

Borrowing Is the New Buying

Picture the last time you went to a wedding, a formal dinner, or a job interview and needed something more formal than what you usually wear. There is a good chance you bought something new, wore it once, and never touched it again.

You are not alone. Across Europe, about 40 percent of clothing sits completely unworn in people's closets. That number alone suggests something has gone wrong with the way people buy clothes.

Fashion rental means borrowing clothes for a short period and then returning them. It has grown from a small trend into something much more common. The global rental clothing market earned around \$6.26 billion in 2023 and is expected to grow in the coming years. There are now platforms where people can rent from large subscription services, and also apps where regular people lend clothes directly from their own wardrobes.

People are attracted to rental fashion for different reasons. For some, it is purely about money. Designer items that cost thousands of dollars suddenly become affordable, which means wearing a Chanel jacket to a dinner party is no longer something only wealthy people can do. One user on By Rotation got back 85 percent of what she originally paid for a dress simply by lending it out several times. Selling it secondhand would never have returned that much.

For others, the appeal is more about convenience and values. Many people are tired of the fast fashion cycle: buy something, wear it once, throw it away. Social media makes this worse by making clothes look outdated very quickly. Renting cuts this cycle short. Instead of buying something for one event and feeling bad about it later, you borrow it, return it, and move on.

The environmental argument is also part of the conversation, but it deserves a closer look. Supporters of rental fashion say that borrowing one item can reduce water usage by about 24 percent and cut carbon emissions by around 3 percent compared to buying new. However, a study from Finland raised a strong opposing view. Sending clothes back and forth requires transportation, and cleaning them professionally uses a lot of energy. These factors can greatly reduce the environmental benefit, especially for everyday items like jeans that someone might wear for many years.

The honest conclusion is that renting is not always better for the environment. Renting a dress that you would only wear once makes a lot of sense. Renting jeans that would have lasted ten years in your wardrobe makes much less. In the end, wearing clothes you already own remains the most responsible environmental choice for most people.

Technology is making the rental system easier to manage. Platforms use tools to track inventory, send return reminders, and suggest items based on user preferences. Trust is also a challenge, so some platforms interview new users before letting them join, while others use rating systems to limit access to expensive items until a user has built up a reliable history.

Of course, rental is not the right fit for everyone. People who wear the same pieces every day, people who wear rare sizes, or people who simply like knowing exactly what is in their closet may find the whole system more trouble than it is worth. Cleaning requirements, return deadlines, and the occasional damaged item are real problems that simply do not exist when you own your clothes.

Still, the trend is hard to ignore. A generation that already streams its music, rents its cars by the hour, and shares its vacation homes does not feel strongly that a dress needs to be purchased in order to be worn. The wardrobe may simply be the last major category waiting to catch up.

- 1) Have you ever bought expensive clothes for a special event and then never worn them again?
- 2) How important is it for you to actually own your clothes instead of renting or borrowing them?
- 3) Does social media make you want to buy new clothes more often?
- 4) How much do your clothes change the way you feel or what other people think of you?
- 5) Would you feel comfortable wearing an expensive outfit that strangers have already rented and worn?
- 6) What kind of person or lifestyle do you think benefits the most from renting clothes?
- 7) What cultural habits in Korea might make renting clothes very popular or very unpopular here?
- 8) Do you think future generations will care less about owning things and prefer renting instead?

Picture	(v)	to imagine or think about a situation in your mind	Picture yourself on a long flight with nothing to read. What would you do?
Formal	(adj)	following accepted rules for official or serious situations	The dinner was formal, so everyone wore their best clothes.
Touch	(v)	to use or deal with something (often used in negative sentences)	He bought a guitar two years ago but has barely touched it since.
Across	(prep)	throughout a place or among a group of people	Schools across the country are changing the way they teach reading.
Sit	(v)	to stay in a place without being used or moved	The birthday cake sat on the table for two days before anyone ate it.
Alone	(adv)	by itself, without anything else; used to show that one thing by itself is enough	The price alone was enough to make her change her mind.

Go wrong	(phr v)	to develop problems or stop working as expected	Everything seemed fine at first, but then things started to go wrong.
Period	(n)	a length of time	She studied abroad for a period of six months before returning home.
Common	(adj)	happening or found often; not unusual	It is common for people to feel nervous before a job interview.
Coming	(adj)	happening soon; in the near future	Tickets for the coming season are already sold out.
Wardrobe	(n)	the collection of clothes that a person owns	After losing weight, she had to replace most of her wardrobe.
Attract	(v)	to make someone interested in or want something	The new park has attracted visitors from all over the region.
Purely	(adv)	only; for no other reason	He moved to the countryside purely because he wanted a quieter life.
Affordable	(adj)	cheap enough for most people to be able to buy	The new phone model is smaller and more affordable than last year's version.
Secondhand	(adv)	not new; previously owned or used by someone else	She bought most of her furniture secondhand to save money.
Return	(v)	to give something back or get something back	The library charges a small fee if you return books late.
Appeal	(n)	the quality that makes something attractive or interesting	Part of the appeal of living in a small town is the strong sense of community.
Cycle	(n)	a series of events that repeat in the same order	Breaking the cycle of bad sleep is difficult without changing your daily habits.
Outdated	(adj)	no longer modern or useful; belonging to an earlier time	The office still uses outdated software that causes problems every week.
Cut short	(phr v)	to end something earlier than planned	The storm cut short their camping trip by two days.
Environmental	(adj)	relating to the natural world and the effects of human activity on it	The school made several environmental changes to use less paper and electricity.

Argument	(n)	a reason or set of reasons used to support an idea or position	She made a strong argument for taking the train instead of driving.
Deserve	(v)	to be worthy of something; to have earned something	After working all weekend, she felt she deserved a proper rest.
Closer look	(exp)	a more careful look at something	Before making a decision, it is always worth taking a closer look at the details.
Usage	(n)	the way something is used, or how much it is used	The app tracks your daily phone usage and sends you a weekly report.
Raise	(v)	to mention or introduce a topic or problem for discussion	Nobody wanted to raise the issue of money at the dinner table.
Opposing	(adj)	completely different from or against something else	The two candidates had opposing views on almost every major policy.
View	(n)	a personal opinion or way of thinking about something	In her view, the best way to learn a language is to speak it every day.
Back and forth	(exp)	moving repeatedly in one direction and then the other	They went back and forth for weeks before finally agreeing on a date.
Factor	(n)	one of several things that influence a result or situation	Weather is always a major factor when planning an outdoor event.
Everyday items	(exp)	ordinary objects that people use regularly in daily life	Simple everyday items like a good umbrella can make a big difference in a rainy city.
Make sense	(exp)	to be logical, reasonable, or easy to understand	It makes sense to book your tickets early if you want the best seats.
Remain	(v)	to continue to be in the same state or situation	Despite several job offers, he chose to remain in his hometown.
Reminder	(n)	something that helps you remember to do something	She set a reminder on her phone so she would not forget the appointment.
Preference	(n)	a greater liking for one thing over another	When booking a hotel, she always states her preference for a quiet room.
Rating system	(n)	a method of giving scores or grades to evaluate quality or performance	The app uses a rating system that lets customers score their experience out of five.

Limit	(v)	to control or reduce the amount of something	The doctor advised him to limit his coffee intake to two cups a day.
Build up	(phr v)	to gradually increase or develop something over time	It takes time to build up trust with people you have just met.
Reliable	(adj)	able to be trusted to do what is expected	A reliable internet connection is essential when working from home.
Right fit	(exp)	the most suitable option for a particular person or situation	The job looked perfect on paper, but she quickly realized it was not the right fit for her.
Rare	(adj)	not happening or found very often; unusual	Finding a parking space in that area is a rare event on weekday mornings.
More trouble than it is worth	(exp)	requiring too much effort compared to the benefit it gives	Trying to fix the old printer yourself is more trouble than it is worth.
Requirement	(n)	something that is necessary or officially needed	One of the requirements for the job is at least two years of experience.
Deadline	(n)	the latest time or date by which something must be done	She always finishes her work a day before the deadline to avoid last-minute stress.
Hard to ignore	(exp)	very obvious or noticeable; difficult to overlook	The smell from the bakery next door is hard to ignore on weekend mornings.
In order to	(exp)	with the purpose of achieving something	She woke up an hour early in order to get to the gym before work.
Major	(adj)	large, important, or serious; more significant than others	Moving to a new country is a major life decision that takes a lot of planning.
Catch up	(phr v)	to reach the same level as someone or something that was ahead	After missing a week of classes, it took her a while to catch up with the rest of the group.