Campus Closet Final Report

Link: https://v0-campus-closet-pwa.vercel.app/

Video:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jDrFvpQduXL-N4FK3qN8A3IRN94jEQAa/view?usp=sharing

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1. Introduction

Campus Closet is a Stanford-specific web platform designed to facilitate short-term peer-to-peer clothing rental systems. This platform is ideal for college students who need formal, themed, or climate-specific clothing for a short-time use, especially for one-time events like interviews, formals, or themed parties that do not justify a full purchase of new fashion items. Our target users are students who may not want to purchase new items they will only wear once or twice, and students who already own such items and are open to lending them out.

We designed and launched Campus Closet to explore how digital systems can foster trust, reciprocity, and sustainability in resource-constrained communities. The platform allows users to browse clothing listings, post items to lend, and contact clothing owners directly through Stanford emails. After conducting interviews, building a prototype, and deploying a curated launch, we observed organic user engagement as we promoted our platform through campus-specific social networks such as Fizz and dorm group chats. Students engaged with Campus Closet to borrow clothes, interact with listings, and offer feedback to improve our platform.

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2. Theory Motivation

Our design is grounded in social computing theory, especially concepts related to community formation, motivation, and norm development. We designed our platform for a specific, semi-close-knit community: Stanford students. This focused target audience was our strategy to overcome the cold start problem. A well-defined community helps reduce the market scope and increase density, especially since Stanford undergraduates mostly live on campus. As discussed in the lecture, successful early-stage systems often focus on a ‘tight loop’ of early adopters to foster strong atomic networks within the community. This bounded context also supports trust, accountability, and more effective norm-setting, which helps maintain the community when facing growth and scope of the social platform.

2.1 Designing for Motivation

Our system serves two types of users: renters and lenders. Drawing from course materials on participation in online systems, we designed the platform around a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators:

- **Renters** are primarily driven by functional, extrinsic needs: they want to access specific clothing without the financial or environmental cost of buying.
- **Lenders** may be extrinsically motivated (earning money, saving space), but we also designed for intrinsic motivators such as the pleasure of helping peers and participating in a community-centered sustainability effort.

We reinforced these motivations by making lending easy and rewarding through intuitive item listings, potential financial earnings, and community visibility for external motivations, and by framing borrowing as a smart, communal, and sustainable choice for internal motivations.

2.2 Addressing a Platform Gap

Our research revealed a clear gap between commercial rental services and general marketplaces such as Facebook Marketplace or Depop. These platforms tend to be broad and transactional. In contrast, Campus Closet targets a semi-close community: students who may not know each other personally, but are connected by weak ties through living in the same dorm, attending the same class, or sharing campus experiences. This structure creates a unique environment: close enough for trust and accountability, yet distant enough for scalability and utility.

This design echoes course material on relationship strength in platform design. While platforms designed for strong ties such as Venmo or group chats focus on close friends, and those for weak ties such as Reddit or Craigslist rely on content-first interactions, Campus Closet operates in the middle zone. We intentionally leveraged Stanford's shared identity and high density to build trust, enable norm-setting, and reduce friction in peer-to-peer exchanges.

2.3 Norms and Social Accountability

As discussed in class, norms are more likely to emerge and stabilize in small, bounded communities. They come in two forms: descriptive and injunctive norms. By launching Campus Closet as a Stanford-specific beta, we were able to intentionally create and reinforce norms, instead of allowing toxic or misaligned behaviors to emerge unchecked. We established several key community norms through our design choices and onboarding materials as listed below.

- Timely and respectful communication was encouraged via structured in-app messaging and automated reminders to respond within 24 hours.
- We promoted clarity and completeness in item listings by requiring photos, tags, and specific details such as size, condition, and availability.
- Accountability and trust were reinforced by linking each user profile to a verified Stanford email address, with optional references to dorms or affiliations to foster a sense of social proximity.
- Our onboarding flow and interface copy emphasized pro-social and sustainable participation, highlighting the environmental benefits of reuse and the community value of mutual support.
- We promoted reciprocity and contribution by encouraging users not only to borrow but also to lend, reinforcing the idea that the platform thrives when everyone participates as both a giver and a receiver.

These norms were supported not only by design, but also by the observability and identifiability inherent in a campus setting. Users who misbehave may be seen again in classes or dining halls. This offline accountability helps mitigate antisocial behaviors common on broader platforms such as trolling, ghosting, or dishonesty.

2.4 Prioritizing the Hard Side (Sellers)

In two-sided marketplaces such as our platform, bootstrapping the 'hard side' is critical especially during early recruitment. For Campus Closet, lenders (those willing to list and share their clothing) are the hard side. We were inspired by strategies discussed in class and case studies such as Uber (which first focused on drivers) to devise our own methods to prioritize lender recruitment

We carried out calls and meetings with potential lenders to understand their motivations and concerns, offered direct onboarding assistance to make the process as smooth as possible, and seeded the platform with curated initial listings from our own closets to immediately showcase variety and value. Additionally, we emphasized lender visibility and the social value of contributing to a sustainable campus community.

This supply-first approach ensured renters would find value immediately upon visiting, reducing churn and increasing the likelihood of virality. By solving the supply problem first, we avoided a common failure mode in early-stage marketplaces.

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3. Design Rationale and Explanation

3.1 Design Rationale

Campus Closet is built to foster a self-sustaining, trust-based clothing-sharing ecosystem within a tightly-knit university community. Our design decisions are grounded in the goals of establishing social accountability, cultivating desirable norms, and ensuring a seamless user experience that lowers barriers to both lending and borrowing. Our core challenge was to create a self-sustaining, trust-driven micro-economy of clothing sharing within a bounded community. We tackled this by prioritizing:

- **Trust Signals**: Trust is foundational for any peer-to-peer exchange systems. We addressed this by requiring Stanford-only authentication using Google OAuth that is tied to @stanford.edu email addresses, ensuring all users belonged to the university community. Verified profiles lend credibility to lenders, and the visibility of usernames on listings builds familiarity and perceived accountability, which are key components in reinforcing mutual respect and safety for transactions.

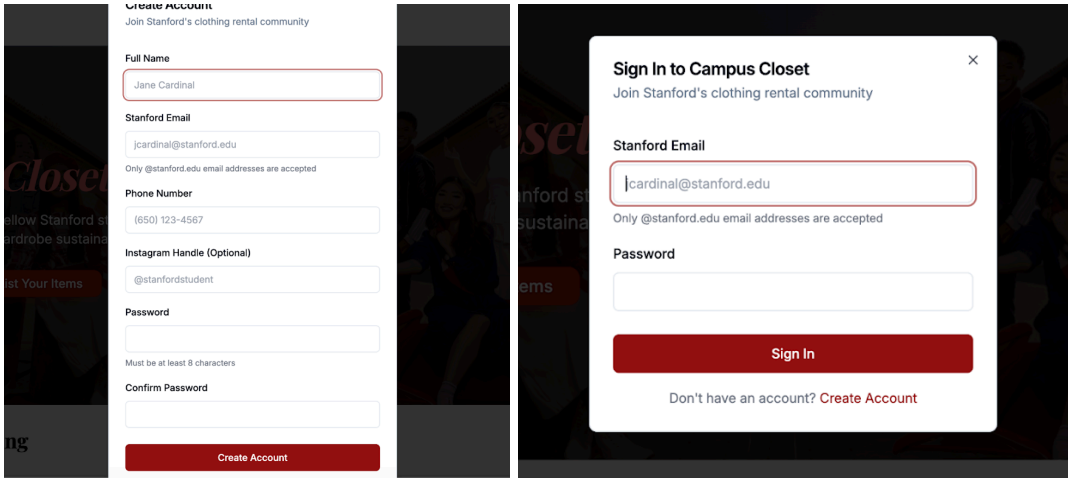

Figure 1. Sign-in/Sign-up Pages

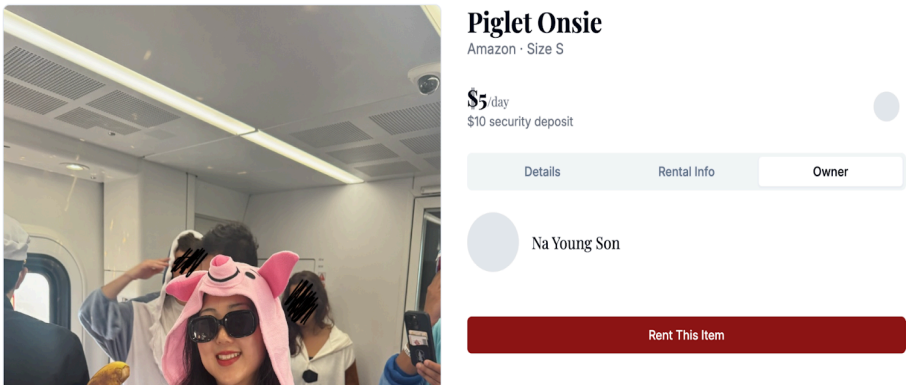

Figure 2. Lender Visibility in Clothing Details Page

- **Community Norms**: To guide quality participation from the start, our item listing form includes structured templates with fields like size, category, and description. These serve not only to standardize listings but to establish behavioral expectations. During our beta test, we actively moderated submissions to ensure completeness, civility, and alignment with community values. This moderation helped us set a tone of mutual care and high standards, seeding descriptive and injunctive norms that promote participation and trust.

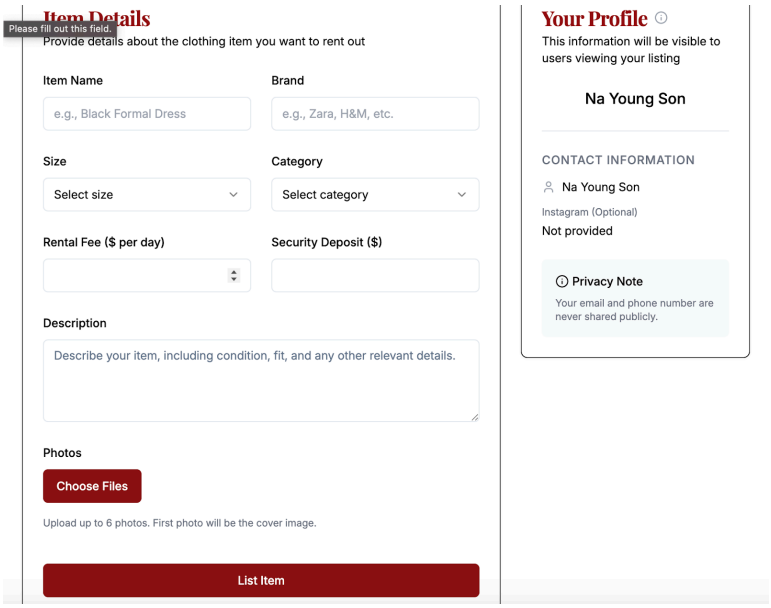

Figure 3. Item Listings Page

- **Hard Side First Strategy**: Drawing from course concepts around two-sided marketplaces, we identified lenders as the 'hard side' to prioritize recruiting. Without inventory, renters have no reason to engage. We focused our early efforts on onboarding lenders through direct outreach, personal onboarding, and curated listings.
- **Bootstrapping content and simulating/ showing off engagement:** We preloaded the platform with over 20 clothing items across diverse styles, sizes, and functions. To show off and simulate activity and boost perceived engagement, we included recently 'rented out' listings on the homepage.

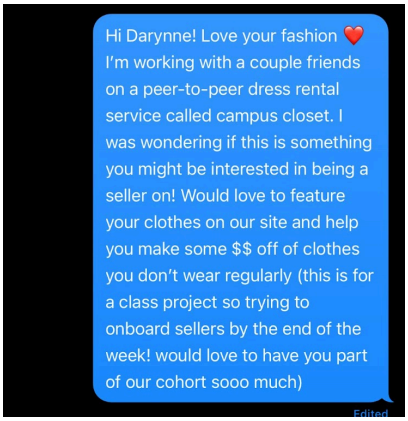

Figure 4. Example of outreach messages to sellers

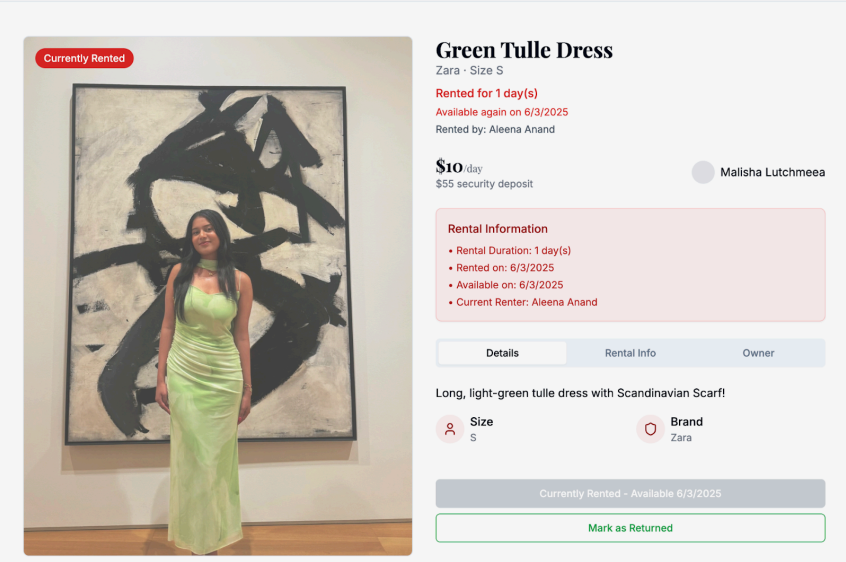

Figure 5. Example of how rented-out item appears

- **Minimal Friction UX**: A key part of our rationale was minimizing friction in every part of the user flow. The user interface was designed to feel familiar yet purpose-built. We prioritized clarity and speed for the users by designing our platform as a PWA (progressive web app) that users can access on their mobile as well as desktop, and also add to their mobile home screen similar to native app icons. Our app is designed as a scrollable grid of thumbnails on the homepage, and we also implement one-click filters such as item type, occasion, and size. Borrowers can request an item in just one step: click "Rent This Item" on the corresponding clothing detail page. Then, users will get a pop-up notification informing that they will receive an email containing information of the renter and lender. Each listing includes visual cues (e.g., clothing descriptions and occasions like “casual” or “formal”) and essential information such as the pickup location and rent period.

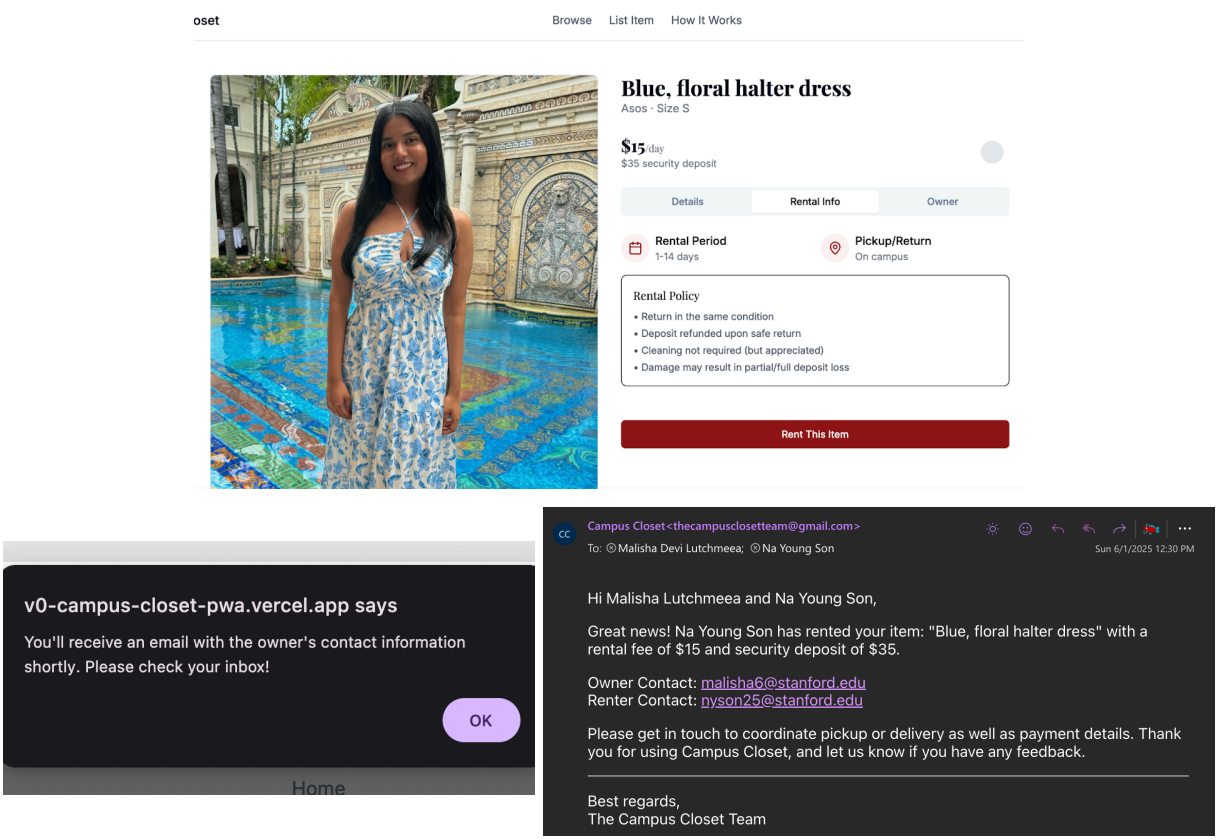

Figure 6a/b/c. User Flow for renting an item

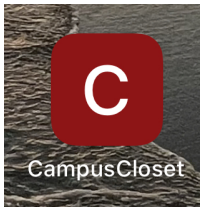

Figure 7. Campus Closet App Icon on iPhone

4. Implementation

Campus Closet is implemented as a PWA (Progressive Web App) using modern full-stack tools, allowing us to move quickly while maintaining flexibility and scalability. We deployed the application on Vercel, enabling seamless integration with frontend frameworks and continuous deployment from our GitHub repository.

4.1 Frontend Development

The frontend was built using React.js, ensuring a responsive, web-friendly interface with smooth client-side routing and state management. We designed reusable components for listing cards, filters, modals, and

messaging, with a focus on usability and visual clarity. The interface supports browsing listings, filtering by size, category, and occasion, viewing detailed item pages, and sending rental requests with minimal friction. The code was written with the help of v0, an AI coding tool developed by Vercel, and some minimal hand coding to fix AI-generated errors.

4.2 Backend & Authentication

We utilized Vercel's v0 platform as the no-code foundation which allowed us to rapidly build and deploy the core structure of our application without extensive manual coding. However, to enable critical backend functionalities necessary for user management, item listings, and tracking user engagement in an effective and scalable manner, we integrated substantial custom code leveraging Supabase. We used Supabase as our backend-as-a-service platform, providing real-time database capabilities, secure data handling, and built-in support for Google OAuth. Authentication was restricted to users with @stanford.edu emails, ensuring that only Stanford students could access the system.

We wrote functions to insert data into various tables such as user profiles, item listings, and engagement metrics. For example, when a new user signed up or logged in, we used Supabase's authentication service to capture their credentials and then added code to insert or update their profile information into a table. Similarly, when a student listed an item for rent, our code collected the form inputs and populated the appropriate table using Supabase's client library. Retrieving user information also required custom logic. To personalize the experience and show users their own listings, we wrote queries to fetch data from Supabase based on the logged-in user's ID. All of these interactions were handled through asynchronous JavaScript code using Supabase's SDK.

In addition, we incorporated EmailJS to facilitate direct communication between clothing owners and renters. This was a key feature that enabled users to connect via email for further details about the rented item. The custom code we developed bridged these services together, handling user actions on the frontend, updating Supabase tables accordingly, and triggering EmailJS to send messages automatically. This substantial extension transformed a basic no-code deployment into a fully interactive rental marketplace tailored to the needs of college students.

4.3 Data Logging & Quantitative Tracking

To support our post-launch analysis, we implemented two critical tables in Supabase, sessions and events, to track user behavior and engagement metrics within our clothing rental system. The sessions table logs each user's session, including the session start and end times, allowing us to measure how long users are spending on the platform. The events table captures specific user interactions such as clicks on the "Rent This Item", "List This Item", or "View Details" buttons. These events are recorded with timestamps and associated user/session IDs, enabling us to analyze how users are engaging with different parts of the system.

To insert this data, we wrote custom JavaScript functions that trigger when users perform these actions. For example, when a user clicks on "Rent This Item", our code records that event in the events table with the relevant metadata. Furthermore, Supabase provides a built-in SQL editor that we used to visualize and analyze

this data. By writing SQL queries directly with the Supabase dashboard, we could generate insights such as average session duration or conversion rates from views to rentals. This functionality allowed us to monitor platform usage and engagement effectively, supporting continuous improvement of the user experience based on real data.

5. Virality and Theory Analysis

5.1 Launch Plan

5.1.1 Instagram

We announced the app launch on each of our public Instagrams, soliciting users from our personal network. More significantly, we were able to leverage the Campus Closet-specific Instagram handle we had started developing during the Piggyback Prototyping phase of our product, to make a public launch announcement to a network of followers who had already shown interest in our product. We put the link to the app in our Instagram bios.

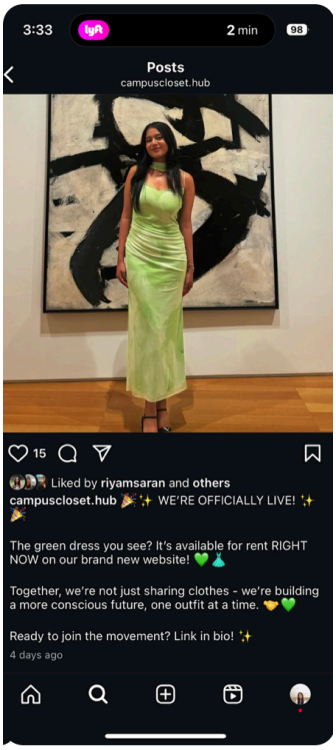

Figure 8. Our launch post on Instagram

5.1.2 Direct Messaging

Although our Instagram efforts focused on recruiting all types of users, from lenders to renters or even casual lurkers, we supercharged our renter-specific outreach with personalized text messaging.

We used strategies from complementing their style to even suggesting specific pieces we've seen them wear that could be a good outfit for Campus Closet. We hand-picked people who had distinctive style and the kind of unique pieces we envisioned would be a good fit for our fashion-forward space.

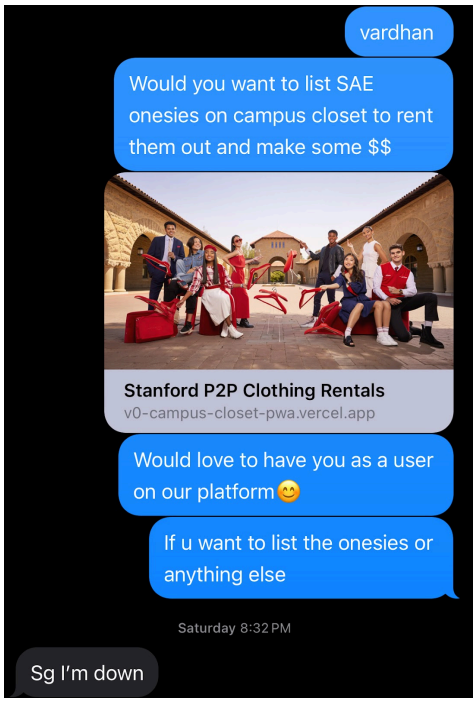

Figure 9. Example of personalised seller recruiting

5.2.1 Outcomes - Quantitative Analysis

In terms of quantitative analysis, we analyzed engagement with our social posts as well as the user behavior data we gathered through extensive instrumentation on our web application itself. Here is the data that we gathered:

a. Daily Usage

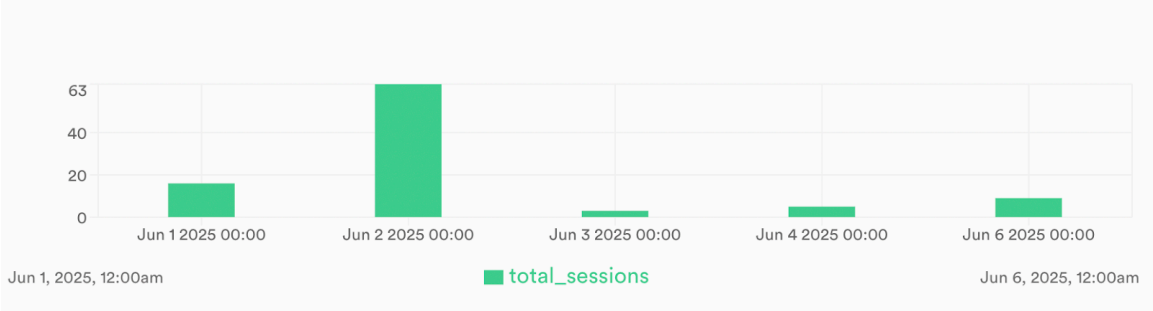

Figure 10. Graph of sessions per day over 5-day period after launch

Our data on day-by-day sessions aligned with expectations. Our major launch post was on June 2, 2025, and on that day we had 64 total sessions of our app. A session is defined as the duration from when a user signs into their Campus Closet account and is on the application to the time they sign out or change windows. We had a few more sessions in the following days, but it dropped to around 10-15 sessions per day since our main day of promotion was June 2. The chart below shows the number of unique users who visited Campus Closet per day since our launch where the highest number is 4 on June 4.

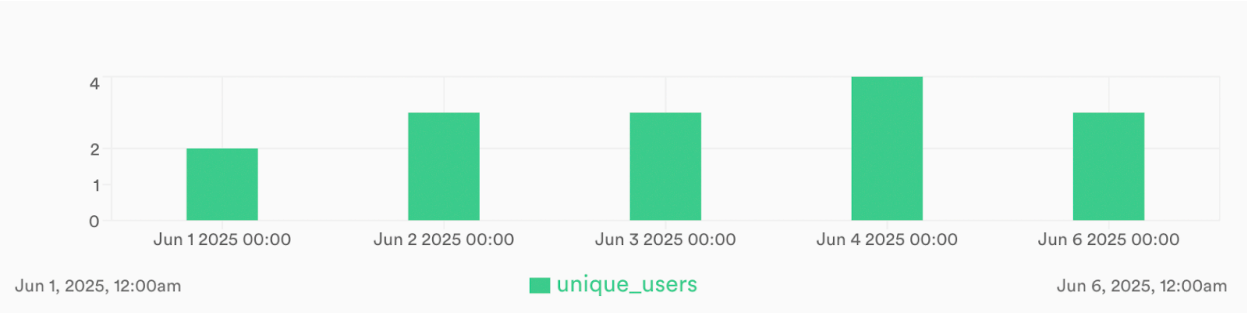

Figure 11. Graph of unique users per day over 5-day period after launch

b. Event Tracking

We tracked interactions with our three main actions to see how popular each is on our platform (View Item Details vs. List Item vs. Rent Item). Taken in aggregate, our data on which action buttons were engaged in gives us information on the relative popularity of buttons, and the amount of real app interaction we saw per user.

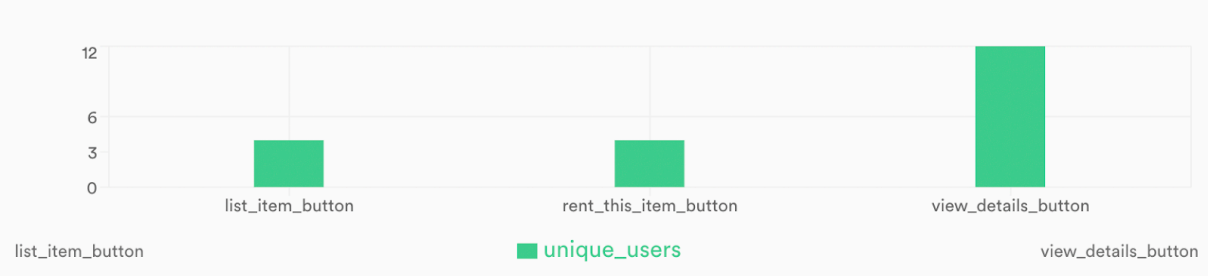

Figure 12a. Graph of unique user interactions per main app action button

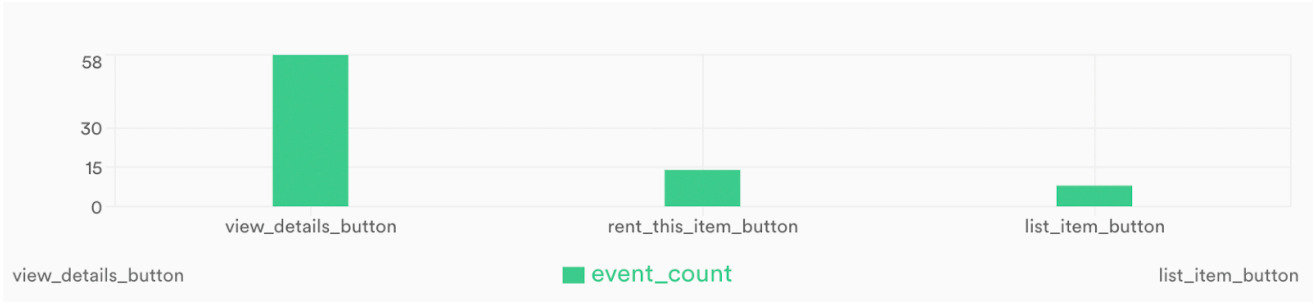

Figure 12b. Aggregate interactions per main action button

1. According to the data above, the View Details button was the most popular button – which was to be expected as it is the lowest-hanging-fruit action you can take on our app.
2. Per unique users, listing an item to rent was slightly more common than renting an item from the listed items. This was a result of our intentional hard-side-first recruiting strategy focusing on lenders over buyers.
3. However, overall we had more users renting items than listing. This conflicting data points to overall more interest in renting than buying – which also corresponds to what we learned in class. The main challenge in building a 0->1 ecommerce platform, Professor Bernstein told us, was recruiting the sellers. The buyers will follow once the site gets populated. This data follows that observed pattern – even though we focused on recruiting sellers, our users still had more overall interest in renting others' items than listing their own.
4. Furthermore, this data also addresses the fact that first-time renters likely came back to rent more – as we had 3 unique users who rented an item, and almost 3x the amount of clicks on the button. This is a positive indicator of buyer satisfaction and retention on our platform.
5. However, the drop in the funnel of users Viewing an Item -> Clicking Rent is quite stark. In total, 6 unique users listed their own clothing for rent and 4 unique users rented available listings. According to the data, 49 items were viewed and about 13 were actually rented, indicating a 26.5% rate of rental after viewing. This is most likely due to the short time since we launched our platform. We expect these numbers to increase as more people list items and there are events that people will look to rent clothing for.

5.2.2 Outcomes - Qualitative Analysis

In addition to instrumentation and analytics, we also conducted short 15-20 minute user interviews with five participants. We reached out to everyone who had either made an account or engaged with our app launch campaign, including those who didn't end up becoming users of our app. In the end we ended up speaking with 2 men and 3 women, all in our team's extended Stanford network. For those whom we couldn't speak to, we solicited text feedback which also informed our qualitative data collection.

If the participant had signed up for our app, we interviewed them about their experiences with renting, shopping, etc and asked for their opinions on our app. If the participant had not signed up for the app, we asked them why they had not, explained any confusions they had, and conducted a "perception test" for the remainder of the interview wherein we asked them to walk us through their first perception of the app interface anyway. This was helpful in getting us some initial feedback both on our concept and our interface.

We acknowledge that interviews with acquaintances could lead to more biased data than if we had conducted interviews with people we did not know. However, during finals week, with the lack of compensation for these people's times, our most reliable recruiting source was our pre-existing network. However, to minimize bias, the interviewer for each participant did emphasise that this app was not their idea, and that they had minimal agency on the design of it, and they were just looking for feedback to send back to their teammates (even if this was categorically untrue, we felt this may encourage people to be more candid in their responses).

Furthermore, by having an almost equal number of men and women and by having a mix of students who had signed up and those who had not signed up, we set ourselves up for a qualitative study process which gave us a rounded set of insights – many surprising.

Main Qualitative Insights:

1. **Reactions to our app were a mixed bag.**

   This was probably the most surprising thing, because we thought rentals were exactly what we, the Campus Closet team, personally needed. But in our interviews, both the recruited men said they saw the ads for Campus Closet and said that they did not sign up for the app because they did not find it was something they would use, as they do not own anything that they do not wear frequently and thus don't feel comfortable renting out. This was surprising to us because both these men were people who we had personally recruited to be

sellers as we knew they had many interesting outfits. A third person, one of the girls, said she was initially interested in the app but then she went back to upload her clothes and realized it is only a rental service and not a place to sell her clothes. The other two interviewees were both women who had signed up for the app, and were emphatic about the concept – in stark contrast to the first three interviewees mentioned. So our hypothesis is that there is a niche fan base who is very interested in this idea, even if others may not be as interested. This fan base seems passionate enough about it to make up for the detractors. This hypothesis is supported by the metrics, where we saw that there were multiple rentals per person – even if so many people were not renting yet.

P2: "Cool concept, but if I'm not wearing a piece anymore I'd rather donate it. Managing a rental and hoping it comes back in good shape feels like a hassle."

P4: "I love seeing someone rock my mini dress at their party and I make a little money—total win-win."

2. **There was a *serious* intention-behavior gap**

We're seeing an intention–behavior gap: early users express interest but fail to activate their accounts or upload because they forget or run out of time. In my interactions with sellers especially, for users who expressed initial interest, many of them did not actually upload content due to not having time to go through their closets/ forgetting when they did. In interviews, people revealed that they did not know if their effort would be worth it due to not knowing who would rent it out, decision fatigue at trying to pick clothes, set price points, take appropriate pictures. People indicated that they would appreciate reminders during the night on weekdays, when they are usually in their dorms and have closet access.

Interesting user instance – said they'd list, forgot, and then remembered again when they bumped into me – and listed a clothing item, unprompted, then and there. This showed they were very interested in partaking in our offerings, but were just too fatigued by the sign up process to have been able to do it when they saw it.

3. **Users had specific communities they would be willing to sell to**

When signed-in users were questioned about their selling intentions, they specified that they would be most comfortable lending to what was the equivalent of the "weak ties" that we learned about in lecture. This was due to a mix of the need for trust in the renter as well as an evaluation of the social dynamics of a money-based rental transaction, and how that might not be suitable for people they are very close to. This was surprising to us because we did not even consider these different levels of ties when thinking about the community we were designing

for – but it became clear that this is an important aspect of community for our members, so it must be something we keep top of mind going forward.

Interesting user instance – marketed their listing on Slack, a professional community, but didn't feel comfortable posting the same on a friends group chat.

6. Design Reflections

What Worked

- Successful Launch Post
    - Evidence: Strong first-day spike (64 sessions)
    - Why it matters: The launch post effectively converted curiosity into initial traffic.
    - Design takeaway: Announce future drops/collections as time-boxed "events" to recreate launch-day urgency.
- High retention
    - Evidence: **High repeat behavior among the few renters:** 3 unique renters generated almost 3× as many rental clicks.
    - Why it matters: Once someone completed a rental, they quickly did it again—an early signal of product-market fit on the demand side.
    - Design takeaway: Lean into *retention before acquisition*: rewards for first rental, post-rental prompts ("what's next on your wishlist?").

What Didn't Work

- Seller activation stalled
    - Evidence: Many invited sellers never uploaded; listing-per-user < rent-per-user despite seller-first outreach.
    - Root cause: High effort: closet triage, photos, pricing. Lack of confidence items will rent.
    - Design takeaway: It would be helpful to send notifications at intuitive times to remind them to go through their closet, etc. It should utilize AI to help them fill out item listings faster and with more assistance on what works and what does not.
- Drop-off after launch day

    - Evidence: Sessions fell to 10-15/day; unique users peaked at 4 after launch.
    - Root cause: One-time promotion with no follow-up triggers; no habitual hook.
    - Design takeaway: Could incorporate daily sales, offer trendy items to give daily new reasons to open the app. Could utilize inspiration from gamification to introduce a habitual hook - daily listing challenge?
- Male students disengaged
    - Evidence: Both recruited men declined to list.
    - Root cause: Lower wardrobe turnover, higher perceived risk, lower social reward for sharing clothes.
    - Design takeaway: Campus Closet might be more female-oriented than we had originally envisioned.
- **Any final reflections on anti-social behaviors, ethical or societal issues that you'd need to address going forward?**
    - There is a problem of ghosting: in all of the cases where the "rent" button was clicked, either the seller or the buyer ghosted each other. (We got this information from the renters themselves).
    - This anti-social behavior is against the norms we should be setting on our platform.
    - Therefore, we must set up a structure so that this does not happen.
    - This could mean having an in-system direct messaging feature, potentially with 24-hour expiry on matches to encourage outreach (similar to the dating platform Bumble).

Theory

Our Design

Campus Closet set out to solve a *resource-waste vs. occasional-need* dilemma specific to college life:

- **Students frequently need "one-off" clothes** (interview suits, themed-party fits, weather gear) but hesitate to buy items they will wear once.
- **Other students already *own* such rarely-used pieces** that sit idle in cramped dorm closets.

We saw that existing options left a gap. Most peer-to-peer rental and resale platforms tend to be broad and transactional. In contrast, Campus Closet targets a semi-close community: students who may not know each other personally, but are connected by weak ties through living in the same dorm, attending the same class, or sharing campus experiences. This structure creates a unique environment: close enough for trust and accountability, yet distant enough for scalability and utility.

We doubled down on the trust factor by only letting Stanford-email linked accounts to sign up on Campus Closet, and by showing every seller's real name and pictures on our app. Also, we leveraged the benefit of having Stanford students living so close to each other to be able to provide same-day pickups which were uniquely useful on a campus where we perceive everything always happening at the last minute!

We also applied concepts from the lecture into our design, ensuring that it would succeed. Firstly, before launch, we bootstrapped the app content by listing our own items that we were lending out. As talked about in lecture, bootstrapping content is an effective way of overcoming the Cold Start problem common in social computing systems. Secondly, when we did our initial user recruiting, we focused on a seller-first strategy going off of what we learned in class about recruiting the hard side first. We made an itemized form for all listers to fill out to list their item, embedding the norms of our system into the design so that everyone knows what information is necessary and beneficial to provide to people through a listing. This design decision was made based on our deep understanding of the importance of norm-setting right from the start, so that users know how to act and do not misuse your system. By starting with a Stanford-specific initial launch, we were utilizing atomic networks as another strategy to overcome the Cold Start problem, as we had learned in lecture that a tight initial graph builds trust and spreads by word-of-mouth quickly. Lastly, in the framing of our product tagline, we used both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to attract audiences. ("Be sustainable" and "share your fashion" as well as "make some money"). This is because we had discussed research in class that suggested purely extrinsic motivators are not enough fuel to power long-term usage of a product, so people would need more than a way to make a quick buck if they were to get genuine value out of this product. Due to the thoughtfulness of the design, we were confident that it would be a useful product for the Stanford community.

Our Usage

Norm-Setting

According to the lecture, people tend to follow whatever implicit norms they see the other users following on a platform (descriptive norms). An example of this was in the selection of listing images for our platform. All our bootstrapped content was of us in iPhone selfies, causal group photos, etc so

the inbound images uploaded by sellers followed the same format. In our bootstrapping we focused on populating the Browse tab but did not spend time perfecting our profiles, and in turn new users onboarded onto our profile also did not spend time on their profile picture. In short, the newcomers after launch basically mimicked whatever behavior they saw in the bootstrapped content. This happened even though the implicit norms did not outwardly prioritize a certain behavior from site visitors, i.e. there was no injunctive norm that outlined that they must upload pictures of themselves in the clothes versus professional images of the photo, nor any norm which said it was more important to fill out every field on a listing than it was to fill out any part of your seller profile.

Tie Strength & Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivators

When asked, all of the users in the user interviews conducted said they would hypothetically prefer renting out clothes to someone they consider a strong or weak tie. However, only three of those said they are actually open to renting out clothes to anyone at all. In cases where they are open to renting out, Campus Closet is more useful to connect weak ties to each other as strong ties are more likely to already have access to a stronger communication channel than Campus Closet to borrow items from each other. There is also a sense of hesitation when it comes to users feeling comfortable renting out clothes “for money” to their strong ties, whereas there is less of this sense when it comes to their weak ties.

The fact that Campus Closet is more useful to connect weak ties to each other aligns with the idea that weak ties often act as "transports to other parts of the social network" and provide access to information or resources (like different clothes) that strong ties might not. Strong ties, having multiplexed communication channels, are likely already able to arrange clothing swaps or borrowing directly without needing a dedicated platform like Campus Closet, whereas weak ties may lack such direct means.

The hesitation users feel about renting clothes "for money" to their strong ties versus less hesitation with weak ties is a key insight related to user motivation. Renting for money introduces an extrinsic motivator. Interactions with strong ties are often rooted in intrinsic motivations, such as mutual support, sharing, or maintaining the relationship itself. The act of borrowing/lending among friends might be seen as an extension of these intrinsic, communal behaviors. Introducing a monetary, extrinsic motivation ("for money") when dealing with strong ties could risk motivation crowding, where the external reward diminishes or feels inappropriate compared to the pre-existing intrinsic motivations or social norms of friendship and sharing.

Cold Start

If one side of the system is not buzzing, it can be hard to get the other side interested in a social computing system.

This “Cold Start problem” is what happened when users indicated in user interviews that they weren’t sure whether the effort of uploading items was worth it given the (non)-popularity of the site amongst actual users.

Hard-side first

Our metrics show that even though we recruited more sellers than buyers, renters were more interested in renting than buyers were interested in listing. This corresponds with what we learned in lecture about the sellers being the hard side to recruit on an e-commerce site.

7. Tarot Analysis & Conclusion

Reflecting on the Tarot Cards of Tech framework, the three cards we identified remain strikingly relevant after our testing, though with evolved nuances that emerged through real user interactions. The Catalyst card proved accurate as we observed both the positive normalization of clothing sharing among early adopters and concerning signs of exclusivity, particularly with male users disengaging from the platform despite our targeted recruitment efforts. Their feedback revealed that they felt uncomfortable with lending personal items and didn't see fashion sharing as aligned with their social behaviors, highlighting how cultural norms around gender and clothing ownership can create unintended barriers to participation. Furthermore, the Smash Hit scenario became more tangible as we witnessed the intention-behavior gap where users expressed genuine enthusiasm but struggled with activation due to the effort required to photograph items and set prices , highlighting how rapid scale could amplify both sustainable behaviors and unhealthy performance pressures around constantly curating trendy listings. Most significantly, The Superfan card manifested in our high retention users who rented multiple times, validating our initial concerns about potential platform domination by power users who could inadvertently create barriers for casual participants seeking simple, low commitment interactions.

New ethical challenges emerged around gender inclusivity and the growing divide between highly engaged users and those who remained hesitant to participate, revealing that our assumption of universal appeal was flawed. We could address these issues through carefully designed onboarding experiences that reduce friction for first time sellers, more inclusive marketing approaches that feature

diverse user types and use cases, and platform features that explicitly welcome different levels of participation without social pressure. Through this project, we learned that even small scale systems, when designed with intentionality and grounded in social computing theory, can powerfully shape offline behavior and social norms within communities. However, they also require continuous vigilance and adaptive design to ensure that emergent social dynamics align with the platform's foundational values of inclusivity and sustainability rather than drifting toward exclusivity, performance pressure, or demographic limitations that exclude potential users.

Repository

https://github.com/diyasabh/campus-closet-webapp