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CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL PAPER

Beyond buying: Extending the concept of acquisition in consumption

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Abstract

The consumption process constitutes a sequence of acquisition, use/consumption, and disposal. Over the last two decades, acquisition has transformed due to digitization and sharing economy innovations. Consumers obtain goods and services through several practices beyond buying, including renting, sharing, streaming, borrowing, and gifting. Access constitutes equal options to ownership, and non-market-mediated exchanges have become alternatives to market exchanges. While research has begun to study these practices, it remains fragmented, and we lack a unifying conceptual framework of acquisition. This gap risks marketers overlooking the acquisition phase, the essential first touchpoint in the customer journey. We develop a new conceptual acquisition framework organized by the levels of ownership transfer and market mediation. It distinguishes four acquisition modes: market-mediated ownership, market-mediated access, non-market-mediated ownership, and non-market-mediated access. We extend the acquisition concept beyond buying and market exchange, contributing to research on access, sharing, and customer journey, and we advance a future research agenda.

Keywords Acquisition · Consumption process · Market-exchange · Ownership · Access-based consumption · Renting · Sharing · Gifting

Introduction

Alice, a financial analyst in her early 30s, is relocating to London, UK. Pondering a new car, she is unsure if she should buy one. Many of her colleagues in the city participate in car- or bike-sharing programs, allowing them to rent a car or bike as needed by the hour. These are cheaper alternatives than owning and have less hassle with parking or maintenance. She can also try different car brands rather than committing to one. The apartment complex into which she is moving has a neighborhood car-pooling and a car-borrowing scheme, where neighbors can co-own, borrow, or rent cars from each other. Alice is excited to learn more about the various options to get a vehicle. She hopes to consider owning a car if she settles in London.

This vignette illustrates a common experience for many urban consumers: car use no longer depends on purchasing a brand or a car model. Like Alice, contemporary individuals meet their mobility needs through various acquisition practices: some market-based (e.g., buying, renting) and others grounded in social exchanges (e.g., sharing, borrowing).

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The rise of digital platforms and the sharing economy has significantly reshaped how consumers access goods and services, making purchasing no longer the default or ideal solution to many consumption needs. Across product categories, consumers now approach the acquisition of offerings not solely via buying, but through a complex set of alternatives that can lead to ownership or provide temporary access, either via the market or not. These options have major implications for cost, convenience, identity, and social dynamics. Accordingly, the central question consumers need to address is not merely *what* car to get but also *how* to obtain it.

This extensive range of available acquisition options poses strategic challenges for firms, especially if they continue limiting their offerings to specific practices (e.g., car sales). Failing to recognize acquisition alternatives, such as car sharing or renting, as legitimate competitors can not only potentially lower firms' value proposition due to strategic blind spots but also result in less market relevance and weaker brand affinity. Today's consumers approach acquisition as a problem that can be solved in various ways, not necessarily through market-based ownership or buying. Therefore, to mitigate such fundamental oversights, firms must evaluate all acquisition practices as viable and likely alternatives within each product category. This paper provides a unifying conceptual acquisition framework, capturing this expansive perspective and including the various access and market/non-market arrangements that will help firms navigate this complex and expansive options.

Acquisition is the key moment in which consumers obtain what they need. Without an appropriate understanding of acquisition, there would be no customer journeys (CJs) or market opportunities to develop a consumer relationship. Managers might miss out on ways to compete within the same product category if they fail to understand the antecedents and pros and cons of alternative acquisitions. Different acquisition practices—the specific behaviors that allow consumers to obtain goods and services (e.g., buying, renting, sharing)—may demand distinct CJs, product configurations, and business models. The traditional notion of the CJ focuses on buying, representing consumer experiences across pre-, during, and after-purchase stages (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Yet, this perspective neglects access-based and non-market-mediated types of acquisitions (Trujillo-Torres et al., 2023). Moreover, distinctive marketing strategies increasingly promote acquisition modes that diverge from buying (Costello & Reczek, 2020; Fritze et al., 2020), underscoring the need to reconceptualize acquisition in light of these developments. This conceptual paper addresses this opportunity, revising and extending the concept of acquisition[1] beyond buying through an integration of extant literature.

Marketing scholars have historically considered buying the archetype of acquisition, while alternative practices, such as renting or borrowing, have been deemed sub-optimal or residual opportunities. Although other options for acquiring market offerings have been explored, like renting (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010) or gift exchange (Belk & Coon, 1993; Ruth et al., 1999), marketing research has assumed that acquisition primarily consists of buying (Jacoby et al., 1977). We challenge this assumption, proposing a more comprehensive understanding of acquisition practices in contemporary markets.

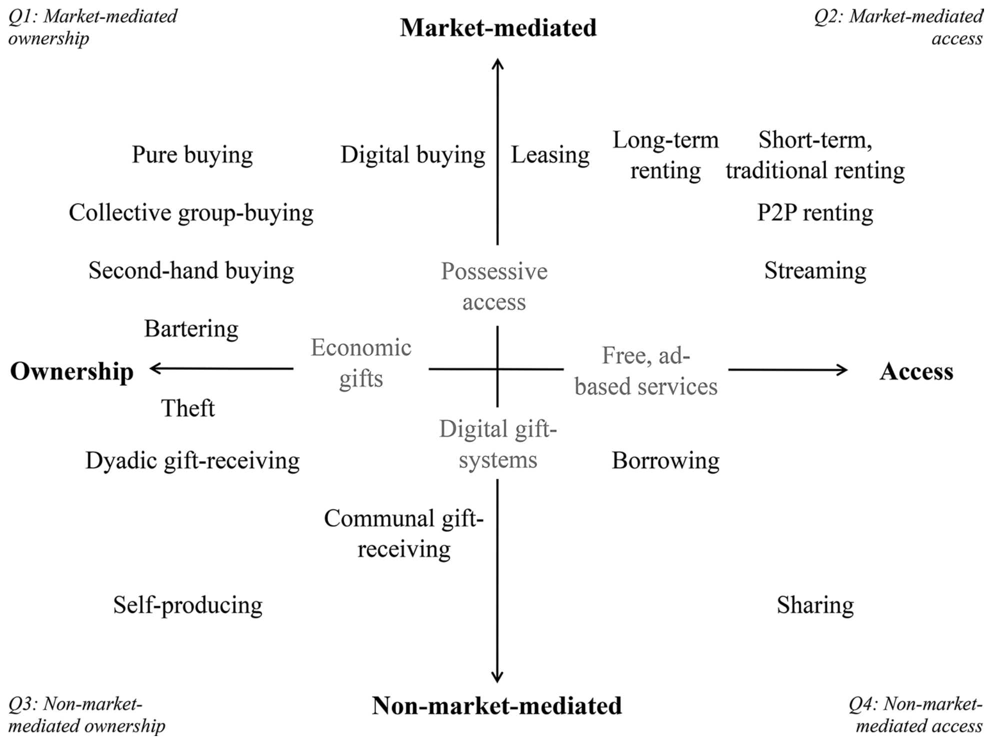
Over the past two decades, additional practices have, indeed, been introduced that capture various forms of acquisition, such as sharing (Belk, 2010), forms of renting (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), a mix of market and non-market transactions (Scaraboto & Figueiredo, 2022), and intergenerational (Bradford, 2009) or communal gift giving and receiving (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). Yet, although this literature acknowledges that acquisition can take various forms, both theoretically and substantially, these practices have been studied in isolation, under heterogeneous assumptions. They are predominantly conceptualized as discrete phenomena observed separately or compared as like-for-like alternatives, which limits—and potentially negates—understandings of acquisition as a nuanced, multifaceted—though univocal—developing concept, posing significant substantive and theoretical implications.

This study extends and revises the notion of acquisition by taking an integrative approach (MacInnis, 2011), incorporating seemingly disparate and unrelated domains of research on various acquisition practices, such as buying, gift receiving, renting, and sharing, into one conceptual space of acquisition, and outlines key implications. We do this via a narrative synthesis review of marketing and consumer research in access, sharing, ownership, renting, buying, bartering, and platforms to collate, review, and synthesize findings from prior research (Sharifonnasabi, et al., 2020). We concentrated our review on 150 key publications over the past decade in the leading marketing research journals garnered by key search terms (Fig. 1, Web Appendix). We analyzed each article to reveal key themes based on its theory, focus, and findings, which facilitated the development of our conceptual framework.

We define acquisition as the process by which consumers come to obtain consumption offerings, which may be market-mediated. We develop a framework where acquisition

[1] We study and examine acquisition in the B2C context where final consumers acquire goods and services for private consumption. We do not consider other meanings of the term "acquisition" as relating—for instance—to "customer acquisition," often used in the B2B context.

Fig. 1 A conceptual framework of acquisition modes and associated practices



varies along two dimensions: (1) the level of ownership transfer, and (2) the level of market mediation. Four acquisition modes emerge, which represent configurations of a set of arrangements of transactions along these two continua: market-mediated ownership, market-mediated access, non-market-mediated ownership, and non-market-mediated access. Our framework: (1) defines each mode; (2) identifies associated consumer motivations under each; (3) identifies the prototypical acquisition practices and their sub-types; (4) discusses movements among them; and (5) outlines distinct consumption consequences. Our analysis yields several propositions formulated into key insights (KI) in Table 1. We advance a conceptual contribution to the first consumption stage by extending and redefining the acquisition of market offerings, contributing theoretically to the research on access, sharing, and CJ.

Prior managerial research is often limited to specific practice-to-practice comparisons, whereas this paper provides a general acquisition framework, making this research managerially crucial. This framework lends insight into how firms might: (1) grow their markets (e.g., providing opportunities to lease vs. buy); (2) see threats of new entrants (e.g., as when streaming services became a threat to the video rental market); (3) identify the distinct CJs associated with each acquisition mode; (4) enhance value to customers by providing diverse acquisition alternatives; and (5) propose distinct marketing strategies for each one.

Conceptual foundations: Acquisition

Acquisition is a foundational notion in marketing and consumer research because it represents the starting point of the consumption process[2], which unfolds across three stages: acquisition, consumption (use and possession), and disposition (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). The theory of the consumption process posits that each stage impacts/shapes the others; as such, how consumers obtain what they need influences consumption (stage 2) and disposition (stage 3). Extant research recognizes the logic of this process and the individual effects of certain acquisition practices on the rest of the consumption process. For example, prior research illustrates how acquisition affects consumers' motivations and values (Chen, 2009), their sense of psychological ownership (Bagga et al., 2019; Morewedge et al., 2021), value creation and co-creation (Scaraboto & Figueiredo, 2022), liquid consumption (Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017), and social and political goals (Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011). However, previous research predominantly focuses on individual practices in isolation, offering a fragmented view of their contribution to a broader, more comprehensive understanding of acquisition. Most of this research investigated market-based transactions (e.g., buying, renting), aimed at pursuing ownership, although some recent and notable exceptions also examined non-ownership (e.g., Harding et al., 2019) and

[2] See Table 1 in the Web Appendix for a summary of the key concepts.

Table 1 Summary of acquisition modes and key insights

Mode	Prototypical practices	Consumer motivations	Implications for consumption	Key insights (KI)
Q1: Market-mediated ownership (Acquiring an object for ownership from the market by paying a price or giving something back in return)	*Buying* • Pure (individual) buying • Group-buying • Second-hand, P2P buying • Digital buying *Bartering (face-to-face or platform-mediated)*	• Exchange value • Control over the item • Self-extensions • Mere possession (endowment effect) • Materialistic needs (e.g., collecting) • Long-term consumption • Pro-social/pro-status signaling (bartering) • Experiential value (e.g., shopping, negotiation) • Potential to 'escape' the market logic (bartering)	• Psychological ownership • Identity signaling • Possession and collection value potential • Sustainability for society and self (also for second-hand P2P buying or bartering) • Maintaining social connections (social value in bartering)	*1*: Consumers prefer Q1 when they are motivated by economic value, control, and long-term orientation at the individual level. *2*: Q1 is carried out via two practices: buying and bartering practices. *3*: Digital ownership challenges some of the basic factors of Q1 as it is designed for access. Thus, consumers who want to "own" digital objects need to engage in solidification of digital objects (e.g., NFTs, digital files vs. streaming). *4*: Consumers prefer Q1 when they desire anonymity to avoid social obligations (e.g., regifting in Q3). *5*: Consumers prefer Q1 when transactions are driven by self-interest rather than moral obligations.
Q2: Market-mediated access (Getting access to objects for a price, fee, subscription, etc.)	*Renting* • Short-term or traditional renting • Leasing and long-term renting • P2P renting *Streaming (paid for or subscription-based or free, ad-based services)*	• Use-value • Cost advantages • Flexibility • Avoiding the burdens of ownership • Temporariness • Variety-seeking opportunities • Environmental identity value	• Potentially more (and more diverse) but less involved consumption and less attachment • Product misuse, lower consumer commitment and care • Lifestyle/identity signaling	*6*: Consumers prefer Q2 when they want to use objects for a relatively short-term period without owning them. *7*: Q2 is carried out via two practices: renting for physical objects and streaming for digital objects. *8*: Consumers would move to Q2 to access items that are not high on identity salience. *9*: Consumers would move towards Q2 in contrast to non-market mediated modes (Q3; Q4) for self-interest and anonymous types of transactions.
Q3: Non-market-mediated ownership (Obtaining goods for ownership without paying a price, nor direct market transactions)	*Gift-receiving* • Dyadic gift-receiving • Communal gift-receiving *Self-producing* *Theft*	• Interpersonal dynamics and social benefits • Sustainability and ecological consciousness • Craft consumer value (especially for self-producing) • Identity construction • Exchange value	• Identity formation • Expression of autonomy and creativity • Personal fulfillment • Social benefits • Potential sustainability benefits for society and self	*10*: Consumers prefer Q3 when they are embedded in and aim to sustain social networks; for sustainable and craft motivations; and prosocial motives in general. *11*: Q3 is carried out via three practices: gift-receiving, self-producing, and theft. *12*: Consumers would move towards Q1 in contrast to non-market-mediated ownership (Q3) to avoid social obligations, interdependencies, and ambiguities. *13*: Consumers would move towards Q4 in contrast to non-market mediated ownership (Q3) in case of participation in gift-giving communities where digital goods are shared by the entire community.
Q4: Non-market-mediated access (Gaining access to objects without direct market transactions)	*Sharing* *Borrowing*	• Cultural norms • Personality traits • Past consumption histories • Consumer lifestyles • Cost savings/economies of scale • Use value	• Relational benefits may contribute to consumer attachment • More diverse identity values sought • Psychological ownership may act as a Q4 mediator	*14*: Consumers prefer Q4 when they prioritize reinforcing social ties via shared consumption, over individual consumption. *15*: Q4 is carried out via two practices: sharing and borrowing. *16*: Consumers would move towards Q4 when they seek (or succumb to) collective identity value over individual identity value. *17*: Consumers would move towards Q2 in contrast to Q4 when they wish to escape identification and subsequent social obligations.

non-market-based acquisition (Belk, 2010; Giesler, 2006; Scaraboto, 2015). Consequently, we lack a systematic framework that holistically synthesizes, integrates, and compares how consumers obtain products and services and the associated impacts on consumption.

More importantly, prior research has traditionally assumed that buying—a market-exchange transaction enabling market ownership—constitutes the ideal acquisition practice. Similarly, ownership has been considered the ultimate goal of consumer desire (Belk, 2010). Although this perspective dominated the discipline for many years, as evidenced in the research domain of buyer behavior, a broader notion of consumption has eventually been adopted (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). During the last decades, new perspectives and concepts have been introduced that highlight non-ownership-based consumption. Belk (2007, 2010) introduced the concept of sharing as an alternative to gift-giving and commodity-exchange practices, which is defined as voluntary lending, pooling, and usage of collectively owned resources (Belk, 2007). Alternative models have also emerged from the business practice, such as commercial-sharing programs that provide the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without owning them. The perspective of liquid consumption recognizes access—"transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881)—as an equal ownership alternative (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Thus, in line with the extensive body of work on access and non-ownership, we identify the level of ownership (access) transfer as a key factor influencing the nature of acquisition. It captures the distinction between ownership and access (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Goldsmith, 2020).

The second dimension that emerged from our review is the nature of the exchange. Market-mediated exchange has been considered the main form of exchange for the definition of consumption (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010); therefore, acquisition was initially defined as market-mediated. However, others have pointed to non-market forms of exchange that enable consumers to get goods (Scaraboto, 2015), such as gift-receiving. The notion of sharing also recognizes that acquisition can take place outside the market via communal or familial sharing (Belk, 2010). Non-market-mediated exchanges have been treated as market resistance (Kozinets, 2002) or alternatives that integrate or substitute for market exchange (Scaraboto, 2015). We use the level of market mediation (from market to non-market exchange) as the second core dimension of our framework. We discuss these two dimensions next.

Factors that distinguish acquisition modes

Ownership to access continuum

The first dimension is the level of ownership transfer resulting from an exchange transaction. This continuum is defined by two extremes: ownership and access (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Goldsmith, 2020). On the ownership side of the continuum, the consumer acquires full (*de jure* and *de facto*) rights to privately own a product. Ownership represents the special relationship between a person and an object, called "owning," while the object is a "personal property" or a "possession" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Ownership is permanent and provides the owner the right to use, destroy, or dispose of the object as well as the obligations of its responsibility.

On the access side, a consumer can use a given good for a particular period without being the owner; thus, access is temporary (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Chen, 2009). Because ownership comes with financial, emotional, and social obligations, consumers can escape these burdens by relying on access-based consumption (Schaefers et al., 2016; Stofberg & Bridoux, 2019), especially in specific liquid consumption contexts, such as mobility/travel, life transitions, and digital consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Maraj & Bardhi, 2023).

Through our systematic review, we identify two key factors that shape consumer movements along this continuum: *identity salience* and *object materiality.* First, identity salience is the identity value of consumption as a source of meaning for consumers' identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Ownership is more private, characterized by an intimate relationship to the object, while access is characterized by a circumstantial relationship to the object, if at all (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Chen, 2009). Consumers prefer access to ownership when they value possession attachment and utility less and are more trend-oriented and convenience-oriented (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2007; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Ownership implies individualism, appropriation, and distinction, which may not carry over under certain types of access. Ownership can provide more identity value than access. Thus, identity salience affects how consumers move towards ownership in this continuum.

Second, the nature of object materiality is defined as "the material qualities of objects and the contingent ways those qualities shape the meaning and use of those objects" (McDonnell, 2023, p. 20.6). Object materiality can, therefore, affect whether consumers own or access goods and services. More physical products, such as books and vinyl records, are recognized as *solid* based on their more material, enduring nature and afford opportunities for possession and ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Mardon & Belk, 2018). Conversely, access can threaten ownership (Morewedge et al., 2021). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) argue that dematerialized products, such as e-books or digital music files, represent a case of *liquid* consumption, characterized by their dematerialized, access-based, ephemeral nature. Digital objects are designed and marketed in access-based consumption models as they can never be wholly owned but only accessed (Giesler, 2006). Our review highlights that materiality affects the movement along the ownership-transfer continuum.

Market to non-market continuum

The second dimension of our framework denotes the nature of exchange, which we characterize as *the level of market mediation*. It distinguishes between market-mediated transactions (i.e., consumers purchase items for a price) and non-market-mediated ones (i.e., exchanges occur among people, often mediated by platforms or other institutions or interpersonal dynamics, without economic compensation). Acquisition changes along the level of market mediation (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

Market-mediated transactions imply consumers must pay a price to gain the right to consume (e.g., via traditional buyer-seller relationships or commercial sharing platforms). Instead, in non-market-mediated contexts, consumers obtain or access offerings for free via social exchange, including community sharing (Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011) or intra-family sharing (Belk, 2010). Between these two extremes are hybrid conditions that provide free or quasi-free access.

In market-based exchanges, efficiency and economic factors play a key role, while the exchange parties' identities are less relevant (Scaraboto, 2015). Acquisition is motivated by possessive individualism (Arnould & Rose, 2016), i.e., individuals are mainly driven by self-interest and the accumulation of personal wealth and possessions. Market exchange is governed by reciprocity norms, which may be balanced or negative (Scaraboto, 2015). Commodity exchange (i.e., buying) is the prototypical form of market-mediated transactions, characterized by objects passed among people acting as free agents (Belk, 2010). In contrast, non-market exchange is embedded in personal relationships where the identities of exchange parties matter without a primary concern for economic considerations. The social dimension of exchange allows agents to give and receive benefits that are "not" strictly technically or economically relevant and are "not" necessarily reciprocal for every transaction. While resource circulation via social exchange has been traditionally examined within familial networks (Belk & Llamas, 2011; Epp & Price, 2010), social exchanges have now proliferated through platforms where individuals interact with strangers (Perren & Kozinets, 2018).

Our systematic review highlights two factors influencing consumer movement along this dimension: *the level of anonymity* and *the self-interest (versus collective) motive*. First, market exchanges are anonymous, i.e., consumers are interested in the product offering, not necessarily the seller's identity. In some contexts, consumers appreciate this anonymity to avoid social obligations associated with social exchange (Marcoux, 2009). On the other side, gift exchange, lending, or borrowing are strongly related to the identity of both givers and takers. The object's importance and value could even become secondary to the very nature of the interpersonal relationship in which the gift or the borrowed item is embedded. We explore how desired levels of anonymity affect acquisition and the movements along this continuum.

Second, consumers move along the market mediation continuum depending on whether they are self-interested (or collectively) motivated. Self-interested behaviors, where individuals aim to maximize personal utility and control over consumption, occur via market-based acquisition. This logic is evident when consumers prioritize ownership, personal gain, and competitive advantage. In contrast, moral motives emphasize the interconnectedness within a community and the importance of social bonds and collective welfare (Arnould & Rose, 2016). Prior research indicates that collective and prosocial objectives drive consumers toward collaborative and community-oriented practices, like sharing, gifting, and communal ownership (Giesler, 2006; Kozinets, 2002; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). Belk (2010), for instance, argued that sharing promotes a sense of communal identity, challenging the notion of goods as exclusive personal property. Giesler's (2008) study of music markets also found that communal motives underlined by social utilitarianism contribute to perceiving music as a cultural resource to be shared, promoting open access to it. Hence, acquisition practices driven by collective or prosocial factors may favor non-market exchange.

A new conceptual framework of acquisition modes

We utilize ownership transfer and market mediation to advance a new conceptual framework of acquisition organized in four quadrants (Fig. 1). Each quadrant represents a distinct acquisition mode, a set of (non)market arrangements of transactions that provide various levels of ownership transfer. For each mode, we discuss consumer motivations, prototypical acquisition practices, dynamics, and implications for the consumption process. We bolstered the framework with key insights, summarized in Table 1.

Market-mediated ownership

The market-mediated ownership acquisition mode refers to transactions that lead to ownership transfer through market mediation (referred to as Q1). Consumers pay a price to obtain ownership. It is the most foundational acquisition mode in consumer behavior, starting with the *Theory of Buyer Behavior* introduced by Howard and Sheth (1969).

Consumer motivations

The literature on the motivations for owning goods via market exchange is too vast to be synthesized here, but we highlight the key differentiating ones. Q1 gives consumers ownership and the associated property rights over an object. Consumers own items when they want to exert control over them; they feel attached to specific objects they are interested in using or collecting (Kleine & Baker, 2004), and, often, they see them as self-extensions (Belk, 1988). In these conditions, possessions are singularized, acquire special meanings, and become idiosyncratic (Epp & Price, 2010). Through owning goods, consumers also satisfy materialistic needs (Chen, 2009), as in the case of collecting (Mardon & Belk, 2018), but also signal specific values to others through their possessions (Richins, 1994a, 1994b). Material goods can also satisfy experiential and materialistic needs (Guevarra & Howell, 2015). Another motivation relates to the temporality of consumption, where this market-mediated acquisition is preferred when an object is consumed long-term rather than temporarily. Owning allows a longer time horizon of use, making money through resale, and the possibility to share or lend (KI 1, Table 1).

When consumers own an object, they value it more than an item they do not own. The endowment effect, defined as individuals assigning a higher value to products simply because they own them (Barone et al., 1997), demonstrates that initial ownership significantly impacts valuation and trading behavior. Thus, although non-market-mediated practices are often cheaper, and access-based ones are more flexible and less constraining than the market-mediated acquisition mode (Schaefers et al., 2016), many consumers prefer owning their goods.

Prototypical practices

In Q1, we identify two prototypical practices: buying and bartering (KI 2, Table 1). *Buying* has been considered the primary and often exclusive object of interest, as this literature is firmly rooted in a marketing-as-exchange paradigm (Bagozzi, 1975). Most studies in this tradition take for granted that consumers buy the goods they need and consider buying as a transaction between anonymous buyers and sellers.

Conventional buying is considered primarily an individual activity, even if social and cultural factors influence it. However, buying can also be collective: group buying is a strategic form of product acquisition to obtain volume discounts (Luo et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013). In group buying, consumers strategically create collectives among peers or even with strangers via platforms to gain bargains and other benefits (Wang et al., 2013). Because of platforms and social media, CJs are becoming "social," with some consumer groups joining together to make purchases whilst crosschecking their respective experiences along the journey (Hamilton et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2020). This means that: (a) the subject of acquisition is not an individual but a collective; (b) these collectives are temporary, distributed via multiple channels, and change over time; and (c) the identity of the individuals involved in these processes may matter. Group buying further impacts the decisions for multi- and omnichannel marketing and asks for communication approaches that account for the role and identity of individuals within the social context in which the CJ is embedded. For example, CJs can be conceived as educational processes involving distributors and customers in a collective, transformative experience in which direct interactions are significant value co-creation drivers.

Buying practices can also differ from the conventional ideal type regarding the nature of the intermediary involved in the exchange. Buying generally implies the presence of a market mediator; hence, the buyer is expected to interact with various types of professional sellers (e.g., car dealers, retail chains, and e-commerce platforms). Nevertheless, consumers can also buy goods directly from other consumers. Second-hand markets are a type of consumer-to-consumer exchange that promotes sustainability and the circular economy (Yrjölä et al., 2021) and facilitates identity expression (Sarial-Abi et al., 2017; Schibik et al., 2022). The diffusion of new business models (e.g., eBay) or applications (e.g., Vinted), allows consumers to purchase and sell used items at the expense of traditional businesses grounded on traditional buying (purchasing new items from specialized retailers), affecting branding strategies of many renown global companies (Soule & Hanson, 2018). Consumer-to-consumer exchanges gave rise to new business models in which the distinction between buyers and sellers is blurred, and the individual actors can benefit from collective and network effects mediated by the platform (Zou & Jiang, 2020). For example, in the car industry, the rise of P2P platforms facilitates competing business models that challenge traditional car dealers, where consumers (Desai & Purohit, 1998) and retailers (Shulman & Coughlan, 2007) sell used cars on the secondary market. Consequently, new car manufacturers in the primary market must reactively adapt to combat the rise of secondary market car acquisitions, which can impact their value proposition, positioning, and consumer relationships. The integration of primary and resale platforms used by consumers demonstrated that the interaction between primary and secondary markets affects both producers and consumers, challenging the traditional assumption that they operate in clear separation (Stephen & Toubia, 2010).

Bartering (or *swapping*) occurs when two individuals hold disposable possessions that are mutually suitable for one another's wants and decide to exchange them without the help of any other means of exchange, such as money (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones, 1992). To accomplish such types of exchange, a consumer (consumer A) needs to find another (consumer B) who has what consumer A wants; then, consumer B must also want what consumer A will give consumer B in return (Graeber, 2011). The terms of these exchanges must be negotiated from scratch every time with each counterpart. Identity matters in barter, as negotiation can only occur if the barterers recognize and legitimize each other as entitled exchange partners. Barter often occurs among community members, physical or virtual, or even transient (Kozinets, 2002), in which a standard set of values is accepted. Thus, bartering often emerges in communal contexts, such as swap meets or online (Philip et al., 2019).

Acquisition dynamics

Object materiality may be one factor that shifts consumers away or towards Q1: consumers aim at owning material objects while reverting to access for non-material or digital ones. However, prior research indicates that ownership remains the most socially desirable option for many consumers, continuing to be highly valued even for digital objects. For instance, non-fungible tokens (NFTs) (Alkhudary et al., 2023) can be conceptualized as instances of consumers' efforts to solidify ownership of digital assets. Individuals often integrate NFTs into their self-concept and identity, viewing them as part of their personal brand and status within the digital community. Thus, within our framework, purchasing NFTs may represent a shift from Q2 (which is access-based and typically preferred for digital objects) to Q1 (ownership-based) (KI 3, Table 1). Another movement can be from non-market-mediated ownership (Q3) towards Q1, when consumers want to avoid social obligations and conflicts arising from social embeddedness (Marcoux, 2009). Thus, Q1 may become more preferred because of the self-interest and anonymity that market exchange provides (KI 4–5, Table 1).

Implications for the consumption stage

Consumer researchers have extensively examined the consumption outcomes of market-mediated ownership, especially the close relationship between identity and possessions (Belk, 1988). Owning material goods offers the highest degrees of freedom for a consumer while also carrying financial, social, and emotional obligations (Richins, 1994b). Material possessions, indeed, enable consumers to define, display, or maintain a sense of identity, even if this trend seems to be weakening as we are moving toward a more liquid consumption lifestyle (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017), in which consumers increasingly use services and digital goods in their consumption activities (Mardon & Belk, 2018; Morewedge et al., 2021). Such individuals experience significant changes in terms of psychological ownership: they may lose direct and legal control over their endowments, but—at the same time—they gain flexibility and more opportunities to engage in innovative consumption processes and social interaction.

Second-hand purchasing also allows consumers to position themselves ethically or morally (Abdelrahman et al., 2020; Sarial-Abi et al., 2017). It can also be related to a surge in interest in sustainability issues that contributes to changing consumption and acquisition habits, reducing the number of physical endowments, and considering disposal and re-use factors when deciding what to purchase (Huang & Wong, 2024; Tari & Trudel, 2024).

Barter has traditionally played a central role in procuring items more conveniently and effectively, and can complement buying (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones, 1992). Historically, barter is older than market exchange and has continued to be used. Above all, consumers participate in bartering to acquire goods at fair prices (Dalli & Fortezza, 2019). Moreover, barter cyclically emerges when consumers engage in critical crisis conditions (Chatzidakis et al., 2021). In these cases, they ditch market exchange (buying) and revert to social exchange, as it appears less expensive. Barter, however, can also enable consumers to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle, reduce waste, and give new life to their objects (Albinsson & Yasanthi Perera, 2012). Consumers prefer Q1 when motivated by economic value, control, and long-term orientation at the individual level (KI 1, Table 1).

Market-mediated access

The second acquisition mode is market-mediated access (Q2), defined as consumers' access to goods and services via market exchange for a price, fee, or subscription. The market norms of negative or balanced reciprocity govern acquisition under Q2. Our framework suggests that all market exchange transactions previously thought of as sharing (e.g., bike-sharing programs [Lamberton & Rose, 2012] or sharing-out [Belk, 2010]) constitute examples of market-mediated access. Market-mediated access applies to both physical goods and digital services, as exemplified by two prototypical practices: renting and streaming (KI 7, Table 1).

Consumer motivations

The core consumer motivation for participation in market-mediated access is economic and utilitarian (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Durgee and O'Connor 1995). Consumers save money using a given good or service rather than buying it. Prior research has shown that the primary motivation is the use-value manifested as the utility of using the product and the savings and convenience it brings, in contrast to ownership. Compared to Q1, consumers embrace market-mediated access to escape ownership's emotional, social, and economic burden (Lawson et al., 2016; Schaefers et al., 2016). Access carries a lower risk than ownership since it can be temporary and frees consumers from obligations. Another motivation for access is variety seeking. Durgee and O'Connor (1995) found that renting is associated with variety seeking and no post-purchase dissonance. Lehr et al. (2020) highlighted that rental services facilitate a form of product trials as they produce positive spillover, especially among low-involved consumers. However, the motivations for users are not the same as those for owners. Owners' drive to offer rent is not only economic, but also socially (Chung et al., 2021) or environmentally (Hartl et al., 2020) motivated.

Prototypical practices

Renting is a market-mediated acquisition practice where a consumer gains temporary access to a resource by paying a price for it, known as a fee, royalty, subscription, or rent (Durgee and O'Connor 1995; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Rental practices are regulated by market agreements and contracts between two (or more) parties where the usage, time, and payment are specified.

Several subtypes of rental practices differ in temporality, anonymity, and product category. Rental practices can be short or long-term (e.g., leasing) depending on their temporality. Prior research has predominantly examined traditional rental and occasional, short-term rental of goods (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Leasing is less studied and may unfold akin to psychological ownership. A more extended, repeated engagement with the object of consumption might lead to an emotional attachment to the object (Debenedetti et al., 2014). Appropriation of the item can occur in leasing, and the consumer could experience a *de facto* sense of ownership (Belk, 1988) because of the long-term usage of the accessed item (Trocchia et al., 2006). Consumers do not own the item but pay for long-term access to it and often have the option to buy it in the future. Therefore, leasing can constitute a hybrid acquisition practice between Q1 and Q2, representing a *possessive access* form.

Rental practices also differ regarding anonymity, with traditional rental being the most anonymous. P2P rental can constitute a social transaction as consumers interact and access goods and services owned by another consumer. P2P renting has gained interest in marketing research because of the multiple logics underlying these transactions as well as the potential hybrid nature of the exchange (Scaraboto 2015). At times, P2P has been considered a form of collaborative consumption governed by the logic of both market and social exchange (Guyader 2018), which may alter the nature of its consumption and associated marketing strategy. Costello and Reczek (2020) found that consumers perceive renting from a person as helping someone. Thus, they are more willing to pay higher prices due to an empathy effect in P2P exchange, which is absent in anonymous rental types. Similarly, consumers tend to provide more generous rankings in P2P contexts and are less likely to report service failure incidents, especially if rapport with owners in a P2P context is established (Osman et al. 2019; Pera et al. 2019). Yet, other scholars found more of a difference between market and social exchange acquisition practices than between various rental practices. For example, Shen et al. (2020) identified no difference in contrasting perceived safety, convenience, privacy concerns, and socialization between a ride from a colleague (social exchange) and those of traditional taxis and Uber.

Streaming is another market-mediated form of access that has grown exponentially in the last decades. Streaming is the real-time transmission of media content (Wu et al., 2021), administered via platforms using an access-based rather than ownership business model. Streaming constitutes a new way for consumers to "rent access to libraries from which they can consume content at no additional cost" (Datta et al., 2018, p. 5). The popularity of streaming is of substantive concern, given its consequences for multiple stakeholders (Meyn et al., 2023).

While Q2 does not afford identity value (KI 8, Table 1), prior research suggests that streaming may also, at times, provide consumers with this value (Oyedele & Simpson, 2018), primarily through the mechanism of psychological ownership (Danckwerts & Kenning, 2019). Despite not being the legal owner of streamed content, consumers may develop feelings of psychological ownership towards streaming services based on links between streamed content, their identities, and the desire for control, which streaming usage can signal, given its renowned utility, convenience, and efficacy (Danckwerts & Kenning, 2019). Further, Sinclair and Tinson (2017) found perceived control, choice, and manipulability of streaming applications as key features facilitating psychological ownership that positively relate to user intentions to switch from a service's free to paid premium version (Danckwerts & Kenning, 2019).

Consumers can often stream for free when accessing digital content. Hence, consumers frequently perceive many services (e.g., Spotify, YouTube) as non-market acquisitions. Our framework challenges this view, reinforcing that these *free*, *ad-based services* are also considered market-mediated access acquisition, owing to specific opportunities and transaction costs. Papies et al. (2011, p. 777) show that many platforms seek to attract consumers via an ad-based business model "by offering free downloads while relying on advertising as a revenue source." In this sense, streaming differs from sharing (Q4), which takes place outside of market exchange, not only for free but also without exchanging private user information, advertising content, or other forms of exploitation of users' information or work (Cova & Dalli, 2009).

Dynamics

Regarding the horizontal movement, prior research suggests that both product materiality and identity salience can play a role. First, a key insight from our framework indicates that Q2 is preferred for digital product offerings (KI 7, Table 1). Digital products are increasingly designed for streaming or long-term leasing without the possibility of ever providing consumers full physical ownership (Morewedge et al., 2021). Second, our insights indicate that acquisition moves towards access (Q2) when identity is not salient (KI 8, Table 1). Prior research also suggests that consumers avoid identification or identity value in access (Eckhardt et al., 2019). In other words, digital materiality and access do not afford possession, ownership, and identity value in consumption.

Regarding the movement along the vertical axis, research suggests that consumers would move towards Q2 in contrast to non-market-mediated acquisition for self-interest and anonymous types of transactions (KI 9, Table 1). While this can be the case for the prototypical rental practices, this is not as straightforward regarding P2P renting, as indicated above. A configuration of both market and social exchange logics will likely guide P2P.

Implications for the consumption stage

Q2 has a significant impact on consumer behavior. First, it does not lead to actual resource possession (Chen, 2009; Harding et al., 2019). Prior research has shown that consumers are less attached to rented than owned objects (Durgee and O'Connor 1995; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010) and do not identify with them (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Thus, consumers care less for such accessed objects or may damage or misuse them (Peck et al., 2021). Moreover, Graul and Brough (2020) found that attachment cues tend to inhibit the renting of possessions because the user wants to avoid the responsibility of potentially damaging or having to take care of a valued possession. Finally, access-based acquisition is preferred to ownership-based acquisition when possession is not valued, such as mobility and temporary relocations (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Yet, accessing objects via the market effectively signals social status, even when renting luxuries (Pantano & Stylos, 2020).

The nature of consumption resulting from this acquisition mode is paradoxical: on one side, market-mediated access leads to more consumption; on the other, this is associated with less attachment (Maraj & Bardhi, 2023). Research has demonstrated how market-mediated access via renting platforms and streaming has democratized access to cultural products globally, owing to its business model that facilitates unprecedented utility and consumer benefits. For example, consumers may use more via streaming but become less loyal and/or attached to the products they consume. Such a paradox is evident from Datta et al.'s (2018, p. 19) study of Spotify users, which reveals that streaming leads to an increase in the quantity (i.e., more plays) and diversity (i.e., variety of product categories) of consumption, but "while it is easier to enter the consumption set, it is harder to stay there." Nonetheless, consumers can benefit from increased convenience by reducing search frictions and helping them discover new high-value content. Consumption resulting from market-mediated access takes a *liquid* form due to its access-based, dematerialized, and ephemeral nature, in contrast to solid, tangible forms of owning and collecting possessions (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017).

Non-market mediated ownership

The non-market-mediated ownership acquisition mode (Q3) consists of transactions that lead to ownership transfers via non-market exchanges. It encompasses diverse practices, such as gift-receiving or self-producing, emphasizing social relationships and rituals, intertwining creativity, and blurring the lines between production and consumption. This mode fosters community involvement, environmental consciousness, and resistance to commodification. However, while Q3 bypasses traditional market exchanges, it can create conflicts between individual benefits and collective welfare (KI 11, Table 1).

Consumer motivations

Social relationships and societal dynamics are key drivers of acquisition in Q3 (KI 10, Table 1), starkly contrasting the self-motivated and anonymous dynamics in Q1 and Q2. The primary motivation for getting ownership via non-market transactions is social relationships, as in the case of gift-giving (Belk & Coon, 1993; Marcoux, 2009), which are often associated with specific rituals, such as weddings and anniversaries (Cheal, 1988), birthdays (Belk, 2010), dating (Minowa et al., 2011), and Christmas (Otnes et al., 1993).

Sustainability can also motivate consumers towards Q3, encouraging them to reuse and repair to extend object lives, and reduce waste rather than acquiring new things (KI 10, Table 1). Cruz-Cárdenas et al. (2019) investigate clothing reuse, i.e., repurposing garments for different functions or transforming them into new ones. This practice aligns with reducing waste and promoting ecological sensitivity, particularly among low-income individuals, young consumers, students, and women. Godfrey et al. (2022) illustrate repair as a practice where consumers maintain or restore product functionality, extending product lifespan, reducing waste, and fostering sustainability. These motivations are often ideologically opposed to commodification, and are typical of gift-giving communities, such as Napster, which position themselves as a marketplace alternative (Giesler, 2006, 2008).

A third motivation relates to the value derived from personal efforts, such as self-producing instead of buying goods (Moisio et al., 2013). Campbell (2005), for instance, emphasizes that craft consumption plays a crucial role in identity construction, enabling consumers to express individuality and personal style.

Prototypical practices

We highlight three acquisition practices for Q3. *Gift-receiving* is a non-market-mediated ownership transfer practice where consumers receive goods as gifts from others (Belk, 1976; Sherry, 1983). This practice belongs to the social exchange domain, where consumers rely on others to acquire things (Belk & Coon, 1993; Marcoux, 2009). It upholds social relationships and is key to personal and cultural celebration rituals (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). Gift-giving exchanges belong to the moral economy, which is not based on monetary transactions and should be distinguished from the market economy (Cheal, 1988).

While research has primarily focused on dyadic gift-receiving (Belk & Coon, 1993; Bradford, 2009; Lowrey et al., 2004; Ruth et al., 1999), scholars have also explored communal gift-giving (Giesler, 2006; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). Gift-giving within communities significantly enhances social relationships (Bradford, 2021), providing an alternative to marketplace transactions (Kozinets, 2002). For instance, Giesler (2006) introduced the concept of the "consumer gift system" through digital file sharing, a structured set of non-dyadic gift exchanges and social relationships. Similarly, Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) described "intracommunity gifting," emphasizing relationship building within communities, while Ciampa and de Valck (2024) examined how co-creative gift systems, such as Wattpad, enable collaborative content creation and the formation of dynamic relationships between givers and receivers. Scaraboto (2015) observed that hybrid economies develop in consumption communities, such as Geocaching, where the market and social economies coexist (see also Corciolani & Dalli, 2014; Kozinets, 2002).

Self-producing, also studied as a form of "prosumption" (Trujillo-Torres et al., 2023) or "craft consumption" (Campbell, 2005), consists of activities where individuals actively engage in the production of goods and services, thereby creating rather than consuming value (Moisio et al., 2013). This concept extends beyond the traditional consumption model, involving consumers in producing, customizing, and improving tangible elements, such as home improvements and cooking. This participatory role transforms consumers from mere users to co-producers, obscuring the lines between production and consumption and allowing consumers to own goods without marketplace purchases (Campbell, 2005). Dellaert (2019), for instance, discusses the evolving role of consumers as co-producers in the sharing economy, facilitated by digital platforms that engage consumers in production activities. This concept expands the traditional CJ to include steps and processes where consumers act as co-producers.

Theft is an illegal and unilateral property transfer occurring without mutual consent, bypassing traditional market exchange (Scaraboto, 2015). There is little research on theft beyond identifying its various contexts. Giesler (2006) identifies behaviors like "leeching," where users download music without reciprocal sharing, violating reciprocity norms in Napster's gift economy. Similarly, Scaraboto (2015) discusses how theft can erode cooperative systems like consumption communities, highlighting tensions between individual gain and collective welfare. Another example of theft is the illegal downloading and sharing of digital content, such as movies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2007).

Acquisition dynamics[3]

The level of anonymity can explain a movement from Q3 to Q1. Gift receivers should accept and acknowledge gifts and then reciprocate. This need to balance debt creates mutual feelings of gratitude and supports social relationships over time (Schwartz, 1967). Yet, the embedded requirement to give, receive, and repay can lead to tensions and ambiguities between individuals, who may feel distressed managing interdependence and reciprocity (Belk & Coon, 1993; Ruth et al., 1999). Negative feelings may arise from this sense of indebtedness (Morales, 2005). Thus, anonymous acquisition via Q1 can provide options to avoid complex social obligations tethered to gifting (Marcoux, 2009) (KI 12, Table 1).

In digital materiality, downloading a file from a web community can be a peculiar form of gift-receiving (Giesler, 2006). When consumers acquire a file online, such as an MP3 file, they often feel a sense of ownership over the downloaded resource. However, on P2P platforms, where numerous such transactions occur, these files transform into a collective resource shared by the community (Belk, 2010).

[3] This subsection mainly covers the gift receiving movements in Q3, representing the voices of the prior literature as not much is known about the other acquisition practices

This transformation is made possible by the digital nature of these materials, which allows for infinite replications of a single item (Belk, 2013). Unlike physical goods, digital files can be copied and distributed without the original owner losing possession (Giesler, 2006). As a result, this circulation practice does not perfectly fit the traditional concept of gift-receiving (Q3). Instead, digital gifting may be viewed as a shift from Q3 to Q4, where multiple users can simultaneously *access* and utilize offerings (KI 13, Table 1).

Implications for the consumption stage

This acquisition mode has significant consequences for consumption by shaping identity formation (Campbell, 2005), personal fulfillment (Moisio et al., 2013), and social relationships (Belk & Coon, 1993; Sherry, 1983). In terms of implications for the consumption stage, these practices foster personal satisfaction and value (Gregson et al., 2009), allowing individuals to express autonomy and creativity (Biraghi et al., 2021) while often responding to economic constraints (Rocha et al., 2020) and promoting sustainability (Godfrey et al., 2022). A gifted object frequently symbolizes a crucial social relationship valued by the receiver (Belk, 1976; Price et al., 2000). Acquiring offerings outside the market can also relate to identity meanings as consumers extend themselves into an object of consumption via producing it (Belk, 1988) and evoking memories (Joy, 2001).

Gift-receiving also presupposes adherence to specific rituals, such as pleasing the giver or avoiding unpleasant behaviors like returning a gift too quickly (Belk, 2010). Receiving gifts is linked to possession value, full ownership rights, and an exclusive relationship with the item, which is often associated with inalienability (Belk, 2010; Curasi et al., 2004). Thus, re-gifting may be perceived as morally dubious (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Ruth et al., 1999).

Self-producing offers control, autonomy, and personal fulfillment, which are less present in market-mediated acquisitions. By engaging in self-production, consumers create tangible value, reinforce their identities, and build social connections (Campbell, 2005). Both Etgar (2008) and Xie et al. (2008) underscore the active role of consumers in the production process, illustrating how consumer participation in creating and customizing products enhances personal value and fulfillment. Consumers may thus derive personal, social, and economic value through activities traditionally viewed as consumption but also involve significant production elements (Moisio et al., 2013). For example, DIY home improvement projects allow consumers to exercise creativity, develop skills, and achieve a sense of accomplishment and identity affirmation through their contributions to the household. We see a parallel in the digital realm where consumers engage in social labor by creating and sharing content on social media, which fosters a sense of community and personal eudaimonia (Biraghi et al., 2021).

Self-producing, while offering personal satisfaction and cost savings, requires significant time, effort, and skill, with competent maintenance rejuvenating objects and incompetence potentially leading to failed repairs and disposal or creating barriers for some consumers (Campbell, 2005; Gregson et al., 2009). Consumers' co-production can also constitute a form of exploitation, where individuals add value without being compensated for co-created products (Cova & Dalli, 2009). Rocha et al. (2020) introduce the concept of "involuntary prosumption," where consumers engage in production-like activities due to external pressures, often in response to economic constraints.

Regarding theft, we know little about the nature of consumption post the act of robbery beyond its disruptive capability. Theft can break community trust, as illustrated in the study of the Geocaching community, where stealing items such as geocoins and travel bugs undermines the principles of sharing and reciprocity (Scaraboto, 2015). Online community leeching also challenges market logic, brokers new forms of value, and prioritizes access over profit (Giesler, 2006). Further, moral disengagement justifies the theft of digital goods (Krawczyk et al., 2015).

Non-market-mediated access

Non-market-mediated access (Q4) involves transactions that provide access to product offerings outside market-mediated exchange. Historically, Q4 predates other acquisition modes, relying on social rather than economic exchange. It emphasizes interpersonal relationships and social norms of reciprocity, as well as cultural rituals, such as those emanating from familial or cohabiting networks (Morales, 2005). Thus, it can serve as a consumer escape from or resistance to market exchange (Belk, 2010).

Consumer motivations

Cultural norms, such as collectivism and extended families' resource pooling (Belk, 2010), can motivate consumers toward Q4. At the individual level, personality traits, such as self-sufficiency, possessiveness, materialism, and fear of intimacy, may deter Q4 practices (Belk, 2007; Belk & Llamas, 2011). Consumers' past histories may also affect their willingness to engage in Q4 (Belk & Llamas, 2011); negative experiences, such as unwanted contamination, can discourage Q4 practices (Mardon et al., 2023). Consumer lifestyles and socio-economic backgrounds can also underpin whether and how consumers utilize Q4. Factors including consumers' household living arrangements, the closeness of ties between potential cohabitants, and feelings of psychological ownership or territorialization can (de) motivate engagement in Q4. Consumers are likely to freely share access to things within the same cohabiting household unit, such as families, couples, or roommates (Belk, 2010; Belk & Llamas, 2011), which can strengthen social ties, establish, or reinforce relational identities, creating cost benefits within a household (Mardon et al., 2023).

Prototypical practices

We identify two prototypical acquisition practices of Q4: sharing and borrowing (KI 15, Table 1). Both have received limited attention in marketing research but persist in contexts where consumers value opportunities to "escape" both the market *and* the burdens of ownership. *Sharing* is "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use as well as the act and process of receiving something from others for our use" (Belk, 2007, p. 127). Sharing is conceptually and practically distinct from activities derived from the market-mediated sharing economy. It may take the form of "sharing-in," which ranges from ancient, primitive forms of acquisition, such as hunter-gatherer tribes and forager societies, to more contemporary instances of carpooling, family "potluck" meals (Belk, 2010), and co-habitants' access to furniture (Epp et al., 2014; Epp & Price, 2010) and shared technologies (Mardon et al., 2023). Conversely, "sharing-out" involves sharing things with strangers (Belk, 2010), which hinders opportunities for identity value. For example, continued sharing-out may lead to "sharing-in." An occasional and discrete act of sharing transforms the relationship from an individual-to-individual to a communal one, and a new member is added to the family through consumption (Belk, 2010). Overall, sharing may lead to collective possession, as in an extended family where the members own and use the same object, which becomes a collective good (Belk, 2010). Both forms of sharing rely on relationships, guided by social norms of reciprocity (Belk, 2010), thus contributing unique forms of identity value (Mardon et al., 2023).

Borrowing "involves a temporary transfer of possession, in which the borrower does not become the legal 'owner'" (Jenkins et al., 2014, p. 131). We distinguish borrowing from sharing in two aspects. First, in borrowing, a temporary transfer of ownership (*de facto*) occurs once borrowed; the good is temporarily unavailable for the owner, which is not necessarily the case in sharing: borrowing a car to travel vs. sharing a car to travel. Second, borrowing classifies parties into lenders and borrowers and stresses a double form of obligation that is absent in Belk's notion of sharing (Jenkins et al., 2014). Jenkins et al. (2014) stress that borrowing is about relationships with others and with the borrowed object (Decoopman et al., 2010). Borrowing and related lending are usually free but imply potentially significant reciprocity and obligation (Marcoux, 2009). While we know little about borrowing in marketing, it is typically part of an ongoing friendship or familial relationship and follows goodwill (Decoopman et al., 2010). As a case in point, Jenkins et al. (2014) found that borrowers develop a sense of responsibility and sensitivity towards borrowed items.

Dynamics

Both sharing and borrowing are intrinsically relational and pro-social. Identity salience influences movement along the access/ownership continuum and can also explain movements horizontally from this mode to Q3. Although identity salience is associated with ownership-oriented practices, various types of sharing can also provide consumers with distinct forms of identity value. For example, sharing-in can foster familial identities as the shared goods bring together those who own and use them (e.g., Epp & Price, 2010). The family unit can be considered a shared consumption environment (Kerrane & Hogg, 2013), typified by its cohabiting nature across many cultures. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) found that consumers may perceive a common identity or shared self within networks of loved ones, reassuring them that their possessions will be in good hands. Such mechanisms can prove helpful in disposition practices (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005), such as handing down items or assigning heirlooms, divesting out of necessity, or responding to broader societal transformations (Lucy, 2022). Overall, Q4 may foster distinct forms of shared identity values at the group level, which can be instrumental in reinforcing social ties (KI 14, Table 1). This contrasts with the individualistic identity value garnered through ownership (Q1, Q3).

Consumers can also shift vertically between Q4 and Q2. For example, the level of anonymity can direct a shift towards Q2, particularly in contexts where sharers, lenders, and borrowers prefer to escape the interpersonal obligations and the social burdens that arise from established social ties with each party involved in the exchange (KI 17, Table 1). Shifts towards Q2 can also vary with consumer demographics (e.g., age, income level) and psychographics (e.g., life stage, lifestyle). For example, in the case of Alice presented in the opening vignette, her first car may have been one she borrowed from her parents (Q4). But, now, relocating to a new city in her 30s, she is unlikely to pursue car ownership and would more likely prefer short-term car rental (Q2) to benefit from its temporariness and lack of identification.

Implications for the consumption stage

Sharing-in practices have significant implications for relational identities (Epp & Price, 2008, 2010) and relationship longevity (Belk, 2010), which can suggest more opportunities for consumer attachment. Sharing-out practices may not necessarily provide "less" identity value but distinct forms, such as collectivist or community-based types of identity value, which may be desired more than individual identity value in some societies, such as collectivist cultures (KI 16, Table 1).

Prior research suggests that borrowing is mediated by psychological ownership (Bagga et al., 2019). Although the primary focus is on comparing consumers' willingness to pay for renting versus borrowing (where renting is valued more highly), it also revealed that consumers' willingness to pay for borrowed objects was not influenced by consumers' spending tendencies (tightwads/spendthrifts), nor the product nature (hedonic/utilitarian) (Bagga et al., 2019). One explanation may be that the collectivist obligation and reciprocal nature of borrowing contribute to the social rather than monetary value of lending.

What governs the sharing circulated via Q4? Belk (2010) argued that sharing is non-reciprocal since no debt is incurred. However, as a form of social exchange, sharing can be governed by social norms of reciprocity, and normativity guides behavior as we share. However, like Belk, we also acknowledge that, as a form of social exchange, sharing occurs in communities, such as in the context of Couchsurfing (Scaraboto & Figueiredo, 2022) or P2P problem-solving communities (Mathwick et al., 2008). When replicated and distributed through a collective, individual acts of generosity transform their nature into a form of social capital that is shared and accessible (Dolfsma et al., 2009). A form of mutuality and generalized reciprocity (Arnould & Rose, 2016) is extended through Q4.

Hybrid acquisition practices

Our framework integrates into one conceptual space the diverse modes and associated practices consumers use to acquire offerings. By providing conceptual parsimony, it emphasizes the evolving nature of these configurations and the dynamic interplay of acquisition behaviors (Table 1 summarizes key insights).

The framework also identifies four intermediate (hybrid) conditions between quadrants, where acquisition practices are guided by multiple, sometimes conflicting logics (see Fig. 1). First, leasing falls between Q1 and Q2, constituting a form of *possessive access*. Although leasing is an access-based acquisition practice, its consumption temporality enables a sense of psychological ownership because of the long-term nature of its access. We thus highlight possessive access as an intermediate form of acquisition between ownership and access, which leads consumers to consider the goods they use as "theirs" in a way that resembles pure ownership. Second, accessing digital content through streaming platforms for free (e.g., Spotify and YouTube) constitutes *free*, *ad-based streaming*, straddling both (Q2) as a form of streaming, as well as (Q4) as a digital sharing system. Because consumers do *not* pay for the content, they often experience such services as shared. Similarly, P2P renting, while following the logic of market-mediated access, can sometimes be governed by social normativity and social embeddedness, especially when the exchange happens between two consumers (Q4) (Scaraboto & Figueiredo, 2022). Therefore, it can be located between Q2 and Q4.

Third, *economic gifts* (Belk & Coon, 1993) fall at the intersection of Q1 and Q3 when the gift is given with the implicit (or even explicit) expectation to receive something in return: another gift, special attention, or consideration of some sort. The consumer gets the gift and leverages its potential to deliver some form of compensation that may be economic (e.g., the case of a return gift), psychological, or behavioral. Fourth, *digital gift systems* constitute a hybrid condition between Q3 and Q4, where consumers offer their goods to be shared collectively. This is especially prevalent in sharing digital objects, which are repositories developed through individual gifts (e.g., some users upload or provide copies of their digital goods) and then shared communally. These hybrid conditions reveal that the dimensions we employed are theoretically discrete but empirically distributed along many intermediate conditions.

Discussion, implications, and future research

Theoretical contributions

We revise and extend the concept of acquisition, the first stage of consumption, which we redefine as the process by which consumers come to obtain consumption offerings, which may be market-mediated. We identify that acquisition consists of four modes enabling consumers to own or access offerings (e.g., goods, services) mediated by market or non-market mechanisms. This definition moves beyond traditional views, predominantly associating acquisition with buying (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010) or payment methods (Dasgupta et al., 2007). We extend this classical view—and, by association, the conceptualization of consumption—by incorporating both ownership and access and market and non-market exchanges (e.g., social exchange) into it. In doing so, we depart from and advance MacInnis and Folkes' (2010) contribution, extending the notion of acquisition beyond market-mediated transactions. We then emphasize that acquisition aims for ownership but also includes access, challenging the classic definition of consumer behavior based on ownership consumption. In sum, consumers may get what they consume through market, non-market, ownership, and access-based modes.

Our theoretical framework contributes to consumer and marketing research by establishing a unified conceptual space where diverse acquisition modes are systematically analyzed. Prior research has developed many isolated theories and concepts that remain largely disconnected from one another, and, as a result, research remains siloed and limited in what it can address. Our integrative approach highlights the fluidity between and interconnectedness of four acquisition modes, aligning several practices (e.g., buying, renting, streaming, leasing, gift receiving, borrowing, and sharing) along two dimensions (*ownership transfer* and *market mediation*). The four acquisition modes—market-mediated ownership, market-mediated access, non-market-mediated ownership, and non-market-mediated access—have distinct consumption and potential disposition implications. We derive this by integrating and contrasting large marketing and consumer research domains. Described as an *integration* type of conceptual contribution (MacInnis, 2011), this framework offers a novel perspective on how these modes are interconnected, adding clarity and serving as a conceptual guide for navigating various literature streams. It allows us to compare the properties of different acquisition modes while considering their interrelationships, underlying motivators, and mechanisms.

Contributions to access and sharing research

Our framework contributes to research on access-based consumption in two significant ways. First, we theoretically distinguish access from acquisition practices (e.g., renting, sharing), a distinction not always evident in the literature. We position access as an alternative to ownership and conceptually situate it on a continuum representing how consumers benefit from goods and services. It views ownership and access as governing the consumer-object relationship rather than facilitating resource circulation practices. Our framework also redefines gifting and sharing as distinct acquisition practices, the former leading to the transfer of ownership and the latter leading to access. These distinctions are critical in addressing conceptual confusion in this research domain.

Second, our framework maps out the conceptual space of access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), including the conceptual spaces of Q2 and Q4, recognizing renting, streaming, sharing, and borrowing as distinct access-based acquisition practices. While renting is primarily discussed as the leading access-based practice, we extend this view by including streaming, borrowing, and sharing under access. Streaming services are identified as a specific form of market-mediated access due to their digital materiality and business model design, posing distinct consumer behavior implications. Streaming represents a unique form of market-mediated access, distinct from renting. We expand the original notion of access to encompass both market- and non-market-mediated non-ownership practices. Finally, we address the conceptual debate related to sharing in consumer research (Arnould & Rose, 2016; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010): our framework considers sharing and borrowing as access-based acquisition practices that do not involve market mediation.

Contributions to customer journey research

Our conceptual framework has important implications for the CJ concept. The traditional definition of the CJ focuses on buying, firm-centric types of market transactions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 74). Its conceptual boundaries have recently been broadened (Akaka & Schau, 2019). Our framework adds to this debate in three main ways. First, it bridges the gap between customer and consumption journeys by integrating firm- and consumer-controlled touchpoints. The distinction between customer and consumption journeys falls along the level of the market-mediation continuum (Fig. 1): CJ applies to Q1 and Q2 along market-mediated acquisition, whereas the notion of the consumption journey better captures the whole customer experience, including Q3 and Q4 along non-market-mediated exchange. Our framework highlights how consumers' choice of acquisition modes influences what happens *after* acquisition. For example, Q3 practices, such as gift-receiving, present a clear case where the customer is not a consumer, and the consumption journey can provide significantly distinct and valuable insights for marketers. Our framework overcomes the dichotomization of these two related yet separate research streams. It provides insights into why and how customer and consumption journeys warrant distinct marketing strategies and rely on different business models.

Second, our framework argues for a multi-mode CJ, which goes beyond buying. Each of the four acquisition modes introduced here demands a specific customer experience reflecting distinct pre-, during, and after-acquisition touchpoints and decisions. By focusing only on the buying practice and Q1, firms might ignore other distinct acquisition modes regarding motivations, touchpoints, satisfaction dynamics, and post-purchase implications. Some modes are anchored in social norms and obligations (e.g., Q3), while others are anonymous and driven by self-interest and economic motives (e.g., Q1 and Q2). Thus, each mode demands ad hoc designs of CJs. For example, Q2 requires an access-based CJ, a distinct type of consumer experience given the active role of consumers as co-providers and facilitators, and platform mediation to assemble a multitude of actors and a varied set of offerings (Trujillo-Torres et al., 2023).

Third, given the breadth of acquisition practices across the four modes, we provide a multi- or omnichannel view of customer and consumption journeys. Strategically, marketers should consider both traditional buying channels and access-based and non-market-mediated channels, as consumers may switch between them and even integrate different acquisition practices and modes. Multichannel strategies represent increased customer purchase points in various conditions and/or moments of their purchasing process (Balasubramanian et al., 2005; Venkatesan et al., 2007). For example, car dealerships have combined elements of leasing and ownership via a flexible "personal contract plan" that requires consumers to pay a deposit and monthly installments for a period, after which they can either return the car to the dealer, make a balloon payment to own the vehicle, or exchange the car for a newer model at the dealer. That is, the consumer is actively encouraged to try the product (Lehr et al., 2020) before deciding on a particular acquisition mode. Overall, acquisition can take many forms, with each an alternative or, potentially, a complementary solution for others.

Finally, our framework argues that the choice of the acquisition mode and practice has become equally salient to the choice of what to acquire. As we show in our starting vignette, consumers decide what to get and how to get it simultaneously. Recently, scholars have begun to consider the *how* as a core decision that consumers make, together or even before choosing the product or the brand, hence the *what* (Eckhardt et al., 2019). For example, green consumers might choose to barter rather than purchase new items for ethical reasons (Dalli & Fortezza, 2019). Consumers may, similarly, refuse acquisition practices associated with social exchange to avoid future social obligations (Marcoux, 2009). We argue that consumers deem acquisition practices as alternatives to each other and are likely to integrate them into complex acquisition strategies, as is increasingly the case in omnichannel environments (Penz & Hogg, 2022). Marketing scholars and firms should consider the choice of the acquisition practice as a significant component of consumer choice, meaning key differences in proposition value.

Managerial implications

Our framework suggests that for each product category, firms should consider all four acquisition modes as legitimate alternatives because consumers today see acquisition as a problem that can be solved in various ways, not necessarily through market-based ownership or buying. It suggests opportunities for market growth as firms can grasp prospects across acquisition practices, for example, along each dimension (e.g., providing opportunities to lease vs. buy). Non-market-based acquisition practices can be accomplished thanks to the contribution of intermediaries and platforms that engineer social exchange mechanisms, relationships, and rituals. By having an extensive and integrated view of the acquisition process, firms can better enhance customer value by providing diverse acquisition alternatives.

Competition must first be understood around the acquisition mode/practice before evaluating the brands in the consideration sets. Our study questions the traditional notion of competition, which ignores the nature of acquisition. By focusing on the conventional notion of the CJ (Q1), marketers risk ignoring key forms of competition represented by the other acquisition modes (Q2, Q3, Q4). As illustrated in our starting vignette, consumers like Alice are faced with many alternatives for their mobility and depending on a variety of personal and contextual factors, each one can become preferred over the others. Car manufacturing firms, for example, are not only competing with other car brands but must also consider the competition from car-sharing clubs that provide consumers access to cars (Q2) without carrying the burden of ownership. The multitude and ever-changing variety of acquisition practices have transformed the competitive landscape for most market offerings. This is crucial as consumers are less likely to remain loyal to their product/brand choices, which makes access-based forms of acquisition more appealing, and the competitive setting even more challenging for firms.

We provide more specific acquisition mode related implications next with additional managerial implications in the Web appendix.

Implications for market-mediated ownership

Buying can become problematic or unfeasible for lifestyle, ideological, sustainability, and socio-economic reasons. Consumers like Alice may maintain lifestyles that prioritize geographical mobility, which she sustains by defaulting to more liquid relations with possessions (Bardhi et al., 2012). Buying a car becomes Alice's last resort as she is unlikely to pursue such a long-term commitment, permanent sense of ownership, and responsibility, given the precarity of her relocation to a new city. For retailers, this suggests opportunities to revise business models from traditional B2C exchanges and incorporate more access-based modes into their offerings. As Alice minimizes her possessions, she may also embrace circular economy initiatives (e.g., second-hand, reselling schemes).

Implications for market-mediated access

Access options are attractive to consumers with low involvement with the product category, those who are variety-seekers and enjoy product trials, or see renting as a means of overcoming long-term commitments and obligations of ownership or precarity (e.g., relocations, gig-economy employment). We recommend that marketing managers emphasize these characteristics when promoting options within this acquisition mode. Prior research suggests that marketers promoting renting versus purchasing could also highlight sustainability (Pantano & Stylos, 2020) while downplaying opportunities for product attachment (Graul & Brough, 2020). Costello and Reczek (2020) found that marketers should utilize an "empathy lens," focusing on individual providers when promoting P2P renting versus renting from a company. This shows that marketing strategy needs to be distinct for each of the different practices and the various alternatives in each practice.

Implications for non-market-mediated ownership

Alice is unlikely to use this mode to acquire a high-involvement item like a car. However, for many consumers, their first car might be an inherited gift from their relatives. In this regard, it is essential to highlight that although gift-giving is inherently social, individuals often turn to the marketplace to procure gifts. Retailers can, therefore, play a pivotal role in guiding their customers toward selecting appropriate gifts for their loved ones and acquaintances. They may organize in-store or online events that showcase popular and well-received gift options, inspiring donors and offering insights into trending items and thoughtful gift ideas. They could also provide access to customer reviews and testimonials for products, particularly those purchased as gifts. Positive feedback from others who bought gifts for similar recipients can boost the donor's confidence in their choices. As an exemplar, Etsy curates products from different sellers into gift guides based on celebrity recommendations (e.g., Drew Barrymore, named Etsy's Chief Gifting Officer for 2024). Finally, platforms have facilitated gift exchanges among strangers, often motivated by sustainability motives, such as Freecycle, while relying on ad-based business models.

Implications for non-market-mediated access

Alice can also borrow a car from the neighborhood borrowing scheme or family members. Traditional social exchange practices like sharing and borrowing have become more prevalent because of platforms. At the same time, such transactions remain complicated in the context of digital technologies, many of which are designed with distinct affordances that may create barriers to sharing (Mardon et al., 2023). For instance, with more consumers preferring to access entertainment media via streaming platforms, they become intrinsically constrained by that platform's policies, which may deter potential sharing and borrowing of streamed content, in stark contrast to the pre-digital ways of simply sharing physical possessions. A core issue with such "sharing" is that, given the dominance of the platform's mediation, the social element of sharing disappears, i.e., "shared" accounts effectively become individualized profiles nested within the same account and, thus, the product itself is no longer "shared" in a traditional sense. We recommend that managers of multi-profile user accounts provide users with more opportunities to share and endorse content with each other within the platform. They can exhibit a shared collection that accounts for overlapping tastes across all users while still providing individuals the privacy of choosing which content can or cannot be included in shared collections. Furthermore, ad-based business models are more suitable for such platforms to keep commercial logic separate from community logic, which dominates Q4. A good example is Borrowmydog.com, where pet borrowing and care are free and involve community exchanges rather than monetary ones.

Future research

Our framework advances a comprehensive future research agenda outlined in Table 2. One overarching theme is how consumers navigate the four acquisition modes: How and when do consumers consider these modes as alternatives or substitutes? What factors shape their choices among them? Our conceptual analysis highlights the need for further research to examine (a) the growth of specific modes and practices as others decline, (b) changes in the nature, process, and outcomes of specific practices, and (c) how consumers learn to master new practices and reconfigure disparate practices to acquire resources. Future studies can explore historical shifts across these modes, exploring the institutional and market arrangements driving these changes.

The relationship between acquisition and disposition is also underexplored. For example, we know little about the nature and conditions that motivate disposition in the market-mediated access mode (Q2). Further, the disposition of items with high emotional or social value may vary significantly based on the acquisition mode. Disposing of special items is typically more complex than regular items (Price et al., 2000), with gifts adding layers of complexity (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). How do consumers navigate the complexities of disposing of sacred possessions, and what are the implications for business models?

Table 2 Future research agenda

Topic	Research questions
Overall framework	• How and when do consumers consider the four acquisition modes as alternatives or substitutes? What antecedents shape their transitions across modes? • Ho have acquisition modes shifted historically? Which modes or practices are becoming dominant, and what market or institutional arrangements drive such shifts? • How does the customer journey differ under each mode? • What trade-offs influence companies' decisions to promote or deliver different modes? • How do acquisition modes affect disposition processes and their implications for sustainability?
Q1– Market-mediated ownership acquisition	• How is digital consumption reshaping market-mediated ownership? Does digital ownership require theoretical updates to existing models? • How do consumers develop psychological ownership of digital products compared? • What experiential dimensions arise in peer-to-peer buying, selling, and bartering? • Under what conditions do consumers prefer market-mediated ownership to non-market-mediated modes? *Buying*: • When is solid and liquid consumption seen as complementary rather than substitutes? • What drivers (e.g., pro-social or pro-status) and consequences influence circular economy consumption? *Bartering*: • Is bartering becoming a primary practice rather than a residual one? • What hedonic and social values are associated with bartering?
Q2– Market-mediated access acquisition	• Is market-mediated access acquisition growing due to increasing consumption liquidity? • How do consumer preferences for liquidity vary across product categories? • How does renting and streaming affect perceptions of cultural content (e.g., books, movies)? • How do hybrid access models compare to pure forms of sharing or renting? *Renting*: • How do repeated engagements with rented items (e.g., leasing) affect psychological ownership? • How is peer-to-peer renting (e.g., Airbnb) reshaping consumer market perceptions? *Streaming*: • How does streaming's product and pricing design influence consumer valuation and loyalty? • How can ethical streaming models address illegal practices?
Q3– Non-market-mediated ownership acquisition	• What boundary conditions shape the perception of non-market-mediated ownership? • How do ethical or sustainability concerns influence preferences for gift-giving or self-producing? *Gift receiving*: • How do recipients influence the dynamics of gift exchanges? • How do digital platforms and online wish lists shape gift-giving practices? *Self-producing*: • What institutional, social and cultural barriers limit self-producing practices? • How do platforms and tutorials encourage self-production, repair, and reuse? *Theft*: • How do consumers perceive theft in terms of morality, ethics, and its role as a form of protest or resistance? • What factors, including community norms and peer influences, shape attitudes, behaviors, and rationalizations around theft?
Q4– Non-market-mediated access acquisition	• Under what conditions are sharing and borrowing substitutes for other modes? • How do social norms and morality govern sharing practices? • How do shared digital products challenge distinctions between sharing and borrowing? *Sharing*: • How do digitization and platformization influence sharing practices among groups (e.g., families, strangers)? *Borrowing*: • How do borrowers and lenders navigate privacy concerns when sharing digital items? • What principles sustain borrowing and lending without market mediation?

More research is needed to understand how consumer preferences for access versus ownership vary across product categories, under what conditions access is favored, and whether this may change how consumers perceive these product categories. Future research can explore whether consumers engaging in long-term access practices, such as leasing, identify as "owners" of such goods. Prior research suggests a lack of psychological ownership under market-mediated access. However, longer and repeated engagement with accessed resources could change the nature of consumption within this modality. As leasing gains popularity, for instance, in accessing smartphones (Darlin 2017), research could better explore the boundary conditions between ownership and access. Other questions could examine how P2P renting reshapes consumer perceptions of the market and its role as an alternative or complement to traditional buyer-seller models. Strategies to enhance perceived ownership of rented items to boost value, commitment, and care also warrant investigation.

Future research is also needed to study non-market-mediated ownership, especially in researching several understudied practices such as theft and self-production. Scholars could compare product categories within this mode to determine which are influenced by ethical or sustainability concerns and which appeal to consumers' desire for social and moral engagement. Gift-giving practices, particularly investments where donors expect returns, also warrant further study. Digital tools and online networks increasingly shape gift-giving practices, challenging traditional distinctions between market and gift exchanges (Ciampa & de Valck, 2024; Giesler, 2006). Exploring how online communities and collaborative networks influence gift-giving practices could provide valuable insights (Givi et al., 2023).

Non-market-mediated access acquisition remains the least explored mode in marketing research, making it a critical domain for inquiry. Research should investigate its antecedents and how consumers compare it to market-mediated access. This includes how consumers perceive items accessed through sharing platforms and whether these practices are governed by social and moral norms or self-interest. Another area of research is how the nature of the accessed item challenges the distinction between sharing and borrowing. Digital materiality, for instance, can be replicated and simultaneously shared by several parties. In this case, the distinction between sharing and borrowing might not hold. The interplay between the nature of accessed items and their circulation regimes at the conceptual and practical levels is another promising area for exploration.

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