as the search for the perfect outfit to feel good at a work meeting or the search for the outfit that will make one feel good, especially if colleagues praise one's fashion sense.

This search for fulfilment can even be at the expense of comfort: feeling beautiful in one's outfit can be more important for some consumers than being comfortable.

« I know there are times when I'm walking down the halls at work and I've put on the outfit that I've been preparing, and I love it ... I feel strong like that. The icing on the cake is if someone makes a comment or acknowledges the effort that was made. That's a win. »

« I have evening tops that are not at all comfortable, itchy but it's ok, I figure it's just for the evening so I can make do. »

5. Discussion

This section is divided in two parts. The first subsection deals with shallow lock-ins related to the mix of ingredients of practices. The second subsection deals with deeper lock-ins, the socio-cultural constructs.

5.1. Shallow lock-ins

The analysis of the workshop allowed for the identification of the ingredients of the usual consumption practice. These ingredients represent the reasons given by the consumers to explain their consumption practice and can easily be linked to the ingredients' categories.

Mylan (2015) had already highlighted that these entanglements differ according to the type of practice, the analysis of the workshop shows that they also differ according to the practice carriers. When asked about their latest purchase, each consumer spontaneously cites one, two or three elements - among the ingredients - that pushed them to buy a garment. Each consumer is thus more sensitive to one or other of the elements. Thus, there are different entanglements of ingredients behind the practice of consuming clothing. These entanglements leading to the purchase are specific to each consumer and take the form of a semi-conscious *trade-off* between the different elements. Since ingredients are intimately related and intertwined, understanding specific consumption practices so as to unlock them involves understanding this entanglement (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015; Warde, 2005; Schatzki, 2002). However, most consumers have a low awareness of those elements driving their practice of clothing consumption.

This kind of trade-off, the entanglement between the reasons behind the purchase practice is not always based on perfectly rational processes (Maréchal and Holzemer, 2015). We can gather from the discussion that, in the purchase decision, the weight of the price is more a representation of the price - a subjective, instinctive, and spontaneous estimation of the "right"

price - that the consumer is ready to put in a garment than a real "right price" that would rationally/objectively evaluate the value of the garment. For example, the analysis shows that, although they are not always aware of it, some consumers value whether the purchase of a garment is worthwhile according to its purpose rather than its quality. This would mean that a clothing library that better showcases its associated services (promise to dress in the best possible way for any circumstance, showcases clothing worn on special occasions and makes consumers want to be in the shoes of the wearer, etc.) should be more attractive than a clothing library that only highlights its clothing function. This is especially true as one of the main barriers to PSS adoption documented in the literature is that consumers compare the PSS-offer price to the traditional-offers price, without taking the services value into account (Vezzoli et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2015).

When a garment is bought in order to answer a need for recognition, attention or for a representation, the consumer is ready to accept a greater difference between the "right" price and the "right price" than if it is to answer the basic need for everyday clothing. During the exchanges this was illustrated by the fact that consumers did not set themselves spending limits when they bought clothing seeking for recognition whereas their budget was more often a brake when the consumer is shopping in order to fulfil a basic need. While shopping to fulfil this basic need, the consumer seems to better rationalize their purchase than while buying clothes with the aim to bring an answer to the issue of recognition. For clothing libraries, this could be part of the reason why an occasional clothing library is more attractive for consumers than a daily library (Sczyka, 2020; Borg et al, 2020; Armstrong et al., 2015). The consumer has more time and is less sensitive to price when looking for a garment for a special occasion. However, they are more likely to rationalize their purchase for a garment that they will wear in their daily life.

Sales and discounts inverse the relationship between "right price" and "right" prices. As the price of the garment decreases, the consumer has the impression that it is lower than the "right" price that they have subconsciously set for themselves, and therefore the purchase suddenly seems worthwhile. This clearly shows that the "right" price is estimated spontaneously and is not calculated beforehand (in which case, the consumers would be able to compare what they would have been prepared to spend on a piece of clothing and the sale price, which they do not do).

Another element disturbing the balance of this trade-off is that the more the consumer is in a hurry to find a specific garment, the more the practice is "habitual/routinized". When a consumer needs a specific garment quickly, they go for what they know best. Conversely, when a consumer has time to think about what they want or need, the more time they take to prepare their purchase, the easier it is for them to disconnect from their habits, from their usual practices. This could also explain why occasional clothing libraries seem more attractive than daily clothing libraries (Sczyka, 2020; Borg et al, 2020; Armstrong et al., 2015). Indeed, an identified barrier to everyday PSS-related offers is that they require a change that consumers fear (Tunn et al., 2021; Antikainen et al., 2015; Santamaria et al., 2016).

The trade-off between these elements also seems more precise and explicit (probably because it is more conscious) for what the consumer has identified as a need and less precise for a desire or a crush. This seems logical considering that the desire is linked to deeper elements (beyond the

garment object). The pleasure linked to the purchase and the projection of the pleasure that the consumer expects to feel takes the upper hand over budget, the comfort of the garment, quality, etc. (the materiality takes less weight than getting pleasure from the purchase). Whereas in the context of a need, the consumer programs the purchase they are going to make, which allows them to make a more conscious trade-off.

5.2. Socio-cultural constructs (deep lock-ins)

The analysis of the workshop highlights some socio-cultural constructs, the deeper lock-ins. More particularly, this shows through the notion of pleasure, the influence of dress codes and the fact that clothing is a manifestation of social status. Among the unanticipated results, it appears that the sphere of work constitutes a kind of catalyst for those socio-cultural constructs.

Dress codes are somehow already included in the SPT analysis of clothing consumption as consumers are aware of “*appropriate dress codes in specific social contexts*” (Camacho-Otero et al., 2019, p. 281). Hence, consumers are aware of dress codes, of how and when to follow them. However, the SPT analysis is insufficient to reveal that these dress codes have a wider impact on clothing consumption than the mere competence to cope with them. If Camacho-Otero situated the dress codes as one of the entangled ingredients, our analysis reveals that this social construct should better be viewed as a deep lock-in. For most of the participants, there is no questioning of the dress code, it is only seen as a rule to follow and it is a rule that influences their clothing consumption practices. The only thing that consumers could do, when becoming aware of the weight of this dress code in their decisions is to decide not to follow it. However, they know that they will have to live with the consequences (being uncomfortable because they did not respect the dress code).

Another lock-in revealed by the exchanges is that consumption of clothing brings pleasure. The practice wearer may choose to break with this construct and stop buying clothes but will continue to feel the urge to do so. As clothing is a consumption connected to emotions, it is difficult for the consumer not to buy clothes because they want to keep experiencing the fulfilment linked to the purchase (Borg et al., 2020). For this reason, consumers often do not stop purchasing clothes, they rather change their way of consuming (buying second-hand clothes, exchanging clothes, etc.). Again, this could constitute a strong barrier toward the use of clothing libraries. Relinquishing ownership features among the commonly raised barriers in other PSS domains (Cherry and Pidgeon, 2018; Tukker, 2015) such as transportation (see Moody and al., 2021). Our in-depth analysis rather shows that, when it comes to clothing libraries, relinquishing the purchase might well be more problematic.

This construct is developed in sociological analyses of final consumption, the purchase (see Illouz, 2019; Illouz and Cabanas, 2019). Consumers are conditioned to buy clothes. Simply seeing a garment makes consumers want to buy it, as they want to experience the pleasure that the purchase will give them. This concept of buying for pleasure instead of by need is already explained in the literature (see Shaw and Newholm, 2002 or Kilbourne et al., 1997). As Lehner (2019, p. 106) puts it: “*increased purchasing power in industrialized economies made it possible for individuals to purchase new goods for pleasure and not out of necessity.*”

Additionally, clothing is a signal of social status (Veblen, 1899), the wearer of the practice may be conscious or semi-conscious of this. In the same way as dress codes or the pleasure linked to purchasing something, consumers can decide not to follow this socio-cultural construction by dressing below their means. Even then, other people will keep evaluating their social status through the clothes the consumer chooses to wear. More broadly the signalment of a status or of a personality through products consumption and usage is a recognized barrier to the adoption of PSS-related offers (Tunn et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

By coupling the MLP to the SPT, this paper offers a grid for reading deep and shallow lock-ins to changes in consumption practices in the clothing sector. This article highlights the difference between and the coexistence of a change that can be made at the individual level and one that requires a common evolution at societal level. The former designates unlocking shallow lock-ins, based on semi-conscious ingredients of consumption practice. The second describes societal unlocking of deep lock-ins, of the rank of the social order on which an individual has no hold.

This distinction between the two levels of lock-in seems essential to be able to offer solutions that are not only sustainable but also accessible to all of those who have not changed their practices. Even though a large majority of consumers express being aware of environmental issues and having the will to change, they often claim not having the means to change their practices. This non-translation of environmental awareness into action may be the consequence of the interaction between these two levels of lock-ins.

In order to become more attractive, clothing libraries must thus take these lock-ins mechanisms into account. If clothing libraries figure out the consumers' trade-off, they can adapt their offers so that they balance these trade-offs. At that point, clothing libraries will be as attractive to the consumers as fast fashion offers.

On the consumers' side, being aware of their own trade-offs can allow them to deconstruct them and build new ones. Consumers feeling the price of clothing stores being too high or the style not to their liking is a shallow lock-in that is easy for the clothing libraries' suppliers to overcome.

However, some consumers are still not attracted to clothing libraries because they feel dispossessed of their clothes, to which they have an important representation of social status attached. Deeper lock-ins socio-culturally constructed are more difficult to overcome. Considering the deep level of lock-in therefore makes it possible to highlight that there are lock-ins over which the individual or a company has no control. Hence, in the short term and without societal changes, the clothing library compete with fast fashion within the same landscape and they have to allow the consumer to express their social status or to follow dress codes. It is only by following socio-cultural constructs that clothing libraries will be able to recruit more customers.

In addition to the very specific methodological setting and associated sample of participants, this paper displays other limitations that are worth mentioning. For instance, the existence of multiple

types of clothing libraries as well as different types of PSS-related offers implies that the lock-ins will have different weights depending on these different solutions.

Another limit follows from the proposal to distinguish between two levels of lock-ins. The question indeed arises as to whether this distinction applies to all types of consumption or whether it is only relevant to consumption practices that are marked by strong socio-cultural constructs, as is the case for practices related to the car, clothing, housing and leisure (see Veblen, 1899).

Finally, this paper focuses on current clothing consumption practices and, by extension, on the impact of these current practices on the attractiveness of clothing libraries. It would be interesting to study the grips and leverage points that could potentially induce a change of practice and increase the adoption of PSS-related offers. In this respect, the possible impacts of these current practices lock-ins on the attractiveness of clothing libraries are presented in the discussion. They will need to be validated in further research.

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The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

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