The Secondary Exchange of Transferable Service Access on Xianyu:

Participation Archetypes in a C2C Platform

Abstract

This thesis examines the secondary exchange of transferable service access on Xianyu, a Chinese C2C platform increasingly used not only for second-hand goods but also for service-related deals among consumers. These include practices such as restaurant proxy ordering, discount-mediated ordering, alternative booking routes, and membership-based privileges. The study explores how participants find, evaluate, negotiate, and use these forms of access in everyday consumption on Xianyu. Based on an interpretive case study and 17 interviews, the findings identify three participation archetypes: the Deal Hunter, who uses Xianyu to obtain cheaper access to familiar services; the Gap Bridger, who depends on another person's channel, resource, or knowledge to make access possible; and the Perk Trader, who treats underused entitlements as assets that can be redirected or lightly monetized. The thesis contributes to consumption research by exploring what happens when second-hand consumption shifts from goods to services.

Keywords: Xianyu; secondary markets; transferable service access; C2C platforms; digital possession; participation archetypes

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Phenomenon

In China many everyday offline services are no longer approached as simple direct purchases made at the point of use. Dining, boba, cinema visits, hotel stays, massage, and other lifestyle services are often organized through a platform economy in which access is mediated by bundled deals like a prepaid package or a redeemable entitlement. These formats first emerged as ways for platforms and merchants to attract traffic and organize price competition. Over time they have become part of ordinary consumption habits. Instead of walking in, consumers often check the platforms first. In addition to that, the large number of chain brands make many of these offers relatively portable across users, while platforms and merchants benefit from increased visibility.

Having outlined the broader background of this phenomenon, it is necessary to introduce the platform, Xianyu, chosen for this study. It is one of China's major C2C platforms for second-hand exchange. It was originally associated with the resale of physical goods, such as clothes, which have normally been owned and used before, and therefore cheaper. Overtime, the exchanges on C2C platforms are no longer limited to physical second- hand goods. On Xianyu, it is more and more popular for users to exchange different forms of service access before they are actually used. In many cases, the access has not yet been redeemed. The buyer is purchasing a claim that may allow them to access a service in the future.

We focus on this emerging form of exchange: the secondary exchange of transferable service access on a C2C platform. The exchanged objects are third party services that sellers transfer to buyers. In practice, this may take forms such as a restaurant order placed by another user through a discounted channel, a hotel booking made through someone else's membership or promotional route, or airport lounge access enabled by another person's card-based entitlement.

This phenomenon is not entirely separated from earlier forms of second-hand exchange. Since it still takes place in a secondary market, and buyers often care about lower prices. However, it also departs from the standard second-hand model in important ways. For example, the object is not necessarily physical, may not have been previously used, and its value does not come mainly from depreciation. Instead, its value depends on whether the entitlement can be made to work at the moment of service use. A QR code, screenshot, booking route, or membership-linked benefit only becomes valuable when it is recognised by the relevant restaurant, hotel, cinema, airport lounge, or other service provider.

1.2 Research Problem

Existing research offers important insights into second-hand consumption, secondary markets, and access-based consumption. However, these research traditions have largely been developed around two object conditions: previously used physical goods, or primary access arrangements organised by firms or platforms (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Guiot and Roux, 2010; Tibben-Lembke, 2004; Belk, 2010; Eckhardt et al., 2019). In both cases, the analytical assumptions are relatively stable: the previous second-hand exchange is typically tied to material goods with prior use histories, while access-based consumption is usually discussed in relation to renting, subscribing, sharing, or other primary service arrangements.

The phenomenon examined in this thesis does not fit neatly into either of these frames. On Xianyu, what enters secondary circulation is not necessarily a previously used product, but still-valid access to a future service. This means that the familiar links between second-hand exchange, prior use, depreciation, and object-based value become less secure, while the logic of primary access arrangements is also insufficient. What is exchanged here is neither simply a used good nor a standard firm-organised access model, but a transferable service entitlement that must be made workable through user-to-user exchange.

The problem, therefore, is not only that the exchanged object has changed, but that participation itself may be reorganised under these changed object conditions. Existing research does not fully explain how participants engage when the exchanged object is still-valid service access rather than a used material good. It also remains unclear whether participation in such exchanges follows a single logic. Since participants may differ in how they identify value, assess credibility, manage risk, mobilise access routes, and understand their own role in the exchange. For this reason, the present study approaches the phenomenon not only as a transition from goods to services, but as a field of differentiated participation. It therefore asks how participants engage in the secondary exchange of transferable service access on a C2C platform, and what distinct participation archetypes emerge from these engagement patterns.

1.3 Research Aim and Research Questions

This study explores what happens when C2C second-hand exchange shifts from physical goods to transferable service access. Within this broader question, it identifies and conceptualises distinct participation archetypes through which users engage in this emerging market.

The study is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How do participants engage in the secondary exchange of transferable service access to third-party services on a C2C platform?

RQ2: What distinct participation archetypes emerge from these engagement patterns?

RQ1 focuses on the practical side of participation. It asks how participants search, screen, compare, negotiate, transfer, confirm, and verify service-access entitlements. It also directs attention to the procedures through which participants manage uncertainty, such as checking seller credibility, judging the source of an entitlement, delaying confirmation of receipt, relying on platform protection, and waiting for final service-side recognition.

RQ2 focuses on the patterns that emerge from these practices. The aim is to show how different configurations of value logic, risk orientation, and role perception appear across participants' accounts. These configurations are developed into participation archetypes.

1.4 Research Context and Case Selection

The empirical setting of this study is Xianyu. The platform is suitable for this research because it has moved beyond a narrow second-hand goods function. Users still exchange physical objects, but they also use the platform for a wide range of service-related transactions.

Xianyu is also useful because this market is not fully formalised. The platform was not originally designed around the secondary exchange of service entitlements. Many of the practices examined in this study have developed through user adaptation. Participants use existing platform tools, such as listings, chat, escrow payment, ratings, and confirmation procedures, to handle objects that sit between goods, services, and digital entitlements. This makes Xianyu a revealing case for studying how users make sense of an emerging market before it has been fully institutionalised.

The study adopts an interpretive case study design. Xianyu is treated as the focal case, while participants' accounts of their exchange practices provide the empirical basis for analysis. The study examines how participants understand the exchange, how they manage its risks, and how different participation archetypes become visible within one platform context.

1.5 Contributions of the Study

This thesis makes three main contributions. First, it contributes empirically by examining the secondary exchange of transferable service access. The Xianyu case shows how users exchange still- valid access claims, and how they work to make these claims usable in practice.

Second, the thesis contributes conceptually by extending discussion of secondary circulation beyond material goods. The concept of pre-owned virtual service access helps describe objects that are not physical, not necessarily used, and not fully explained by depreciation. Their value depends on whether they can be converted into future service access. This shifts attention from residual value after use to the uncertain realisation of service access.

Third, the thesis contributes typologically by developing three participation archetypes: the Deal Hunter, the Gap Bridger, and the Perk Trader. These archetypes describe different ways in which participants understand value, manage risk, and position themselves in the exchange. The typology shows that the market is not a single practice of informal bargain seeking. It is a differentiated field of participation organised around the practical problem of making transferable service access hold.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews earlier research on second-hand goods, secondary markets, and virtual access rights, and uses this discussion to define the conceptual gap addressed by the study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology, including the interpretive case study design, the selection of Xianyu, the sampling strategy, the Human-AI Collaborative interview method, and the inductive thematic analysis. Chapter 4 presents the analysis and discussion by developing the three participation archetypes and the cross-cutting practices through which they were enacted. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by answering the research questions, summarising the main contributions, clarifying the scope conditions and limitations, and suggesting future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

One important issue that needs to be clarified before discussing contemporary secondary exchange is the conceptual basis of existing research. Studies on secondary circulation do not emerge from one unified theoretical tradition. Instead, researchers approach the topic from several related but distinct angles. Some focus on what should count as a second hand object. Others examine how secondary markets operate outside primary channels. A further line of discussion concerns the nature of the exchange object itself. By presenting these 3 lines of inquirey in the literature review, we lay the foundation for empirical investigation into C2C secondhand thirdparty service exchange.

To keep the discussion clear, several related terms need to be distinguished. In this study, second hand goods refers specifically to physical items that have previously been owned and used. Secondary market refers to the exchange space that emerges after goods leave primary channels. Secondary circulation refers to the actual process through which these objects move and are exchanged within secondary markets. Although these concepts are closely related, they describe different analytical levels and are therefore not used interchangeably. C2C (consumer-to-consumer) refers to exchange in which a platform facilitates transactions directly between individual users rather than between businesses and consumers (Zaman, 2010).

Examining the literature through these layers helps clarify the conceptual foundations on which existing understandings of secondary exchange have been built. It also makes it possible to distinguish between questions of object definition, market structure, and the nature of the exchange object itself. The following review therefore moves from second-hand goods, to secondary markets, and then to debates about exchange objects beyond physical goods.

2.2 What Counts as Second-Hand Goods

To understand contemporary secondary exchange, it is necessary to start with a basic question: what does consumer research usually mean by "second-hand"? This question matters because most studies of second-hand consumption rest on a shared assumption about

the object being exchanged. Although this assumption is not always stated directly, it shapes how the field has understood second-hand markets and the people who take part in them.

Actually, in much of the existing literature, second-hand consumption is discussed in relation to physical goods that have already been owned and used. This can be seen across several research perspectives, including sustainability studies, value-based approaches, and practice- oriented work (Aggarwal et al., 2025). These approaches differ in emphasis, but they tend to agree on the basic nature of the object, that is a second-hand transaction usually involves a material product that has passed through at least one earlier stage of use. Because of use, wear, or simply the passage of time, the product is no longer treated as new. Since its value changes, and it enters secondary circulation.

This understanding is also reflected in formal definitions of second-hand shopping. Guiot and Roux (2010), for example, define it as the acquisition of goods that have been previously owned and used, and that are obtained through channels other than conventional new-product retail. This definition has been applied across different product categories. Similarly, a lot of studies of books, clothing, and electronic products all tend to rely on the same assumption: second-hand goods are material objects with a previous use history (Cervellon et al., 2012). The same object boundary also appears in discussions that distinguish second-hand goods from related categories. Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015), for example, separate second-hand items from vintage goods and collectibles by focusing on whether the object has actually been owned and used before. In their framework, the second-hand status of an item depends first on this history of use. It is not only a matter of symbolic meaning or cultural value. This point is important because it shows how strongly the idea of prior use is built into the concept of second-hand consumption. Second-hand goods may be bought for lower prices or for reasons linked to sustainable lifestyles (Carrigan et al., 2013), but they are still treated as goods that have already been through use.

As it is seen, the field has developed a relatively narrow object focus. Most mainstream studies treat second-hand consumption as the exchange of goods that are physical, previously used, and affected by value loss. This does not mean that all second-hand goods are understood in the same way, or that symbolic value is absent. Rather, it means that the basic object condition has remained quite stable. The object is usually assumed to be a material product that has moved away from its original new-product status. On the basis of this object assumption, existing research often explains second-hand consumption as a way of gaining value through lower prices. Thrift shopping is one of the most common perspectives when it comes to second hand shopping. For example, some studies emphasize price sensitivity and budget management (Lastovicka et al., 1999), while others discuss economic constraint (Williams and Paddock, 2003). Other work focuses on the experience of thrift shopping, such as the pleasure of searching, the feeling of discovery, and the emotional satisfaction of finding something unexpected (Sherry, 1990; Bardhi, 2003; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). These studies do not all make the same argument, but they do share a common direction. Second- hand consumption is often understood as a way to create value through the price difference between new and used goods (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Christiansen and Snepenger, 2005).

This price-based explanation has become even more visible in later studies. Price sensitivity is often treated as an important factor in predicting second-hand shopping behavior (Roux and Guiot, 2008). In studies that compare vintage and second-hand consumption, the willingness to pay extra for symbolic meaning becomes an important boundary between the two categories (Cervellon et al., 2012). Some research even describes second-hand goods as inferior goods, in the economic sense, because their demand is negatively associated with income level (Gilal et al., 2024). There are, of course, studies showing that thrift shopping is not only practiced by consumers with limited economic resources (Christiansen and Snepenger, 2005; Bardhi, 2003; Sherry, 1990). However, this correction does not remove the importance of price. It only shows that price is not the only reason for participation. The level of analysis in these studies is also important. Most of the literature focuses on individual consumers and asks why they enter second-hand markets. The second-hand market itself is usually treated as a background setting or as one channel among others. Less attention is given to whether participation practices change when the object being exchanged changes (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Christiansen and Snepenger, 2005; Guiot and Roux, 2010). Even in research on digital settings, the main concern often remains consumer motivation rather than differences between forms of participation (Bae et al., 2022).

This shows a further limitation in the existing literature. The basic object assumption is rarely treated as a problem in itself. Second-hand consumption is usually defined as the acquisition of previously used goods (Roux and Guiot, 2008). The movement of these goods into secondary circulation is understood as a continuation of the product lifecycle (Guiot and Roux, 2010). It is not normally understood as a return to the system of new goods. In this way, second-hand research has built a stable starting point: secondary circulation is assumed to deal with physical goods that have already been used, and whose value is shaped by price difference and depreciation. This assumption does more than define the object. It also affects how participation is understood. Participants are usually seen as exchanging goods within an already established price and lifecycle logic. Their practices are explained as responses to that setting. What is less clear is whether these practices would remain the same if the object of exchange had a different form.

This issue becomes more important when the object entering secondary circulation is no longer clearly physical, previously used, or defined by depreciation. In such cases, the usual assumptions about second-hand exchange become less secure. It can no longer be assumed that participants will understand the market, their roles, and the value of exchange in the same way.

2.3 What Is a Secondary Market

The previous section explained how second-hand objects can be understood. However, only looking at the characteristics of objects is not enough to explain how secondary exchange becomes a market. To understand its position, it is also necessary to look at the structure of the secondary market itself.

In existing studies, secondary markets are usually defined in relation to primary markets. They are seen as exchange spaces that appear after goods have left primary channels. For example, in management and supply chain research, secondary markets refer to systems in which products continue to circulate after the first sale has been completed (Tibben-Lembke, 2004). This definition is based on an important point: secondary markets depend on earlier transactions in primary markets. They do not exist at the same stage as the sale of new goods, but come after it. Later studies have discussed different mechanisms within this framework, but the basic structure has not changed much. For example, in the study of digital goods, Ghose, Telang, and Krishnan (2005) discuss substitution effects and market expansion effects in secondary markets. In research on durable goods, Chen, Esteban, and Shum (2013) argue that secondary markets are supported by the stock of products that have already been sold. Although these studies focus on different issues, they share the same basic idea: the supply of secondary markets comes from objects that have already passed through a primary market and become available for recirculation. Therefore, secondary markets are often understood as systems for redistributing and recirculating existing products (Parker and Weber, 2013).

This product-based understanding is useful, but it does not cover all secondary market forms equally well. A particularly important exception is ticket resale, where the object in circulation is not a used durable good, but a still-valid claim to future event access. Ticket resale, ticket scalping, and secondary ticketing therefore provide a useful bridge between conventional secondary markets and the phenomenon examined in this study. Courty (2003) explains ticket resale as a market in which promoters, consumers, brokers, and scalpers interact around underpriced or scarce event access. Leslie and Sorensen (2014) show that resale markets can move tickets from lower-value to higher-value consumers, while also generating transaction costs and rent-seeking in the primary market. Drayer

(2011) further shows that ticket resale has long raised questions of fraud, price gouging, consumer protection, and the changing legitimacy of Internet-enabled resale platforms. Duffy, Reid and Finch (2020) add that digital secondary ticket markets are enabled and problematised through issues of scarcity, fairness, bots, and market devices. Together, these studies show that secondary markets can involve still-valid access claims rather than only previously used goods. However, they remain mainly concerned with event-ticket markets, brokers, pricing, regulation, and market configuration.

The product-based understanding of secondary markets is also supported by theories of the consumption lifecycle. Consumption is increasingly theorised not as a single act of purchase but as a sequence of practices. Warde (2014) describes this sequence through three As: acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation. These refer to how goods enter a user's life, become integrated into everyday routines, and are valued in use. Evans (2019) extends this account by adding three corresponding Ds: disposal, divestment, and devaluation. These describe how goods are physically removed, symbolically released from the user's possession, and reassessed as less worth holding. Within this process, secondary markets are usually positioned at the boundary where one user's D-stages meet another user's renewed A-stages. They are therefore described as spaces in which unwanted goods are transferred, redistributed, or repositioned for further use (Rogers, Rogers, and Lembke, 2010).

In this context, the main function of the secondary market is often described as extending product lifecycles (Ma, Maier, and Wieringa, 2021) or recovering remaining value after depreciation. This position in the lifecycle stays relatively stable even when companies take part in resale systems. For example, companies may support recirculation through official platforms or buy-back programs, such as COS Resell or IKEA Buy Back and Resell (Pang, Li, and Jiang, 2023; Rogers, Rogers, and Chen, 2022). These practices make secondary exchange more organised. However, they still do not change its basic role in the product lifecycle. Secondary exchange is still mainly understood as something that happens after use, and as part of the continued circulation of existing goods.

In short, much of the literature on secondary markets and consumption lifecycles still relies on a stable assumption: secondary markets are usually organised around existing stock that has left primary channels and is available for recirculation. In many cases, this stock is material and has already been used. Ticket resale is an important exception because it involves still-valid access to future events rather than previously used goods. However, this exception does not remove the broader limitation. Existing secondary market research still gives limited attention to how ordinary users participate when a wider range of service-access entitlements enter C2C circulation.

Recent developments have made this picture more complicated. The growth of digital platforms has created new pricing mechanisms and, in some cases, new ways of creating value. For example, resale platforms may be used as investment tools (Kim and Meng, 2025). Limited-edition products may gain higher prices in secondary markets (Slaton and Pookulangara, 2022). In some cases, goods may even be traded before they are actually used (Cowen Equity Research, 2019, as cited in Slaton and Pookulangara, 2022). These examples show that the timing of exchange and the logic of pricing are becoming more flexible. However, they do not by themselves explain the specific case of transferable service access. In physical resale markets, the exchanged object is still usually a product that can be possessed and transferred as an object. In ticket resale, the exchanged object is a future access claim, but the literature usually focuses on event tickets, brokers, pricing, regulation, and market design. The broader question of how ordinary C2C platform users evaluate and enact heterogeneous service-access claims remains less developed.

From this perspective, secondary markets should not be understood only as spaces for the redistribution of used material stock. Ticket resale already shows that still-valid access claims can circulate before use. Bennett, Seamans and Zhu (2015) also show that secondary markets can affect primary markets through both option value and cannibalisation effects, depending on the relationship between primary and secondary markets. This is useful for the present study because it shows that secondary markets can shape how access is valued even before consumption takes place. However, the Xianyu case extends the discussion beyond event-ticket resale. The exchanged objects in this study include food coupons, proxy orders, hotel booking routes, airport lounge access, restaurant discounts, ticket credentials, and membership-linked privileges. These objects are more heterogeneous than event tickets and often depend on screenshots, QR codes, account-linked benefits, booking routes, or final recognition by service providers. The key issue is therefore not only how secondary markets are structured, but how participants make transferable service access credible, usable, and meaningful in practice.

2.4 Virtual Access Rights

In traditional marketing theory, exchange is usually understood as an economic activity based on the transfer of ownership (Bagozzi, 1975; Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987). Under this view, consumption is closely connected with possession, and ownership is often seen as the main way through which value is obtained. In other words, value is assumed to come from acquiring and holding an object. However, recent studies show that this understanding has changed to some extent. More consumption practices are now based on temporary access rather than ownership (Belk, 2010; Habibi et al., 2016; Eckhardt et al., 2019; Guyader, 2024). In these cases, consumers do not need to own a product in order to use its benefits. They may obtain access through renting, sharing, or subscribing. Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) also point out that the sharing economy allows consumers to enjoy some functional benefits of ownership without carrying the related burdens.

From this perspective, access has become an important form of consumption in practice. But this does not fully solve the theoretical problem. In traditional exchange theory, value is often seen as being contained in goods at the moment of exchange. If value is strongly connected with ownership transfer, then access arrangements without ownership transfer may still be treated as secondary or incomplete forms of exchange. Therefore, it is necessary to explain why access itself can also become an exchange object. Service-dominant logic provides a useful way to understand this issue. This perspective shifts the focus from the transfer of goods to the creation of value. It argues that value is not simply located in goods, but is co- created through use (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2016). From this view, physical products are not the final purpose of exchange. They are means for providing service (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). And value appears as value in use during consumption (Grönroos, 2008; Grönroos and Ravald, 2011). This means that value does not have to depend on ownership itself. It can also depend on the possibility of future use. If an arrangement gives a consumer access to future use, then it has real economic value. However, having value does not automatically mean that something can be traded in a market. For a secondary market to develop, the object of exchange also needs to be clearly defined, identifiable, and transferable.

For this reason, several conditions are important. The object of exchange needs to have clear boundaries and be identifiable in practice (Ferrario et al., 2011). The rights attached to it also need to be exclusive and enforceable, either through technical systems or legal arrangements (Watkins et al., 2016). The transfer needs to be traceable, and the right needs to be reassigned from one holder to another (Chen et al., 2025). In addition, after the transfer, the original holder's right should be removed or limited. Otherwise, the same right could be copied or used by several people at the same time (Perzanowski and Schultz, 2016). Therefore, service- dominant logic explains why access can have value without ownership, but the market exchange of access still depends on these technical and institutional conditions. At this point, studies of digital and virtual goods provide further support. Existing research shows that digital objects, such as code, accounts, usage quotas, and subscription entitlements, can become stable objects of exchange even without a physical carrier (Perzanowski and Schultz, 2016; Watkins et al., 2016). In these cases, what consumers obtain is not ownership in the traditional sense, but a defined right to use something (Perzanowski and Schultz, 2016). This type of virtual possession is organized through bundles of rights, which decide how the object can be used, changed, or transferred (Watkins et al., 2016). The stability of these digital objects does not come from their physical properties. It is maintained through code and digital governance systems, such as digital rights management (Manley and Holley, 2012, as cited in Watkins et al., 2016). These systems give control to particular users and make sure that access remains limited. As a result, access rights can be defined, priced, and transferred. Usage credits and digital tokens are not only products in primary markets. They can also become tradable units that circulate in secondary markets (Chen et al., 2025).

In conclusion, these studies show that access rights exist in practice and can carry exchange value. They are supported by theories of value creation, and they may also be made transferable through technical and institutional arrangements. In this sense, access rights can be treated as legitimate objects of exchange.

At the same time, important gaps remain across the reviewed literature. Studies of access-based consumption and service-dominant logic mainly focus on primary markets or on the process of use, and usually explain why consumers choose access instead of ownership. By contrast, studies of secondary markets still focus mainly on physical goods and often understand supply as the redistribution of existing stock after products leave primary channels. And the traditional research on second-hand consumption likewise tends to assume that exchange objects are physical, previously used, and shaped by depreciation. As a whole, these traditions leave two related limitations insufficiently addressed. First, they do not fully explain how secondary exchange should be understood when the object in circulation is not a used material good. Second, they do not clearly explain how participation is organised when familiar assumptions of prior use, stock, disposal, and lifecycle extension no longer fit well.

These limitations become especially important in the present study. When the object of exchange becomes transferable service access, it can no longer be assumed that participants understand value, risk, credibility, and their own role in the same way as in conventional second-hand markets. What remains unclear is how participants enter this exchange space, how they interpret and evaluate such rights in practice, and whether participation follows a single logic or becomes differentiated under these changed object conditions. This is the gap addressed in the present study, which examines how participants engage in the secondary exchange of transferable service access on a C2C platform, and what participation archetypes emerge from these engagement patterns.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains how the study was designed and carried out. The study examines the secondary exchange of transferable service access on C2C platforms, a form of exchange that is still not well covered by existing research. It is not a phenomenon that can be easily reduced to fixed variables or tested through a hypothesis-driven design. For this reason, the research is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical tradition and uses an embedded single- case design, with Xianyu as the focal case studied through user interviews. After collecting the data, they were then analysed through inductive thematic analysis for typology construction. The chapter covers the research philosophy and strategy, case selection, sampling, interview instrument design, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis, and researcher reflexivity.

3.1 Research Philosophy and Strategy

3.1.1 The Interpretivist Commitment

The central phenomenon of this study, the secondary exchange of transferable service access on a C2C platform, does not yet have a settled theoretical language. A participant may buy a restaurant entitlement from a stranger on Xianyu, or sell airport lounge access that comes from a credit card benefit they will not use. These activities sit only partly within existing discussions of second-hand markets, digital consumption, and platform economies. To understand them, it is not enough to ask whether the transactions happened or how often they happened. The study needs to ask what participants think they are doing, how they organise the exchange, and how they make sense of their own role in it.

This is why the study adopts an interpretivist epistemological stance. Interpretivism treats social reality as something produced through actors' situated meaning-making and through the shared meanings that arise in social interaction, rather than as a fixed object waiting to be measured (Schwandt, 1994). From this position, the research questions are not mainly about frequency, distribution, or causal effects. They are about process, perception, and the internal logic of practice. The study therefore needs methods that can work with participants' own accounts and stay close to the contexts in which their meanings are formed.

This position also affects how the findings should be understood. The purpose is not to make statistical claims about a wider population. It is to build a detailed understanding of one case and the forms of participation that appear within it (Merriam, 2009).

3.1 .2 Case Study as a Strategy for Typology Construction

The study uses a case study strategy within this interpretivist tradition. Case study research is appropriate when a study asks "how" or "why" questions, when the researcher cannot control the events being studied, and when the phenomenon cannot be neatly separated from its context (Yin, 2018). The secondary exchange of transferable service access is shaped by Xianyu's platform environment, its interface affordances, and the informal trust norms that users develop there. If the practice were removed from this setting, some of its most important features would disappear from view.

The theoretical purpose of the case study is typology construction. Typology building seeks to identify and describe meaningful patterns of variation within a phenomenon. It is different from theory building that aims to produce causal propositions (Doty & Glick, 1994). Eisenhardt (1989) discusses case study research as a way to develop propositions that may be tested later. This study asks a different kind of question: what distinct forms of participation can be seen in this market, and what logic holds each form together? This question is directly linked to RQ2. The participation archetypes developed in this study are not statistical clusters. They are ideal types built from the data, each organised around a configuration of value logic, risk orientation, and role perception (Bailey, 1994).

3.1 .3 Research Design: Embedded Single-Case

The research design is an embedded single-case design. Xianyu is the single case. The embedded units of analysis are the seventeen participants and their overall patterns of engagement with secondary service access exchange. The transaction episodes described in the interviews have a specific analytical role. They are used as empirical anchors, because they show how a participant's broader pattern of engagement appears in a concrete situation. They are not treated as separate units of analysis. They are also not separated from the participant who described them. The unit of analysis remains the participant and the participation pattern attached to that participant.

This design was chosen because it keeps the case context stable while still allowing comparison within the case. All data come from the same platform environment and the same informal market. At the same time, participants differ in how they engage, what they value, how they assess risk, and how they see their own role. These differences provide the variation needed for typology construction. A multi-case design would have introduced differences between platforms. At this stage, that would have made it harder to see the internal variation within Xianyu itself.

3.2 Research Context and Case Selection

3.2 .1 Defining the Phenomenon and Its Boundaries

This study focuses on the secondary circulation of transferable service access on a C2C platform. The objects being exchanged are conceptualised as pre-owned virtual service entitlements. This term refers to digitally mediated access rights or usage qualifications that point toward offline service consumption, have not yet been redeemed, and have entered secondary circulation through platform-mediated exchange. Examples include proxy ordering services based on a seller's membership privileges at catering chains, hotel loyalty benefits or airport lounge access linked to financial products, and entertainment or leisure tickets obtained through preferential channels and then resold.

The definition also sets limits around the phenomenon. It does not include physical second- hand goods, which have already been studied extensively in C2C markets. It also does not include purely virtual content such as gaming skins or digital collectibles, because those items do not point toward offline service consumption. The focus is on exchanges where the buyer is not purchasing the service directly. Instead, the buyer is purchasing a right, credential, or capacity to access the service, often through channels that bypass or work around official retail arrangements.

3.2 .2 Xianyu as the Focal Case

Xianyu was selected as the focal case for this study. Alibaba originally launched Xianyu in 2014 as a second-hand physical goods platform, but users have gradually expanded what the platform is used for. By 2024, Xianyu itself had acknowledged this change. Its president stated that the platform was moving beyond physical goods transactions into virtual service exchange, introducing features such as skill-listing profiles and side-income tags across hundreds of service categories, including errand running, language tutoring, and lifestyle management (Sohu News, interview with Xianyu President Ji Shan, 2024: https://www.sohu.com/a/895161037_184641). By March 2025, Xianyu reported 209 million monthly active users, about 20% year-on-year growth, and the highest growth rate among e- commerce applications in China (QuestMobile, 2025 China Mobile Internet Spring Report, May 2025: https://news.sina.com.cn/sx/2025-05-08/detail-inevvssv2616533.shtml). These features make Xianyu an important case rather than simply a convenient research site.

The case selection follows the logic of a revelatory case (Yin, 2018). A revelatory case allows the researcher to study a phenomenon that has not been easily accessible to social science inquiry. The secondary exchange of transferable service access has not yet been studied systematically as a market form. Xianyu is useful here because the platform was not originally designed for this kind of exchange, yet users have adapted it for that purpose. The case therefore offers a way to observe how the practice emerges, becomes more stable, and takes different forms without much formal institutional support. Its informal norms, limited category-specific regulation for service entitlement exchange, and large user base make it well suited to an interpretive case study concerned with typology construction.

3.3 Sampling Strategy and Participant Profile

The study used qualitative interviews as its main method of empirical data generation. In addition, the research was informed by exploratory observation of relevant listings and platform features on Xianyu. This supplementary observation was not treated as a standalone method of analysis, but helped familiarise the researcher with how the phenomenon appeared on the platform, how relevant exchanges were presented, and what kinds of platform functions shaped interaction and transaction. Interviews remained central because many key aspects of the phenomenon, including credibility assessment, risk management, access negotiation, and role interpretation, were only accessible through participants' own accounts.

3.3 .1 Purposive Sampling and Recruitment Channels

The target population for this study is not formally listed or institutionally defined. It consists of people who have direct experience of secondary service access exchange on Xianyu. Probability sampling was therefore not practical, and it would not have suited the research purpose. The study instead used purposive sampling. Participants were selected because they could provide detailed accounts of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criterion was direct personal experience with Xianyu-based transactions involving the kind of service entitlements defined in Section 3.2. Participants needed to have completed at least one transaction where the object of exchange was a transferable right or capacity to access an offline service, rather than a physical good or purely virtual item.

Recruitment used three channels in parallel. First, the researcher conducted direct outreach on Xianyu. Active listings related to the phenomenon were identified, and invitation messages were sent to sellers whose listings suggested relevant transaction experience. Second, the researcher posted a short description of the study through WeChat Moments, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo, inviting interested users to make contact. Third, snowball referral was used. Some early participants recommended people in their own networks who they thought had relevant experience. Using these channels together helped reduce dependence on any single source of participants and increased the chance of reaching different participation patterns.

3.3 .2 Sample Composition and Variation

Seventeen participants were recruited. They were between 19 and 34 years old, and the sample included nine males and eight females. All seventeen had experience as buyers of secondary service access on Xianyu. Four participants (P03, P06, P07, P16) also described seller experience during the interviews. This was not part of the recruitment criterion, but emerged in their accounts and points to the role fluidity present in this market.

No participant with only seller experience was included in the final interview sample. This does not mean that seller-only actors are absent from the market. Rather, it reflects the composition of the interview sample and the practical limits of recruitment. Although more seller-oriented actors, including dedicated resellers, were visible in the field, they did not ultimately enter the final set of interviews. The study therefore captures seller experience only where it overlapped with participants' own histories as buyers.

Participants' accounts covered a range of transaction scenarios, including catering and beverage proxy ordering, travel and hospitality entitlement transfer, entertainment and leisure ticketing, and other forms of digitally mediated service access such as metro use and airport lounge entry. Their degree of participation also varied. Some had engaged only occasionally, while others reported more frequent or longer-term involvement. Table 1 summarises the sample.

Table 1. Participant overview.

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Primary transaction scenario	Role experience	Level of participation intensity
P01	32	Female	Fast-food breakfast proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P02	31	Female	Fast-food breakfast proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P03	34	Male	Food and beverage proxy ordering, restaurant voucher resale, and queue-holding service	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P04	28	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P05	34	Female	Fast-food proxy ordering and hotel breakfast access	Buyer only	Frequent
P06	21	Female	Food and beverage coupon transfer	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P07	24	Male	Scarce performance-ticket access	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P08	29	Male	Performance-ticket access and occasional fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P09	27	Female	Travel and hotel booking access	Buyer only	Long-term
P10	26	Male	Cinema tickets, leisure reservations, and food coupon access	Buyer only	Frequent
P11	33	Female	Restaurant bill discounts and urban transit access	Buyer only	Frequent
P12	29	Female	Restaurant vouchers and food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P13	19	Male	Hotel booking access	Buyer only	Frequent
P14	30	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P15	26	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P16	23	Male	Cinema-ticket proxy ordering and restaurant voucher resale	Buyer and seller	Occasional
P17	22	Female	Airport lounge access	Buyer only	Occasional

3.3 .3 Sample Size and Theoretical Saturation

The sample size also needs justification. Qualitative research does not have one fixed rule for how many participants are enough. Appropriate sample size depends on the research tradition, the purpose of the study, and the kind of data produced (Staller, 2021). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that, in studies with focused aims and relatively homogeneous participants, saturation often occurred within the first twelve interviews, with few new themes appearing after that. In this study, the researcher observed that by the fourteenth and fifteenth interviews, participants' accounts of transaction mechanics, risk perception, and value reasoning had begun to repeat earlier material. The final two interviews did not introduce new core patterns. This gave the researcher reasonable grounds to treat the sample as sufficient for the typological analysis.

The concept of information power also supports this decision. Malterud et al. (2016) argue that studies may need fewer participants when the data are especially relevant and rich. Each interview in this study produced a Chinese-language transcript of several thousand characters. These transcripts were generated through the structured and iterative probing process explained in Section 3.5. They did not only record general opinions. They reconstructed transaction episodes step by step, including decision points, trust assessments, and reflections after the transaction. For this reason, the analytical value of the data cannot be judged by the participant count alone.

3.4 Interview Instrument Design

3.4 .1 Sensitizing Concepts as Orienting Lenses

The interview instrument was shaped by sensitizing concepts from work on consumer participation, market practices, and typological classification. Blumer (1954) distinguishes sensitizing concepts from definitive concepts. Definitive concepts tell the researcher what to look for, while sensitizing concepts "merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). In this study, they helped orient the interviews without deciding in advance what the analysis would find. Bowen (2006) makes a similar point, arguing that sensitizing concepts can support inductive qualitative research by giving the researcher a starting point while still leaving room for unexpected patterns.

Five sensitizing dimensions were identified from adjacent literature on consumer typologies, market practices, and platform-mediated consumption: participation role, exchange practice, value logic, risk and trust, and social embeddedness (Andersson et al., 2008; Fuentes et al., 2019; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007; Myers and Nicosia, 1968; Semaan et al., 2024). These dimensions informed the design of the interview guide and helped orient the data collection toward issues relevant to the research questions. At the same time, they were not used as a fixed coding framework and were not treated as predetermined analytical categories. Their role was therefore preparatory rather than classificatory: they shaped what kinds of experiences and reflections were elicited in the interviews, but did not determine in advance what patterns would ultimately be reconstructed from the material. Throughout both data collection and analysis, the study sought to maintain this distinction between theoretical orientation and analytical imposition.

This orientation also affected the form of the questions. A practice-based view of markets treats markets as ongoing outcomes of exchange, representational, and normalizing practices (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007). The interview guide therefore avoided focusing only on abstract attitudes and instead asked participants to reconstruct concrete transaction sequences: what they did, what decisions they made, what information they checked, and how they adjusted when the exchange did not follow a simple path. This logic shaped the funnel structure of the interview guide, which is provided in Appendix 1.

3.4 .2 The Funnel Structure of the Interview Guide

The interview guide followed a funnel structure, moving from broad scene-setting questions to more focused probing. It began by establishing whether participants had relevant experience and by asking them to select one recent transaction they could describe in detail. This worked both as a screening step and as a way of shifting participants from general commentary to concrete recall.

The core of the interview was a transaction reconstruction section. Participants were asked to narrate one transaction from beginning to end, including how they found the opportunity, what information they checked or provided, how the entitlement was transferred or operationalised, and what happened when the service was ultimately redeemed or accessed. During the process, follow-up probes were used to draw out the practical knowledge, judgments, and adjustments participants had developed through experience.

The interview then moved to questions about entitlement source and realisation mechanism, before turning to broader reflection on value, risk, legitimacy, and role. This sequence was important because it anchored later reflections in specific events rather than abstract or socially desirable accounts.

3.5 Data Collection: A Human-AI Collaborative Approach

3.5 .1 Methodological Positioning: The AI as Dynamic Probe Generator

The data collection method differs from conventional qualitative interviewing in one main way. During the interviews, follow-up probes were generated in real time by a locally deployed large language model, rather than being drawn only from a prepared interview guide by the researcher. This approach belongs to the wider area of technology-assisted qualitative data collection, where information and communication technologies have been seen as expanding the possibilities of qualitative interviewing and data acquisition (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). It read the participant's most recent response and produced possible follow-up questions that targeted details, contradictions, or assumptions in that response.

The human researcher retained control of the interview process. The researcher opened and closed the interview, managed the relational and emotional parts of the interaction, decided which AI-generated probes should be voiced, and remained responsible for the later interpretation of the data. The AI's task was limited to producing candidate follow-up questions. It supported the researcher's probing capacity, especially across seventeen interviews lasting 40 to 60 minutes. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that responsive interviewing depends on the interviewer's ability to generate probes and follow-up questions that help the interviewee provide more depth, detail, and precision. The Human-AI Collaborative method was designed to support that specific part of the interview process.

3.5 .2 The Evolution of the Method: From Pilot Failures to a Workable Design

The final data collection protocol was developed through trial and adjustment rather than fixed in advance. Two earlier approaches were tested and then rejected because each created a different problem.

In the first pilot phase, approximately two interviews were conducted in a conventional human-only format. The researcher asked questions directly from the interview guide without AI assistance. These interviews showed a pattern of social desirability bias, meaning that participants tended to present themselves in a more socially acceptable and favourable way (Nederhof, 1985). When asked face-to-face why they used cheaper or alternative access routes to services, participants often spoke about convenience or curiosity. They were less willing to discuss cost-saving or system arbitrage directly. The researcher-led setting appeared to encourage some self-presentation management, which reduced the candour needed for the study.

In the second pilot phase, two to three sessions used a fully automated format. Participants interacted with the AI system through a web interface without the researcher present. This reduced the face-to-face social desirability issue, but it produced a more serious problem. Participants gave short answers, treated the interaction as a task to finish, and disengaged quickly. Without a human interlocutor, the interaction lacked the social accountability and relational warmth that encouraged participants to narrate in detail.

The third approach generated the seventeen substantive interviews included in the analysis. It used a hybrid structure. Interviews took place through Zoom, with the researcher present throughout as the visible and audible interlocutor. At the same time, the AI system ran on the researcher's screen. The researcher used voice-to-text input to capture the substance of each participant's spoken response in near real time, made minor corrections, and submitted the text to the AI. The model then generated candidate follow-up probes within seconds. The researcher read these silently and voiced only the probes that were relevant and had not already been covered. Probes were set aside when they repeated earlier material or when the researcher judged that they did not fit the participant's emotional register at that moment. In this structure, the researcher was not a passive relay. The researcher filtered the AI's output before it reached the participant. The final design combined the trust and social presence of a human-led interview with the probing depth made possible by AI assistance. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes and produced a Chinese-language transcript of approximately 5,000 to 7,000 characters.

3.5 .3 Translating the Interview Framework into AI Instructions

The sensitizing dimensions from Section 3.4 were translated into the AI system through a structured instruction protocol. The protocol guided how the model generated probes. Its main priority was process reconstruction. The model was instructed to ask about concrete steps, decision points, and transaction mechanics in the episode being described. It was also instructed not to accept abstract or general answers too quickly, a tendency that can appear in generative language models.

The instruction architecture followed the same funnel structure as the interview guide. At the beginning of an interview, the model was oriented toward scene confirmation and transaction reconstruction. It generated prompts asking what happened next, how a piece of information was found, or how a claim was verified. Once the transaction narrative had become clear enough, the model shifted toward deeper questions. It then generated probes about risk reasoning, the value participants felt they gained beyond monetary saving, and how participants understood their role in the exchange. This gradual movement from concrete description to more abstract reflection kept later answers grounded in the transaction account already given.

3.6 Data Management and Ethical Considerations

3.6 .1 Data Generation and Format

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. After each interview, the researcher manually transcribed the recording, with the script file generated by the program, into a full Chinese-language text document. The transcription process was still a conventional post-hoc task, but the interview format affected the quality of the transcripts. Because the interviews were structured and because the AI-generated probes helped keep the conversation focused, the transcripts were relatively well organised compared with transcripts from more loosely structured qualitative interviews. Each transcript was checked against the original recording for accuracy and completeness before translation and coding.

3.6 .2 Informed Consent

Before each interview, participants received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, the kinds of questions they would be asked, and how their data would be handled. All participants gave informed consent through electronic signature before the interview started. The consent form made clear that participation was voluntary, that participants could withdraw at any point without consequence, the whole conversation would be uploaded to a locally deployed AI and it gives suggestions on probe questions, and that identifying information would be anonymised in any research outputs.

3.6 .3 Local Model Deployment and Data Sovereignty

The most important ethical issue in the data collection design concerned the infrastructure behind the AI-assisted interview system. Participants described informal and semi-regulated transactions in detail. If these accounts were linked to identifiable people, participants could face platform sanctions or reputational harm. For this reason, data sovereignty was treated as essential.

The research team did not use commercially hosted large language model APIs, even though they would have been more convenient and technically stronger. Services such as OpenAI's ChatGPT or Anthropic's Claude route input through external servers, where data may be logged, stored, or used for model training. That risk was not acceptable for this study. Instead, the study used a fully local deployment architecture. An open-source large language model (DeepSeek R1-14B) ran on our own computer. The codebase of the open-source interview system was substantially rewritten so that it could support this local deployment. With this setup, all conversational data stayed inside a physically isolated computing environment. This included participants' descriptions of transaction mechanics, pricing strategies, and platform workarounds. No interview data were sent to any external server, cloud service, or third-party infrastructure during or after data collection.

3.6 .4 Automated Ethical Circuit-Breaker

The system also included a hard-coded ethical safeguard. This safeguard was designed for the possibility that a participant might describe serious legal violations or content raising acute ethical concerns. The AI model's system instructions stated that, if the participant's input contained clear legal infractions or severe ethical issues, the model had to output only the termination code (5j3k) and suppress all other text. The front-end system was programmed to detect this code. If the code appeared, the system would immediately end the interview session and show a courteous closing message thanking the participant for their time.

This mechanism worked as an automated ethical circuit-breaker. It reduced the need for the researcher to decide in the moment whether an ethically problematic interview should continue. That automation was deliberate. In a live interview, the social pressure to keep talking and the cognitive work of managing probes could make it harder for the researcher to act quickly on ethical red lines. The circuit-breaker moved this responsibility into the system layer, where it could be carried out immediately and without social negotiation. The mechanism was not triggered in any of the seventeen substantive interviews. This suggests, indirectly, that the phenomenon studied here, while informal and sometimes unclear in regulatory terms, did not normally involve conduct that required immediate termination.

3.6 .5 Anonymisation and Platform Risk Mitigation

Participants often described practices that sit in grey areas of platform rules. Examples include using membership privileges for proxy ordering or transferring access rights that were not explicitly designed to be transferable. The study therefore used a careful anonymisation protocol to reduce the risk of reverse identification by the platform or by other parties. Participants are identified only through alphanumeric codes, P01 through P17. Specific brand names mentioned by participants, including restaurant chains, hotel groups, beverage franchises, and airline lounges, were generalised throughout the analysis (e.g., “a major fast food chain,” “an international hotel group”). Geographic and temporal details that could narrow identification were also obscured. These protections were applied not only to the final written analysis but also to internal working documents, coding sheets, and analytical memos.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

3.7 .1 Analytical Orientation: Inductive Thematic Analysis for Typology Construction

The data analysis used inductive thematic analysis directed toward the construction of participation archetypes. The approach draws on Braun and Clarke (2006, p.17), who define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” and describe it as flexible across different epistemological positions and research questions. The inductive nature of the analysis is important. The five sensitizing dimensions from Section 3.4, participation role, exchange practice, value logic, risk and trust, and social embeddedness, were not used as a coding framework, category system, or analytical grid during coding. Codes were generated from the data through close reading of participants’ language and narrative structure. The sensitizing dimensions were introduced only at the final stage, after the participation archetypes had already taken shape. At that point, they were used as interpretive lenses for describing and comparing the archetypes along theoretically relevant dimensions. The analysis therefore followed the sequence of induction first and theoretical framing second.

3.7 .2 The Five-Step Analytical Process

The analysis followed five sequential and iterative steps and was conducted manually, without qualitative data analysis software. Both authors took part in coding. Each author first coded the original Chinese transcripts independently. English was introduced later at the level of code labels and analytical summaries in order to facilitate cross-case comparison and support the writing of the thesis. The authors then met to compare their coding decisions, discuss differences, and reach agreement. This independent-then-collaborative process was used to strengthen analytical rigour. Disagreement required each coder to explain the reasoning behind a coding choice, which helped reduce the risk that one researcher's assumptions would dominate the analysis.

Step 1: Immersion

Both researchers read all seventeen transcripts several times. We paid attention not only to what participants said, but also to how they told their stories, the emotional tone of their accounts, and the assumptions built into their descriptions of practice. During this stage, each researcher wrote individual memos to record early observations and possible analytical directions.

Step 2: Open Coding

Both researchers then conducted line-by-line open coding independently. Codes were developed inductively and kept close to participants' own language, actions, decisions, and stated reasoning. The coding at this stage was deliberately detailed and descriptive. The aim was to break the data into small meaningful units before trying to build larger patterns. Codes from this stage included platform search behaviours, uncertainty about entitlement validity, price comparison across channels, and descriptions of the seller's or buyer's perceived role in the transaction.

Step 3: Pattern Recognition

The two sets of codes were then compared and consolidated through joint discussion. Codes identified by both researchers, or codes that clearly overlapped, were retained.

When codes differed, the researchers returned to the relevant transcript passages and considered whether the difference came from interpretation or from wording. The consolidated codes were then organised into higher-order patterns. These patterns grouped behaviours, orientations, and self-understandings that tended to appear together within a participant's account. At this point, the analysis began to move from listing what participants did toward asking how their practices formed distinct configurations.

Step 4: Cross-Case Comparison

The emerging patterns were compared across participants. The researchers asked whether a pattern was limited to one participant or whether it appeared across several cases in a recognisable form. Cross-case comparison also helped define the boundaries between patterns. Sometimes two patterns initially looked similar, but closer comparison showed that they were organised by different underlying logics. In other cases, patterns that first appeared separate were better understood as variations within a broader pattern. The researchers continued this process of splitting and lumping until they agreed that the pattern structure was stable. Stability meant that each pattern was internally coherent, distinct from the others, and supported by evidence from multiple participants.

Step 5: Archetype Construction

In the final step, the stabilised patterns were developed into participation archetypes. Each archetype represents a distinct mode of engaging with the secondary exchange of transferable service access. Only at this stage were the three dimensions named in RQ2, value logic, risk orientation, and role perception, introduced as a systematic framework for describing and differentiating the archetypes. Each archetype was described along these three dimensions. The result is a typological structure in which the archetypes differ not through a single variable, but through a configuration of orientations across several dimensions. This final step turned the inductively generated patterns into the conceptual contribution of the study: a typology that describes the empirical variation in the data and offers a vocabulary for analysing participation in this emerging market form.

3.8 Reflexivity

3.8 .1 The Researcher as Conduit and Filter

The Human-AI Collaborative method placed the researcher in an unusual position. By allowing the language model to generate follow-up probes, the researcher gave up some control over the immediate direction of the interview. In conventional qualitative research, deciding what to ask next is usually treated as a central part of the interviewer's skill. In this study, the researcher still had to listen carefully, but the task changed. The researcher listened to the participant, entered the response into the system, read the AI's suggested probes, judged whether they were suitable, and then voiced selected probes in a way that preserved the trust and conversational warmth of the interview.

This kind of methodological labour does not fit neatly into existing categories. The researcher was not a fully autonomous interviewer in the usual sense, but neither was the researcher a passive instrument. The role was closer to a conduit between an algorithmically generated line of inquiry and a person sharing sensitive experiences in a social setting. The researcher's presence on Zoom, tone of voice, patience during silences, and willingness to depart from the AI's suggestions when reassurance or acknowledgement was needed all mattered to the success of the method. These aspects of the interview could not be supplied by the language model itself.

3.8 .2 Bracketing Moral Judgement

The researcher had personal experience in the market under study, having previously engaged in secondary service access transactions on Xianyu. This created both an advantage and a risk. The advantage was practical familiarity. The researcher understood the platform interface, the informal conventions of listing and negotiation, and the logic behind seeking alternative routes to service access. This familiarity helped with rapport and made it easier to notice details that might have seemed unimportant to an outsider.

The risk was that familiarity could lead either to over-identification or to moral judgement. Some practices described by participants, such as using information asymmetries, using membership benefits in ways not intended by the issuing company, or operating in regulatory grey zones, could be read as freeloading, rule-breaking, or petty arbitrage. The researcher was aware of this possibility and tried throughout the analysis to bracket such judgements. Bracketing here means holding preconceptions and prior assumptions in abeyance so that participants' accounts can be approached more openly (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The aim was not to judge participants against an external moral standard. It was to understand the internal logic, situated rationality, and practical creativity that participants brought to a market that formal institutions have not yet fully recognised or regulated. Participants were therefore approached not as rule-breakers to be evaluated, but as resourceful actors navigating a complex and ambiguous digital environment with considerable tactical ingenuity.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

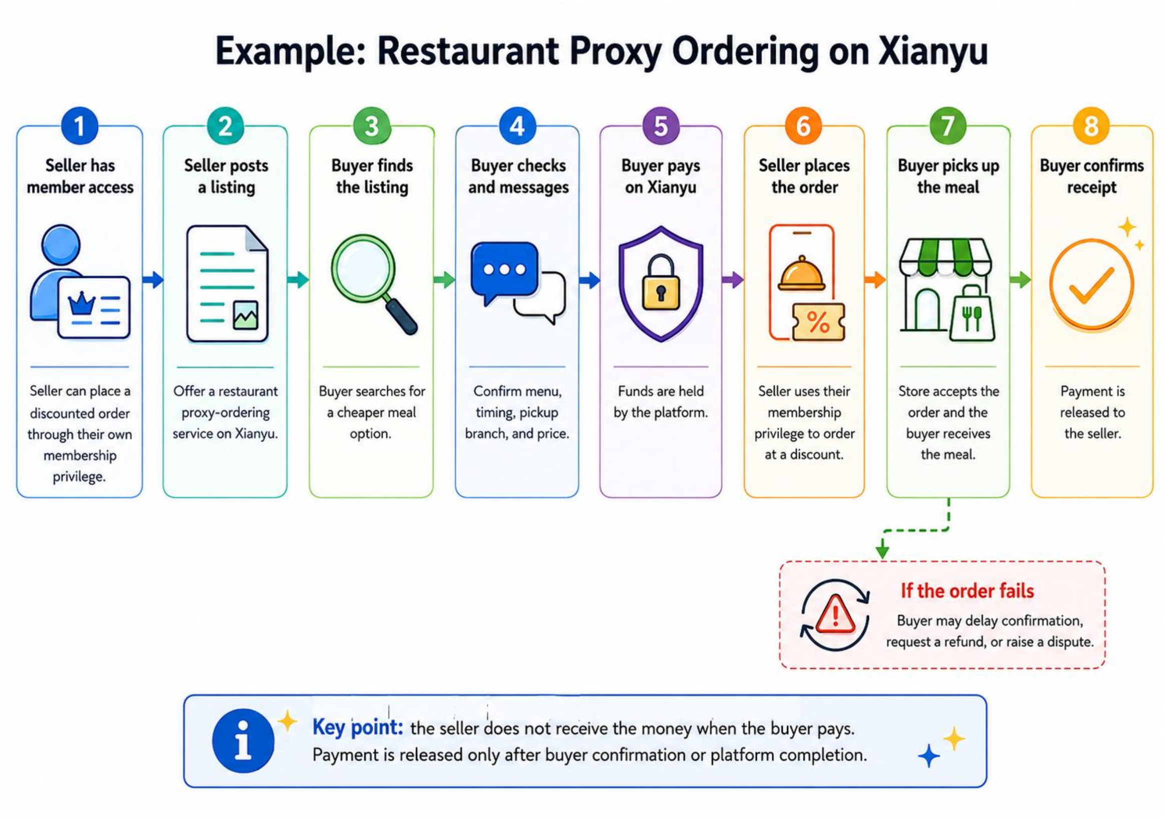
4.1 How Exchange Becomes Workable on Xianyu

A typical service-access transaction on Xianyu follows a simple sequence, which could be seen on Table 2. It usually begins when a seller has a service-related benefit that they can pass on, such as membership privilege. The seller lists this access claim on Xianyu and explains what can be used, how much it costs, and how the buyer will receive or activate it. In this way, a personal service access becomes visible as something that other users can search for and compare.

The buyer then searches for the relevant service and compares available listings. Before paying, the buyer usually checks the seller's profile, reads previous reviews, and messages the seller to confirm practical details, such as whether the entitlement can be used at the intended time and place. Once the buyer decides to proceed, payment is made through Xianyu's platform-linked payment system. The seller does not receive the money immediately. The amount is held in the platform's payment process until the buyer confirms receipt or the platform confirmation procedure is completed. This is broadly similar to the buyer-protection logic on platforms such as Blocket in Sweden, where payment can be handled through the platform and the seller is paid only after the buyer has received and approved the item.

After payment, the seller delivers or activates the access claim. This may mean sending a QR code or booking confirmation. The transaction is still not fully complete at this point. The claim has to be accepted by the restaurant or other service provider. If the access works, the buyer confirms receipt and the seller receives the money. If it fails, the buyer may delay confirmation, request a refund, or raise a dispute through Xianyu.

Table 2. Typical service-access transaction sequence.



4.2 Roadmap to the Analysis and Discussion

Participants did not use Xianyu for the secondary exchange of transferable service access in one single way. Their accounts show different ways of understanding value, judging risk, and positioning themselves in the exchange. The analysis therefore begins from these differences rather than treating the market as a single form of informal discount consumption. In the cases below, participants were not simply buying used goods. They were dealing with transferable service access that might still need to be verified, realised, or recognised by a service provider. This chapter therefore focuses on how participants made sense of value, how they assessed risk, and how they understood their own role in these exchanges.

Much of our knowledge about C2C second-hand marketplaces comes from studies of physical objects. Earlier chapters showed that when the exchanged object becomes transferable service access rather than material good, the market becomes organised around different possibilities and problems. Participants were not only looking for lower prices. They also had to judge whether access could be realised, whether the seller's route was trustworthy, whether the service provider would recognise the entitlement, and what kind of role they themselves occupied in the exchange. This chapter therefore does more than present transaction examples. It develops a participation typology that examines how participants entered this exchange space, how they interpreted it, and how they made it work under these changed object conditions.

Three participation types were reconstructed from the data. At the level of results, participants came to Xianyu for different practical reasons. Many used it repeatedly to look for cheaper access to services they could already obtain through ordinary channels, so Xianyu partly replaced a more expensive official purchase. Others used it more situationally when they needed another person's booking route, membership benefit, information, or resource to access something that was difficult to obtain through their own channels. A smaller group moved between buying and selling, treating underused entitlements as resources that could be redirected, exchanged, or monetised. These differences form the basis of the participation typology. In the Deal Hunter type, value was mainly understood as getting the same service at a lower price. In the Gap Bridger type, value came from the seller's ability to bridge an access gap. In the Perk Trader type, participants moved closer to the circulation logic of the market itself.

The typology is built around three comparative dimensions: value logic, risk orientation, and role perception. Table 3 below is an overview. Participants remain the main unit of comparison. Transaction episodes are used as empirical anchors because they show how a participant's dominant participation logic appeared, was tested, or shifted in practice. The typology therefore maps the dominant configurations found in participants' overall accounts, while also recognising that some participants moved across configurations when the transaction object, realization mechanism, identity exposure, or risk context changed.

Table 3. Participation archetypes overview.

Participation configuration	Core value logic	Risk orientation	Role perception	Indicative accounts and anchor cases
Deal Hunter	Cheaper access to otherwise familiar services	Seller screening plus final service-side verification	Ordinary but savvy consumer position	Dominant accounts: P01, P02, P04, P08, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15. Boundary anchor: P05's low-risk food access
Gap Bridger	Mediated access through another actor's channel, resource, or information bridge	Source legitimacy plus institutional recognition	Beneficiary or informed risk-taker relying on another actor's structural capacity	Anchor cases: P17, P09, P13. Boundary movement: P05 and P10 when access depends more strongly on institutional recognition or another actor's channel
Perk Trader	Circulation and monetisation of controllable or	Two-sided vulnerability across buyer and	Partial market actor or user-trader position	Anchor cases: P03, P06, P16. Complex role-movement case: P07, where the participant moved

Participation configuration	Core value logic	Risk orientation	Role perception	Indicative accounts and anchor cases
	underused entitlements	seller positions		from proxy-buying to buying and selling tickets, relying on fan-based trust, identity verification, and moral boundary work.

These participation archetypes are ideal-typical configurations. Participants are compared through the dominant logic of their accounts: how they understood value, how they managed risk, and how they placed themselves in the exchange. Boundary cases are important because they show where one logic starts to weaken and another becomes visible. They do not mean that the unit of analysis has shifted from participants to isolated transaction episodes. Instead, they show how particular episodes can reveal movement within a participant's broader account.

The sub-variants discussed within each archetype are also not separate archetypes. They are internal variations. They show how the same value-risk-role configuration can be enacted with different levels of routine, situational pressure, relational dependence, or role fluidity.

The chapter first sets out the typological structure that answers RQ2. It then returns to the practical operations through which these archetypes were enacted, which addresses RQ1. This order is analytical rather than chronological. The archetypes and the practices were developed together from the same dataset.

The table 3 gives the broad answer to RQ2. The following sections develop the answer to RQ1 by examining practices such as searching, screening, source judgement, timing, delayed confirmation, platform protection, and final institutional verification. The chapter therefore moves from broad participation configurations to the practical work through which participants made exchange possible. This matters because the findings are not meant to be a catalogue of cases. They are meant to show how a new exchange object produces different participation logics.

4.3 Discounted Access as Familiarized Consumption: The Deal Hunter

The first and most common participation type is the Deal Hunter. In this configuration, participants did not mainly use Xianyu to reach services that were otherwise unavailable. They used it as a practical way to access familiar services more cheaply. Here, discount logic refers to a way of valuing the exchange through the price difference between the official or ordinary purchase route and the Xianyu route. The expected service outcome remained largely the same, but the route to that outcome was cheaper. In this sense, the value of the exchange did not come from material depreciation or prior use. The entitlement had often not been consumed at all. Its value came from the possibility of obtaining the same service access at a lower cost.

This makes the internal logic of the Deal Hunter clear. Value was mainly about cheaper access to a familiar service, rather than ownership transfer, speculation, or access to something otherwise unreachable. Risk was present, but usually contained. Participants checked visible platform cues, used platform protection to limit possible loss, and treated in-store or service-side redemption as the point at which the entitlement became confirmed. Their role perception followed the same pattern. They rarely described themselves as rule-breakers or professional opportunists. Instead, they presented themselves as careful consumers comparing purchase routes before using a familiar service. The object had changed, but their self-understanding remained close to routine price comparison and cautious purchasing.

This is important for the wider argument of the thesis. If conventional second-hand consumption research often begins from usedness and depreciation, the Deal Hunter cases show that discount logic can remain strong even when those object properties do not apply in a simple way. Participants still looked for savings. Yet the saving was attached to a still-active service entitlement, not a worn object. The market therefore still looked like a value-seeking consumer space, but the basis of value had shifted.

4.3 .1 The Habitual Deal-Checker

The first sub-variant is the Habitual Deal-Checker. In this pattern, checking Xianyu had become part of a normal pre-purchase routine. Participants did not use the platform only when they faced an unusual access problem. They used it before buying breakfast, ordering fast food, purchasing movie tickets, or using other familiar low- to medium-stakes services. The important point is not only repeated use. It is that Xianyu entered the purchase sequence early enough to feel ordinary.

P02 gives the clearest example. This participant learned from friends that fast-food breakfast could be obtained more cheaply through Xianyu and then built this route into everyday consumption.

As P02 explained:

> *"I would check the seller's transaction volume and the price. If the prices were similar, I would choose the seller with more transactions. If the cheaper one had very low transaction volume, I would still choose the more expensive link."*

This account shows the practical judgement behind the configuration. The participant was not simply looking for the lowest price. They were avoiding the extra work of a deep investigation into the seller's source. They used a manageable rule of thumb. Cheapness mattered, but only within a field of acceptable credibility. This is why the practice remains close to ordinary shopping. The participant is not trying to understand the whole market system. They are trying to make a reasonable consumer choice inside it.

P02 also described the final point of verification:

> *"I usually only use it after I arrive at the store. When I see the pickup number appear on the store screen, then I know it is real." (P02)*

The importance of this quotation lies in where certainty is located. Platform cues reduce uncertainty, but they do not remove it. The entitlement becomes fully credible only when the official service setting accepts it. Even in a low-stakes breakfast case, the transaction becomes real only after a platform-external institution recognises the seller-mediated claim. This is one of the earliest signs that transferable service entitlements circulate differently from ordinary goods.

P04 and P15 show a similar pattern in shorter form. Both treated Xianyu as worthwhile because the savings were concrete, even though some extra coordination was required. This

detail matters because the Deal Hunter does not avoid friction altogether. The participant accepts a limited amount of friction in exchange for a worthwhile discount. The calculation is practical, small-scale, and proportionate.

P10 shows a more systematic version of the same routine. The participant used Xianyu when the original price felt too high and described a process of price comparison, condition checking, and seller evaluation.

P10 described the trigger in a simple way:

> *"When the original price was hard for me to accept, or when I felt there might be a lower-priced option, I would search on Xianyu for what I wanted to buy and add the words 'proxy order'." (P10)*

P10 also explained the logic of screening:

> *"I first compare the prices, then I message them to ask about the details, such as what conditions are needed to place the order, where and when it can be used, how much cheaper it is than the original price, and also how trustworthy it is." (P10)*

These comments show that the routine is not only about price. It also includes checking whether the entitlement can be used and whether the seller seems credible. They also show that the participant already knows how to search, message, and compare. That knowledge has become part of ordinary consumption procedure. The Habitual Deal-Checker is therefore not just someone who repeatedly finds bargains. It is someone who has learned how to place Xianyu inside a familiar shopping routine.

P01 marks an important boundary inside this sub-variant:

> *"If it involves personal private information, such as my name or ID number, I generally would not choose it." (P01)*

This shows that Deal Hunters pursue savings only while the mechanism remains clear enough and the privacy cost remains acceptable. Routine use does not mean complete normalization. Participants may treat Xianyu as a practical extension of shopping, but that comfort is conditional. When the exchange requires more identity exposure, the Deal Hunter logic begins to strain.

Taken together, these cases show that the Habitual Deal-Checker was not a compulsive bargain seeker. The routine described by participants was more limited: before purchasing familiar services, they checked whether Xianyu offered a cheaper route. Non-depreciated service entitlements could therefore still be understood through discount logic, while routine seller screening made secondary exchange feel close to ordinary shopping. What became normalised was the repeated practice of obtaining it through a secondary route.

4.3 .2 The Occasion Saver

The second sub-variant is the Occasion Saver. These participants also treated Xianyu as a way to obtain cheaper access to familiar services, but their use was triggered by a specific situation rather than built into a standing routine. The value logic is close to the Habitual Deal-Checker, but the timing is different. Xianyu is not always part of the background of consumption. It becomes worth using when a particular occasion makes the saving timely, attractive, or easy enough.

P11 gives a strong example. The participant described the exchange as one between:

> *"two clever people" connected through a "clever channel." (P11)*

This wording frames the transaction as practical cleverness rather than deep market involvement. The participant is not claiming a lasting trader identity. They are describing a smart situational choice. That self-description fits the broader Deal Hunter logic because the market remains an extension of practical consumption rather than a separate sphere.

P12 adds another feature of this sub-variant:

> *"I only confirmed receipt after I had completely settled the bill." (P12)*

This suggests that episodic users may rely more strongly on delayed confirmation when routine trust has not been built. The platform's procedure matters, but participants also actively use it to compensate for thinner familiarity.

P08 makes the situational trigger especially clear. The participant used Xianyu for a concert ticket because it was "cheap, convenient, and timely" (P08), and described the final step in this way:

> *"We met at the concert venue entrance, and I confirmed receipt only after I got in." (P08)*

The same participant also named the uncertainty:

> *"I was not really sure. I was just taking a chance." (P08)*

These quotations show that the Occasion Saver is not necessarily less exposed to risk than the Habitual Deal-Checker. In some cases, situational and time-bound use may involve thinner trust. What keeps the case within the Deal Hunter configuration is not the absence of uncertainty. It is the continued focus on getting a wanted service more cheaply at a moment when the trade-off feels acceptable.

P14 shows the same logic in a lower-stakes food case:

> *"When ordering on KFC Crazy Thursday, I found that proxy ordering on Xianyu was more cost-effective." (P14)*

Again, the participant is not describing an everyday platform habit. A specific consumption moment activates the route. The saving matters because the occasion makes it relevant.

These cases show that Deal Hunter participation can be routine, but it can also be situationally activated. What changes is not the basic understanding of value, risk, or role. What changes is when the platform becomes worth using. This distinction adds detail to the typology because it shows variation within the same value logic.

Boundary pressure within Deal Hunter

Once the Deal Hunter pattern is clear, its limits can also be seen more clearly. P05 is useful here. In the participant's low-stakes food-related account, the exchange fits comfortably within the Deal Hunter logic.

P05 put this bluntly:

> *"The source does not matter. As long as it lets me enjoy the low price, that is enough." (P05)*

This statement makes explicit what is often only implied in low-stakes discount cases. When failure would have limited consequences and redemption is easy to check, price advantage can be enough to organise the exchange.

The situation changes in P05's hotel-related account. The participant described the case through a different kind of evidence:

> *"I also received an official text message from the hotel system." (P05)*

This shows something different. Once institutional recognition becomes more visible and more consequential, discount logic alone no longer fully stabilises the exchange. This is not a mistake in classification. It is configuration movement. P05's low-stakes food case remains close to Deal Hunter because the entitlement is cheap, easy to verify, and low in identity exposure. The hotel-related case moves toward Gap Bridger because the claim has to pass through a more institution-facing recognition system. The participant may still want a lower price, but the participation logic shifts when another actor's route and institutional recognition become more central.

The broader point is that the Deal Hunter reconstructs the secondary exchange of transferable service access as an extension of ordinary consumption. Yet even in this familiar logic, the object-specific features of the market keep reappearing. The entitlement is not fully secured at payment. It still has to work somewhere else. Boundary cases such as P05 therefore help show when a discount logic can remain stable and when it starts to become a logic of mediated access.

The Deal Hunter both continues and unsettles existing accounts of second-hand consumption. Second-hand shopping is often defined around the acquisition of second-hand objects through channels separate from new-product retail, with economic motives forming part of a wider motivational structure (Guiot & Roux, 2010). The Deal Hunter cases keep the value-seeking side of this logic, but detach it from the usual material basis of second-hand exchange. Participants were not accepting wear, age, or prior use in exchange for a lower price. They were using a secondary route to obtain still-valid service access more cheaply. The point is not that bargain-seeking is new. The point is that familiar bargain reasoning can attach to a different kind of exchange object.

4.4 Access Through Another Person's Channel: The Gap Bridger

If the Deal Hunter used Xianyu mainly to get familiar services at lower prices, the Gap Bridger used it to cross an access gap that ordinary consumer routes did not easily solve. The issue was not only that Xianyu might be cheaper. Another person had a booking channel, institutional position, information advantage, or usable resource that the buyer would otherwise not have had access to.

Value is no longer only discount capture. It also lies in mediated access. Buyers pay because the seller can do something that they cannot do by themselves, or can do it faster, more plausibly, or through a route they cannot access. Risk also changes because the legitimacy and stability of the source channel matter more. Role perception shifts as well. Participants may still call themselves consumers, but they recognise the seller more clearly as an intermediary, resource/status holder.

The Gap Bridger cases show that some Xianyu transactions were not organised around a ready-made used object. Buyers were paying for access through another person's route. This route might come from a membership benefit, a booking channel, a ticket source, a workplace or institutional position, or another form of recognised qualification. In these cases, the service access did not simply move from seller to buyer as a finished object. It had to be made usable through the seller's unique position and through the service provider's later recognition of that position.

P17 provides a clear entry point into this archetype. The participant bought airport lounge access while waiting before a flight. The attraction was not only a lower price. It was also that the official route was difficult to identify, reach, or activate independently.

As P17 explained:

> *"The official channel was not easy to access. I did not even know clearly how to pay for that lounge service directly, but on Xianyu the seller could connect my need to a workable route very quickly." (P17)*

The statement shifts attention away from price alone. The seller is valuable because the route is workable. The transaction solves a problem of access organisation, not just a problem of cost.

P17 also explained the seller's role:

> *"It felt less like he was transferring a ticket to me, and more like he was using his membership qualification to register my name for entry." (P17)*

This distinction matters because the value of the exchange does not lie in handing over a self- contained object. It lies in activating a relational or system-based capacity. The quote is useful because the participant also recognises the ambiguity of the exchanged object. What moves through the transaction is not a simple item, but another person's operational capacity.

P17 made the bridging function even clearer:

> *"Xianyu helped make up for the information gap. I only needed to know my own need, and the seller directly connected that need to the actual route of realization." (P17)*

The phrase "information gap" is important. It shows that Xianyu is not only a site where unused entitlements are listed. It is also a site where differences in knowledge, qualification, and procedural access can be turned into value.

At the same time, P17 saw the final institutional encounter as the part that could not be fully controlled:

> *"For me, the final verification step was the hardest to control, because I had to take what the seller gave me and face the actual lounge staff, who were outside our transaction chain." (P17)*

This captures a central tension of the Gap Bridger. Buyer and seller may coordinate up to the point of use, but the service provider remains an external gatekeeper. The buyer is therefore not buying certainty. They are buying 'a better chance of' access through another person's channel.

4.4 .1 The Regular

One sub-variant of the Gap Bridger is The Regular. In this pattern, repeated successful use of a specific intermediary creates a stable working relationship. The seller's value lies in repeatedly bridging access through a familiar channel.

P09 illustrates this through repeated hotel and transport proxy booking:

> *"For about three years, when I travel, I often go back to the same seller. I have booked hotels, flights, and rail tickets through him, and in the end it was always completed smoothly." (P09)*

This does not mean that the intermediary disappears. Instead, repetition stabilises dependence on a particular bridge. The participant becomes more selective about which route-holder to trust, rather than less reliant on another person's route.

P09 also described what the seller did:

> *"I choose the hotel myself on a booking platform, send the hotel and my information to him, and then he checks whether he can place the order through his own route." (P09)*

The description shows the layered nature of the transaction. The participant still exercises consumer choice by selecting the hotel, but realization depends on whether the intermediary can activate a separate route. The buyer is not simply purchasing a listing. They are entering a coordinated process.

Trust in this case was built less through ratings than through repeated realization and relationship building. But the source still remained partly opaque:

> *"He never clearly told me where the discount came from. I only knew that for some routes he could do it and for some he could not." (P09)*

This quote shows that practical reliability does not require full transparency. The relationship becomes reliable through use, even though the source is not fully explained. This combination of use-based trust and source opacity is one of the clearest features of the Gap Bridger logic.

P09 also explained that the most serious risk was not only losing money. It was late non-realization that could disrupt an already planned trip:

> *"The real worry is not only whether the money comes back. If he delays and does not issue the booking in time, the problem is that your trip may already be affected and the room may no longer be available." (P09)*

This changes the analysis. In low-stakes Deal Hunter cases, the loss is often a small amount of money or inconvenience. Here, the deeper risk is coordination failure. The bridge has value because it solves an access problem. But if it fails too late, it may create a larger practical problem than using the official route would have done.

The Regular therefore returns to a known intermediary because that intermediary has a workable channel, not because the exchange has become transparent. Trust accumulates through successful realization, not through full knowledge of the source.

4.4 .2 The Calculated Gambler

The second sub-variant is The Calculated Gambler. Here, the participant knows that the access route may be unstable, opaque, or institutionally uncertain, but still proceeds because the possible gain is judged worth the risk.

P13 offers the clearest example:

> *"This is really a gamble. I cannot be 100 percent sure, but the price difference was about 40 percent, so I was willing to take the risk." (P13)*

This quote removes any sense of routine comfort. The participant is not turning the exchange into everyday shopping. They name the uncertainty and proceed anyway. The practical reasoning is not based on secure trust, but on calculated tolerance.

P13 also described the verification sequence:

> *"I first received the official hotel booking email, then I called the hotel to confirm the reservation existed, and in the end I only counted it as realized when I saw the order at the front desk and paid the hotel directly." (P13)*

This layered sequence shows how confidence is built gradually. No single confirmation is treated as sufficient. Each step reduces uncertainty, but full realization remains at the end. The quote therefore does more than describe a hotel transaction. It shows an interpretive style in which the participant assembles plausibility from several partial signals.

P13 made the role of the seller explicit:

> *"I think it is a grey area. I would define those sellers as resource holders. They are using resources to exchange for money." (P13)*

This wording describes the seller as more than an ordinary discount provider. The seller is converting access capacity into an exchangeable offer.

P13 also added:

> *"There is no such thing as an old reliable seller here. Every transaction is a new transaction. Today it may be real, next time it may not be." (P13)*

This separates the Calculated Gambler from The Regular. Repeated participation does not necessarily produce durable confidence. The participant accepts opacity, institutional uncertainty, and possible failure each time. This sharpens the chapter's overall argument.

Participation differs not only because services differ, but because participants inhabit different risk worlds.

P13 also named the concrete forms that failure might take. The risk was not only outright fraud. It could also involve the wrong room type, the wrong number of nights, or promised benefits such as breakfast or lounge access not appearing. In some cases, the buyer might have to explain where the booking came from if questioned by the hotel. This makes the exchange more institution-facing than a typical Deal Hunter case.

4.4 .3 Boundary sharpening within Gap Bridger

The internal boundary of this archetype becomes clearer by returning briefly to P10 and P05. In P10's movie-ticket case, the lower price remained the main attraction, and the seller's role was still close to orderly discount provision. That account therefore remains closer to Deal Hunter as a dominant participation logic. Still, P10 helps mark the edge of the configuration because similar searching and screening practices can take on a different meaning when the seller is needed not only to provide a lower price, but to make access workable. P05's movement from low-risk food access toward hotel-related access shows the same shift. When the transaction object and realization mechanism change, the logic of participation may also change. Once access depends more clearly on another person's organisational route, membership qualification, hidden booking capacity, or institution-facing confirmation, the exchange becomes less about buying the same thing more cheaply and more about crossing a gap through mediated access.

This distinction prevents the analysis from flattening the market into one informal discount space. The Gap Bridger cases show that price advantage is not the only organising principle. The market is also organised by uneven access capacity. It appears when the entitlement's object features, realization pathway, and verification demands make another actor's access capacity central.

The Gap Bridger therefore moves the analysis beyond price-based exchange. Sharing can be distinguished from commodity exchange, and that distinction becomes especially important when market calculation and commodification enter (Belk, 2010). The Gap Bridger cases should not be treated as simple sharing. Participants did not merely receive help from another user. They paid for another actor's channel, membership position, booking capacity, or information. The seller's value lay in mediating a route to access, not in transferring a conventional object.

4.5 Circulating and Monetizing Underused Entitlements: The Perk Trader

The Perk Trader moves further into the circulation logic of the market. If the Gap Bridger begins from the buyer's need for someone else's route, the Perk Trader shows what happens when participants themselves work with entitlements that can be redirected, recombined, sold, or strategically bought and resold. These participants are not only end-users. At certain moments, they become partial operators within the circulation system.

The Perk Trader should not be read as a professional seller category. It names a participation configuration in which participants begin to treat controllable or underused entitlements as movable assets, even while they may still understand themselves as ordinary users.

This archetype matters because it changes role perception most visibly. Value is produced by turning spare capacity, acquired know-how, or temporarily controllable benefits into exchangeable assets. Risk also changes. The participant has to consider not only whether an entitlement can be used, but whether it can be delivered to someone else and survive verification after transfer.

4.5 .1 The Coupon Flipper

The first sub-variant is the Coupon Flipper. In this pattern, participants move between buying, holding, using, and reselling discount entitlements, usually in low- to medium-stakes service settings.

P16 is the clearest anchor because this participant had experience on both sides. As a buyer, P16 used Xianyu to buy cheaper movie tickets. As a seller, the same participant resold an unused restaurant package that had originally been obtained through a live-stream promotion.

P16 described the shift directly:

> *"I bought the restaurant package in a live-stream promotion, but later I did not have time to use it, so I put it on Xianyu and sold it for a little more than what I paid." (P16)*

The importance of this account is its ordinariness. The participant is not presenting themselves as a professional trader. The resale arises from a change in everyday plans. Yet once the entitlement is treated as transferable, that adjustment becomes market activity.

P16 also explained the resale logic:

> *"I spent time and effort to get that discounted price, so if someone else does not want to study how to get it, they can just buy mine. I think of that extra part as a kind of labor fee." (P16)*

This makes monetisation morally understandable in the participant's own terms. The markup is framed as compensation for attention, timing, and effort. The participant is not only reselling a spare object. They are pricing the work involved in acquiring access. This is one clear way in which the exchanged object differs from a conventional used good.

P16 described delivery in practical terms:

> *"I asked when the buyer needed to use it. When the time came and they had paid, I sent the redemption screenshot, and then they used it in the restaurant." (P16)*

Timing becomes part of the asset logic here. The entitlement is not simply transferred once and finished. It has to be coordinated around the buyer's moment of use.

P03 supports the same sub-variant from another angle:

> *"Sometimes I stock up on low-priced coupons during anniversary promotions, and then I also sell them on Xianyu." (P03)*

P03 also described the transfer mechanism:

> *"After the buyer placed the order, I uploaded the QR code screenshot through the platform, and then they used it when paying in the store." (P03)*

P06 gives the same pattern in compressed form:

> *"He paid first, and then I sent him the coupon code." (P06)*

Together, these cases show that the entitlement is understood differently. A coupon, voucher, or discounted package is no longer only a personal opportunity to save money. It becomes something that can be moved, timed, and given a small markup. The move from user to seller may look minor, but analytically it is important.

4.5 .2 The Fan Trader

The second sub-variant is the Fan Trader. It appears most clearly in P07's concert-ticket case. This case cannot be reduced to discount-seeking or casual resale. The participant moves through an ecology of emotional commitment, scarcity, identity verification, temporary trust, and repeated buying and selling.

P07 described moving from selling one ticket to later buying another ticket in the same event cycle:

> *"I had originally sold my ticket because I decided not to go, but two days before the concert I bought another person's ticket on Xianyu and finally went again." (P07)*

This movement between selling and buying shows how fluid roles can become. The participant is not fixed as either consumer or trader. Their position changes with the situation. This role fluidity is one reason why the Perk Trader should not be reduced to occupational selling or to a fixed type of person.

The participant also described screening:

> *"I would not trust tickets that were too cheap or too expensive. I looked for a middle range, then checked the seller's page, comments, and the reason why they were selling." (P07)*

Price is still a signal here, but not in the simple sense of bargain-hunting. It is one clue among several used to judge whether a fragile access route is believable. The Fan Trader therefore combines valuation, moral reading, and risk inference.

In one case, the participant logged into the seller's ticketing account and later used the seller's ID card to enter the venue:

> *"I could log into the seller's ticketing app with the account and password, and on the day of the concert I entered with that person's ID card." (P07)*

The participant also described the final threshold of certainty:

> *"I only really felt it was safe at the moment I actually got in." (P07)*

These quotations show the realization problem in an intense form. The traded object is not simply a ticket. It is a bundle of credentials, access conditions, and coordination demands that must hold long enough for entry to succeed.

P07 also reflected on the moral boundary of the practice:

> *"I think this is a grey area. If someone only does this often to make money, I really dislike that kind of person." (P07)*

This shows that the Fan Trader expands the Perk Trader configuration in a specific direction. Circulation is not only economic. It is also emotional and moral. The participant accepts some forms of circulation, but draws boundaries around others. That matters because even in a trader-like participation logic, participants still judge what kinds of market behaviour are acceptable.

Bringing the Perk Trader together

The Coupon Flipper and the Fan Trader show that some participants engaged the Xianyu market from within its circulation logic rather than only as consumers seeking cheaper or otherwise inaccessible services. They recognised that underused or controllable entitlements could be held and transferred. The entitlement was no longer just something to use. It became something to move. P07 is especially important because the concert-ticket account does not simply place the participant into a trader category. It shows movement across buying, selling, affective commitment, identity verification, and moral boundary work as the access claim becomes harder to realise and more personally meaningful.

The Perk Trader therefore extends the chapter's argument. The findings are not only about consumers seeking discounted or mediated access. They also show how some participants learn to treat transferable service entitlements as lightly tradable assets. This is where the market moves furthest away from ordinary bargain-seeking and conventional second-hand exchange. The participant does not only adapt to the market. In a limited way, they help operate it.

The Perk Trader cases are important for the thesis's object argument. Digital possession cannot be reduced to either full ownership or temporary access, because consumers may act through partial and fragmented forms of control (Watkins et al., 2016). This helps explain why transferable service entitlements can be treated not only as consumption opportunities, but also as controllable capacities that can be held, timed, redirected, or lightly monetized. Participants did not own a physical good. They could, however, sometimes control a code, screenshot, account-linked benefit, booking route, or promotional entitlement long enough to redirect or monetize it.

4.6 Cross-Cutting Engagement Practices

The three archetypes do not tell the whole story by themselves. They show distinct configurations of value, risk, and role, but several practices recur across the data. Examining these practices helps show how participation was actually carried out in everyday situations. It also helps answer RQ1 more directly. If the archetypes describe broad modes of engagement, this section explains the practical operations through which those modes were stabilised, tested, and sometimes strained.

Four practices stand out, which could be seen on Table 4. The first is final institutional verification, the moment when a transaction became real or failed. The second is the source stance continuum, which describes how participants related to the often unclear origins of the entitlement. The third is time pressure and situational activation, which shaped when Xianyu became worth using and how much uncertainty participants accepted. The fourth is the unstable relationship between platform protection and platform distrust. Participants relied on the platform's payment and dispute mechanisms, but they also doubted whether these protections were enough in more complex cases.

Table 4. Cross-cutting engagement practices.

Practice	Deal Hunter	Gap Bridger	Perk Trader
Final institutional verification	Confirms that a cheaper route works in an ordinary service setting.	Tests whether another actor's channel is institutionally recognized.	Determines whether an entitlement can survive circulation as a deliverable or resellable asset.
Source stance	Source concern can be bracketed when the transaction is low-stakes and easy to verify.	Source legitimacy becomes more important because the seller's channel or qualification matters.	Source concern becomes two-sided because both entitlement origin and post- transfer behavior matter.
Time pressure	Activates occasional deal-seeking in concrete consumption moments.	Raises the cost of delayed non-realization, especially in travel or scheduled access.	Creates circulation value through expiry dates, promotional timing, scarcity, or buyer urgency.
Platform protection	Provides basic procedural safety through escrow, ratings, and delayed confirmation.	Helps but cannot fully protect against late institutional rejection.	Becomes ambivalent because either side may be exposed after code or screenshot delivery.

The matrix shows why these practices should not be detached from the archetypes. The same practice changes meaning across value-risk-role configurations. Final institutional verification, for example, confirms a cheaper route for Deal Hunters, tests another actor's access channel for Gap Bridgers, and determines whether an entitlement can survive circulation as an asset for Perk Traders.

These practices therefore deepen the typological analysis rather than sit beside it. The same act of delayed confirmation can be ordinary in a Deal Hunter's case, procedural necessity in a Gap Bridger case, and two-sided vulnerability in a Perk Trader case.

4.6 .1 Final institutional verification

Across the findings, one recurring feature stands out: platform payment alone rarely made the exchange complete. A transaction became fully meaningful only when the final service-setting institution recognised the entitlement.

P02 described this simply:

> *"When I see the pickup number appear on the store screen, then I know it is real." (P02)*

P13 described the same issue in the hotel case through a staged process:

> *"I first received the official hotel booking email, then I called the hotel to confirm the reservation existed, and in the end I only counted it as realized when I saw the order at the front desk and paid the hotel directly." (P13)*

P17 made the problem visible in the airport lounge case:

> *"The final verification step was the hardest to control, because I had to take what the seller gave me and face the actual lounge staff, who were outside our transaction chain." (P17)*

P07's concert case shows the same logic under higher pressure:

> *"I only really felt it was safe at the moment I actually got in." (P07)*

These cases show that the exchanges are not fully contained within Xianyu. Their realization depends on recognition by an institution outside the platform transaction. This directly supports the thesis's argument about the changed nature of the exchanged object. What circulates is not complete value in itself. It is an entitlement whose value still depends on later recognition and realization by third party providers. Final institutional verification is therefore not just a practical step. It is part of what the object is.

Final institutional verification marks the point at which a platform-mediated claim becomes usable service access. Value is not simply contained in an exchanged object, but is determined through use and by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In this market, payment on Xianyu creates a provisional claim. That claim becomes valuable only when the restaurant, hotel, cinema, lounge, or venue accepts it in practice.

4.6 .2 Source stance continuum

A second recurring practice concerns participants' stance toward the source of the entitlement. Participants did not all relate to source opacity in the same way. Their positions ranged from source indifference to cautious source concern.

At one end, P05 stated the position most directly:

> *"The source does not matter. As long as it lets me enjoy the low price, that is enough." (P05)*

A more moderate form appears in P09:

> *"He never clearly told me where the discount came from. I only knew that for some routes he could do it and for some he could not." (P09)*

Further along the continuum, participants became more concerned about the kind of source involved. P13 expressed this caution clearly:

> *"I would not choose the ones that use points to exchange rooms, or use someone else's name to let me stay." (P13)*

This continuum shows that participants neither ignored opacity completely nor investigated it fully. Most worked with bounded source concern. Their concern increased when the route involved more external scrutiny, identity linkage, or institution-facing verification. Source stance therefore does not belong to only one archetype. It is a recurring adjustment to the fragility of the exchanged object.

4.6 .3 Time pressure and situational activation

A third recurring practice concerns time. Across the cases, time pressure shaped both the decision to use Xianyu and the amount of uncertainty participants were willing to accept.

P17 used Xianyu while already at the airport and facing several hours of waiting. P08 described the transaction as "cheap, convenient, and timely" (P08). In hotel cases, P09 explained that the major risk was not always direct fraud, but delayed booking issuance that might affect travel plans. In lower-stakes food and coupon cases, P16, P03, and P06 also showed that response speed and timing mattered, even when the stakes were lower.

These examples suggest that the market is not activated only by price difference. It is often activated by temporal mismatch. Sometimes the issue is immediate need. Sometimes it is an expiring opportunity. Sometimes it is the need to reduce coordination work under time pressure. Time is therefore not only background context. It is part ofthe value structure itself.

4.6 .4 Platform protection and platform distrust

The final recurring practice concerns the ambivalent role of platform protection. Participants often described Xianyu as providing a basic safety mechanism. Escrow payment, delayed confirmation, visible ratings, and dispute options made risky transactions feel more manageable.

P12’s remark is representative:

> *“I only confirmed receipt after I had completely settled the bill.” (P12)*

P09 also linked trust to platform procedure:

> *“Because we still used platform transactions, I felt that if there was an issue I could still refund it.” (P09)*

Yet this reliance existed alongside distrust. P13 rejected the idea of a stable trust system by arguing that every transaction is new. P07 noted that the platform gives only partial protection in high-stakes ticket transactions. P06, speaking as a seller, worried about buyer-side refund abuse after a code had been delivered.

Participants therefore treated the platform as necessary but insufficient. It could hold money and delay confirmation, but it could not fully guarantee institutional recognition, source legitimacy, or the other party’s later compliance. This is another point where the exchanged object matters. Because realization still depends on off-platform institutions and coordination, platform protection alone cannot remove uncertainty.

Concluding the cross-cutting practices section

Together, these four practices add detail to the typological analysis. Final institutional verification shows that transactions remain incomplete until recognised by the service-setting institution. Source stance shows how participants handle opacity through uneven and bounded forms of concern. Time pressure and situational activation show that engagement is often triggered by temporal need, not only price. Platform protection and platform distrust show that the platform is treated both as a safety device and as an incomplete shield.

These practices explain how engagement was performed across the three archetypes. They also lead into the discussion. If the findings show that transferable service entitlements circulate through different value-risk-role configurations, the next question is what this means for second-hand consumption theory, access-based consumption, and informal digital markets.

4.7 Discussion

4.7 .1 From second-hand objects to service-access claims

The analysis shows that moving from used physical goods to still-valid service access entitlements changes the basis of secondary exchange. The Xianyu cases extend and complicate the object assumptions through which secondary circulation is often understood. Second-hand shopping is commonly defined in relation to second-hand objects and channels distinct from new-product retail (Guiot & Roux, 2010). In this study, however, participants often exchanged not a used material object but a still-valid access claim: a QR code, booking route, discount entitlement, ticket credential, membership-linked qualification, or promotional package.

This object shift explains why the Deal Hunter can remain close to familiar bargain-seeking while still differing from conventional second-hand exchange. Deal Hunters kept a discount logic, but the discount did not come from physical wear, prior use, or material depreciation. Participants were trying to obtain the same future service more cheaply through a secondary route. The finding therefore shifts the object basis of discount reasoning from residual value after use to future service realizability.

The same object shift also makes the Gap Bridger and Perk Trader configurations possible. Gap Bridger cases emerge because the exchanged claim may depend on another actor's channel, qualification, or information rather than on a stable object that can simply be handed over. Perk Trader cases emerge because some non-material access resources can be held, timed, redirected, or lightly monetized. Digital possession is useful here because it shows that consumers may act through partial and fragmented forms of practical control rather than through full ownership (Watkins et al., 2016). In the Xianyu cases, this control could attach to a code, screenshot, account-linked benefit, booking route, or promotional entitlement. The object was movable, but still fragile. This helps explain why a changed exchange object gives rise to differentiated participation configurations rather than one uniform form of bargain- seeking.

4.7 .2 Monetized access mediation and value realization

The Gap Bridger cases show that buyers sometimes paid not simply for a cheaper entitlement, but for another actor's ability to make access workable. The seller's value lay in a channel, membership position, booking capacity, information advantage, or institutional route that the buyer did not possess in the same usable form. The seller therefore becomes an access- capacity holder rather than only a conventional reseller.

These cases should not be described as pure sharing. Sharing is analytically distinct from commodity exchange, and it changes when payment, calculation, and commodification enter (Belk, 2010). The Xianyu exchanges examined here were monetized, platform-mediated, and risk-managed. Participants did not simply receive access informally from another user. They bought a mediated route through which access might become possible. For this reason, monetized access-bridging is a more accurate description than sharing.

At the same time, seller mediation could not fully guarantee service recognition. Even when the seller provided a code, booking route, official-looking message, or account-based credential, the entitlement still had to work in the final service setting. This is why final institutional verification is central rather than incidental. In service-dominant logic, value is not simply embedded in the exchanged object; it is determined through use and by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In the present data, platform payment created only a provisional claim. Service realization occurred only when the restaurant, hotel, cinema, lounge, or venue accepted the entitlement in practice. Platform exchange therefore remained incomplete until the service institution recognised the claim.

4.7 .3 Role movement, analytical scope, and implications

The typology also shows that participant roles can shift when entitlements become practically controllable. Perk Traders were not professional sellers as a fixed group, and many still understood themselves as ordinary users. What changed was their practical relation to the entitlement. When a benefit could be held, timed, redirected, or monetized, participants could move beyond end-user consumption into partial market-actor roles. This role movement is especially visible when participants shifted between buying and selling, or when codes, screenshots, account-linked benefits, and booking routes became temporary objects of control.

Watkins et al. (2016) help clarify this shift because they show that digital possession involves fragmented arrangements of control, use, and transferability rather than a simple opposition between ownership and access. The Xianyu cases extend this point into secondary service- access exchange. Some participants could act on partial and practical control long enough to redirect or monetize an access capacity.

These claims are analytical generalisations, not statistical ones. The study is based on one platform context. The findings are most likely to travel to contexts where access is digitally encoded, partially transferable, unevenly distributed, and dependent on later institutional recognition. In such settings, secondary circulation may become organised around similar questions: what kind of access claim is being exchanged, who can make it workable, how value is realised, and how ordinary users may move into partial market-actor positions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Generalisations

5.1 Answering the research questions

This thesis examined how participants engage in the secondary exchange of transferable service access on Xianyu, and what participation archetypes emerge from those engagement patterns. In response to RQ1, the findings show that participation was carried out through a set of practical operations: searching, screening, source judgement, timing, platform protection, delayed confirmation, and final institutional verification. These were not background details around the transaction. They were the means through which participants judged whether an entitlement was plausible, managed uncertainty, and tried to turn a platform-mediated claim into usable service access.

In response to RQ2, the study reconstructed three dominant participation configurations: the Deal Hunter, the Gap Bridger, and the Perk Trader. The Deal Hunter used Xianyu as a route to cheaper access to services that were otherwise familiar. The Gap Bridger depended on another actor's channel, resource, or information to make access workable. The Perk Trader treated controllable or underused entitlements as assets that could be redirected, exchanged, or lightly monetized. These configurations do not classify participants by service category or permanent identity. They describe recurring ways in which participants understood value, handled risk, and positioned themselves in the exchange.

Taken together, the two answers show that this market is not just an informal space for bargain seeking. It is a differentiated field of participation organised around the practical problem of making transferable service access hold.

5.2 Main contributions of the thesis

The thesis makes three connected contributions. Empirically, it shows that the secondary exchange of transferable service access on Xianyu is not a homogeneous bargain market. Participants did not all seek the same kind of value, accept the same kinds of risk, or understand themselves through the same role. Some used the platform as a cheaper route to ordinary consumption. Some relied on another actor's access capacity. Others moved into limited forms of circulation and monetization.

Conceptually, the thesis argues that the exchanged object should not be treated as a conventional second-hand good. What circulated was often a still-valid access claim: a code, booking route, discount entitlement, ticket credential, membership-linked qualification, or promotional package whose value depended on future realization. This shifts the analytical focus from residual value after use to the uncertain convertibility of an entitlement into service access.

The thesis offers a vocabulary for describing participation in this market. The Deal Hunter, Gap Bridger, and Perk Trader configurations show how secondary service- access exchange is organised through different combinations of value logic, risk orientation, and role perception. The typology does not claim to classify all users permanently. It identifies patterned ways of participating when the exchanged object no longer fits the usual assumptions of second-hand exchange.

5.3 Scope conditions, limitations, and future research

The generalisation made by this thesis is analytical rather than statistical. The study does not argue that all platforms, service sectors, or digital entitlement markets will produce the same three configurations, or that they will appear in the same proportions. The findings are most likely to travel to contexts where service access is digitally encoded, unevenly distributed, partially transferable, and dependent on later institutional recognition. In these contexts, participants may face similar tasks: judging source legitimacy, managing platform and off- platform uncertainty, and working to convert an entitlement into successful service access.

The study also has limits. It is based on an interpretive single-case study of Xianyu and on participants' own accounts of their transaction experiences. It does not include platform-side transaction data, provider-side perspectives, or direct observation of every service-verification encounter. These limits do not invalidate the typological argument, but they do define its scope. Future research could compare other C2C platforms, examine platform or provider perspectives, or study how service-access transferability changes when it is formally prohibited, tolerated, or institutionalized.

5.4 Final closing discussion

The central conclusion of the thesis is that the secondary exchange of transferable service access on Xianyu is not a marginal or random form of online bargain seeking. It is a structured field of participation in which users work to make access claims valuable, credible, transferable, and institutionally recognizable. The Xianyu case shows one way that secondary exchange can become organised around access claims rather than used objects alone. To understand such markets, analysis needs to consider not only price and platform trust, but also access capacity, practical control, and the institutional moment when an entitlement either becomes usable or fails to hold.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

English interviewer version adapted from the original Chinese guide. The interviews are conducted in Chinese; this version is intended for academic review and interviewer use.

1. Opening Script

We are interested in how people buy, sell, arrange, or make use of access to offline services through platforms such as Xianyu. This may include restaurant proxy ordering, discounted bookings, airport lounge entry, hotel member benefits, service vouchers, or reservation slots. We are most interested in how these exchanges actually work in practice, rather than in any right or wrong answer. Please feel free to speak from your own experience. Any references to platforms, merchants, or accounts will be anonymised.

2. Interview Principles

This is a semi-structured interview, not a survey.

Start with one concrete, recent transaction.

Use that transaction as the anchor for follow-up questions.

Move to broader reflections only after the concrete case is clear.

Each module contains a main question, possible probes, and interviewer notes.

Interviewer note: Keep prompts natural. Do not use theoretical language unless the participant introduces it. Notes to yourself should remain as interviewer notes; they do not need to be read aloud to participants.

Module A. Establish the form of participation

Interviewer note: Many participants will not describe what they do as 'trading service access'. Start from their own everyday language.

A1. Do you usually look for this kind of thing on Xianyu?

Possible probes:

- For example: proxy ordering, discounted access, member-rate bookings, lounge entry, reservation slots, or benefits that someone else cannot use.
- When was the most recent time you looked for something like this?
- How did you first learn that Xianyu could be used in this way?

Interviewer note: If the participant only says 'I look for cheap deals', ask what form this actually took: a code, a proxy order, a booking, or another person's entitlement.

A2. What role do you usually play in these exchanges?

Possible probes:

- Are you mainly using these services yourself, or do you also help other people obtain them?
- Has your role stayed the same over time, or has it changed?
- If you do 'both sides', could you give a recent example?

Interviewer note: Do not stop at labels such as buyer or seller. Ask what they actually do.

A3. Which service settings do you deal with most often, or what do you most often search for on Xianyu?

Possible probes:

- Food and dining
- Airport or travel
- Hotels or tourism
- Fitness or lifestyle services
- Tickets, entry, or reservations
- Other

Interviewer note: Try to keep the rest of the interview anchored in the participant's most familiar setting.

Module B. Reconstruct one recent transaction

Interviewer note: This is the core module. Most later questions should be anchored in this case.

B1. Could you walk me through the most recent transaction of this kind that you were involved in?

Possible probes:

- Please start from the moment you had the need, then tell me how you searched, contacted someone, and finally used it or failed to use it.
- What was the first thing you did?
- Who contacted whom first?
- At what point did it become clear that the transaction would succeed or fail?
- Were you trying to buy or sell? Why did you not use the official channel?

Interviewer note: If the participant moves too quickly, slow the account down and ask 'What happened next?' or 'Who did that step?'

B2. In that transaction, what exactly did the seller give you, and what did you eventually receive after the service was used?

Possible probes:

- Was the first thing you received directly usable?
- Or did the other person still need to continue cooperating?
- How did that initial thing become something that could actually be used?
- Could the transaction have worked without the seller's further involvement?

Interviewer note: The key issue is often not the transfer of a 'thing', but the practical realisation of an entitlement.

B3. How was access actually completed in the end?

Possible probes:

- From payment to actual entry or redemption, what did the seller do and what did you do?

- Did you need repeated communication?
- Did the seller tell you what to say or do on site?
- How did staff react?
- At that moment, were you worried that it might fail?

Interviewer note: Focus on how access was realised in practice, not only on what was exchanged.

Module C. Where the entitlement comes from

Interviewer note: Differences in source often shape the whole transaction logic.

C1. Where do the entitlements involved in these exchanges usually come from?

Possible probes:

- Platform coupons or promotional packages
- Bank or credit card benefits
- Membership tiers or member identity
- Corporate welfare
- Group-buying, livestream, or event channels
- Packages, passes, or redemption codes inside apps
- Spare entitlements that the original holder cannot use
- Reservation or booking slots

C2. If you have dealt with entitlements from different sources, what differences do you notice between them?

Possible probes:

- Which are easiest to transfer?
- Which most often require the seller's continued cooperation?
- Which are most likely to fail on site?
- Which feel more like clearing unused benefits, and which feel more like doing business?

Interviewer note: This is a good place to probe whether participants see the entitlement as 'really theirs' and whether selling it feels legitimate.

C3. Do you distinguish between transferring something you cannot use yourself and obtaining something specifically in order to sell it?

Possible probes:

- Do you see these as different in motivation, in practice, or both?
- Which one is closer to your own position?
- How do you think other people would distinguish between these two types?

Module D. Why buyers do not use the official route

Interviewer note: Do not reduce this to price alone.

D1. Why do buyers come to Xianyu for this kind of entitlement instead of using the official channel directly?

Possible probes:

- Can you give an example that is not only about price?
- Have you ever found that Xianyu was actually more troublesome than the official route?
- Do people come because it is cheaper, easier, unavailable officially, too complicated officially, or because someone else knows how to do it?

D2. What do you think people are really looking for when they come to Xianyu for these transactions?

Possible probes:

- If you say 'convenience', what step does it save?
- If you say it is 'worth it', what exactly makes it worth it?
- Are there cases where the price difference is small, but people still prefer this route?

Interviewer note: Ask for examples rather than abstract labels.

D3. In the transaction you described, what mattered most to you personally?

Possible probes:

- Was it mainly price?
- Was it because you could not otherwise get access?
- Was it mainly to save effort?
- Was it because you only needed the service once and did not want a long-term membership?

Module E. What the seller is really providing

Interviewer note: This module is central for building archetypes.

E1. Do you see major differences between the kinds of sellers or providers active in this market?

Possible probes:

- What makes them different?
- Where do you see the differences most clearly?
- Do some look like people clearing unused benefits, while others look more like rule-savvy operators, brokers, or repeat traders?

E2. What do you think these sellers are actually providing to the buyer?

Possible probes:

- A ready-made item?
- A qualification?
- A member-based capability?
- A one-off operation?
- Accompanied entry?
- An information advantage?
- The ability to navigate rules?

Interviewer note: Push the participant to distinguish between a resource and the capacity to make access happen.

E3. If you think about your own case, what do you feel you were providing or receiving?

Possible probes:

- Was it an unused thing, an attached benefit, a channel, labour, experience, or a practical result?
- If the other person already knew how to do it, would they still need you?

Module F. How the transaction process unfolds

Interviewer note: Keep questions short and concrete.

F1. How do you usually discover these opportunities?

Possible probes:

- What do you search for?
- Do you have screening criteria?
- What makes a seller worth contacting further?
- Do you rely on regular sellers or search each time?

F2. In the transaction you described, what were the main steps from first contact to completion?

Possible probes:

- Did you confirm the service first or negotiate the price first?
- Which step took the most time?
- Did you have to repeatedly verify things?

F3. Which step was the most critical?

Possible probes:

- Why that step in particular?
- What would happen if that step failed?
- Who did that step mainly depend on?

F4. Which step is most likely to go wrong?

Possible probes:

- Have you experienced this yourself?
- What exactly happened?
- Who first noticed the problem?
- Could it still be fixed?

Module G. Trust and proof

Interviewer note: Ask how usability is proved in practice, not abstractly whether people trust each other.

G1. Before paying, what do you most want to verify?

Possible probes:

- Do you want to know that the entitlement really exists, that the other person genuinely has it, that it can still be used, or that the seller will cooperate to the end?

G2. How do you usually verify these things?

Possible probes:

- What kinds of evidence make you willing to pay?
- Have you ever been misled by proof that looked convincing at first?

Interviewer note: Possible forms include ratings, transaction history, screenshots, screen recordings, real-time operations, phone or WeChat contact, or willingness to cooperate on site.

G3. What kind of proof makes you feel safest, and why?

Possible probes:

- Has anything you used to trust become less convincing over time?

G4. What would make you immediately abandon a transaction?

Possible probes:

- Examples might include a seller who cannot explain the process clearly, an unusually low price, refusal to provide proof, vague claims, pressure to pay quickly, or promises without evidence.

Module H. Where risk actually occurs

Interviewer note: Avoid asking only in general terms whether they fear being cheated.

H1. What are the most common risks in these exchanges?

Possible probes:

- Which risk do you hear about most often?
- Which one matters most to you personally?

Interviewer note: Examples may include failure on site, failed verification, previously used or frozen entitlements, seller disappearance, account mismatch, lack of platform support, merchant refusal, or account penalties.

H2. From the buyer's point of view, what risk matters most?

Possible probes:

- Is it financial loss, failing on site, embarrassment, lack of recourse, or having no alternative at the last minute?

H3. From the seller's point of view, what risk matters most?

Possible probes:

- Account restriction
- Loss of member benefits
- Complaints
- Being blamed by the buyer
- Doing the work but not getting paid
- Leaving traces that may attract attention

H4. Do these risks differ by service type?

Possible probes:

- For example, food services may centre on codes and redemption; lounge access may centre on identity and accompaniment; hotels may centre on member rules; lifestyle services may centre on reservation timing.

H5. Have you ever had an on-site failure when trying to redeem or use the entitlement?

Possible probes:

- What was your first reaction?
- Did the seller continue helping?
- Did that experience change your later behaviour?
- Did you feel embarrassed, tense, or guilty?

Module I. Pricing and valuation

Interviewer note: Probe how value is judged, not only whether something is cheap.

I1. How do you usually decide what an entitlement is worth, either to buy or to sell?

Possible probes:

- Do you start from the official price or from Xianyu market prices?
- Do you assess likelihood of success before price?
- Are there some things for which 'cheap' is not enough to judge value?

I2. Why do some entitlements that look similar differ so much in price?

Possible probes:

- Is the biggest difference the source, the complexity of the rules, the likelihood of success, the seller's credibility, the amount of cooperation required, or actual scarcity?

I3. Would you pay more for an entitlement that feels more reliable?

Possible probes:

- How much extra are you willing to pay for stability?
- When would you choose the more expensive option?
- Have you ever chosen a cheap option and then had it fail?

Module J. Rules, grey areas, and legitimacy

Interviewer note: This module is useful for role perception and legitimacy.

J1. How do you personally see this kind of practice?

Possible probes:

- Does it feel like an ordinary transfer of something unused, or more like a grey-area practice?
- What makes it feel normal or questionable?
- Are there some types you see as more legitimate than others?

J2. How do you decide whether something can be sold or made available to someone else?

Possible probes:

- Do you think anything you paid for can be sold? Or do attached benefits feel different?
- Is it acceptable as long as there is no real-name verification, no clear platform ban, or no harm to others?
- How did you form this judgement?

J3. Is there any practice you know others engage in but you would not touch yourself?

Possible probes:

- Why not—because it feels unsafe, illegitimate, or too troublesome?
- Do you have a personal line you would not cross?

J4. What behaviour is least acceptable in this market?

Possible probes:

- For example: selling one entitlement to multiple people, false promises, disappearing at the last minute, hiding usage restrictions, or refusing to cooperate through to completion.

J5. If someone said this was just exploiting loopholes, how would you respond?

Possible probes:

- Would that description bother you?
- What do you think it gets wrong?
- Are there some practices that you yourself would also see as crossing a line?

J6. Who would you least want to know about this kind of transaction—the platform, the merchant, or someone else?

Possible probes:

- Why?
- How do these different actors create different kinds of risk?
- Does this affect how you operate or how you talk about the transaction?

Module K. Role understanding and label tension

Interviewer note: This module feeds directly into RQ2.

K1. How would you describe your own role in this market?

Possible probes:

- A normal consumer
- Someone clearing unused benefits
- Someone who helps others save money
- A side hustler
- A broker
- Someone skilled at navigating rules
- A small-scale trader

Interviewer note: Ask why the participant chooses that label and whether others would see them in the same way.

K2. If other people called you a scalper, reseller, or broker, would you accept that?

Possible probes:

- Which label do you reject most strongly?

- Why?
- What do you see as the difference between yourself and those labels?

K3. Why do some people doing similar things describe themselves as simply sharing or transferring, while others seem more like they are doing business?

Possible probes:

- Is the difference frequency, profit, scale, method, or something else?

K4. Has your own role changed over time?

Possible probes:

- Did you begin only as a buyer and later start selling or helping others?
- What pushed that change?

Module L. Learning, change, and archetype building

Interviewer note: Use this module to trace development and participant-observed categories.

L1. What is the biggest difference between when you first took part in these exchanges and now?

Possible probes:

- Did you become better at judging people, understanding rules, setting prices, or knowing what is worth doing?
- What would you no longer do in the way you did at the beginning?

L2. Was there any specific experience that changed how you now participate?

Possible probes:

- For example: being cheated, nearly failing on site, making money, meeting a very reliable or unreliable person, discovering a particularly effective or risky type of entitlement.

L3. Based on what you have observed in this market, what kinds of participants do you think are most clearly different from one another?

Possible probes:

- Why do you see these as distinct types?
- Where do the differences show most clearly?

Interviewer note: Let the participant propose their own categories before imposing yours.

Module M. Closing

Interviewer note: Always leave space for unanticipated perspectives.

M1. If you had to summarise the core feature of this kind of exchange in one sentence, what would you say?

Possible probes:

- What makes it different from an ordinary sale?

M2. Is there anything important that I have not asked about but that is necessary for understanding this phenomenon?

Appendix B: Table 1

Table 1. Participant overview.

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Primary transaction scenario	Role experience	Level of participation intensity
P01	32	Female	Fast-food breakfast proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P02	31	Female	Fast-food breakfast proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P03	34	Male	Food and beverage proxy ordering, restaurant voucher resale, and queue-holding service	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P04	28	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P05	34	Female	Fast-food proxy ordering and hotel breakfast access	Buyer only	Frequent
P06	21	Female	Food and beverage coupon transfer	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P07	24	Male	Scarce performance-ticket access	Buyer and seller	Frequent
P08	29	Male	Performance-ticket access and occasional fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P09	27	Female	Travel and hotel booking access	Buyer only	Long-term
P10	26	Male	Cinema tickets, leisure reservations, and food coupon access	Buyer only	Frequent
P11	33	Female	Restaurant bill discounts and urban transit access	Buyer only	Frequent
P12	29	Female	Restaurant vouchers and food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Frequent
P13	19	Male	Hotel booking access	Buyer only	Frequent
P14	30	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Primary transaction scenario	Role experience	Level of participation intensity
P15	26	Male	Fast-food proxy ordering	Buyer only	Occasional
P16	23	Male	Cinema-ticket proxy ordering and restaurant voucher resale	Buyer and seller	Occasional
P17	22	Female	Airport lounge access	Buyer only	Occasional

Appendix C: Table 2

Table 2. Typical service-access transaction sequence.

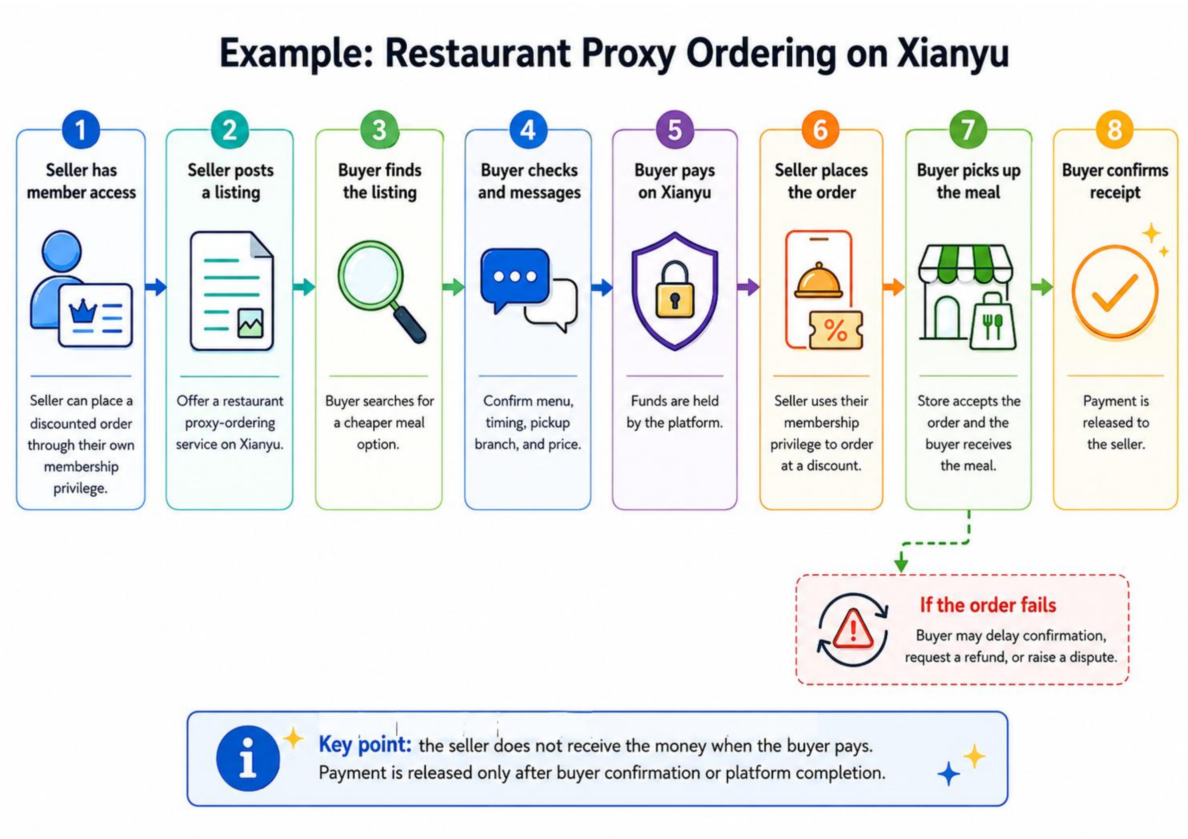

Table 2. Typical service-access transaction sequence.

Appendix D: Table 3

Table 3. Participation archetypes overview.

Participation configuration	Core value logic	Risk orientation	Role perception	Indicative accounts and anchor cases
Deal Hunter	Cheaper access to otherwise familiar services	Seller screening plus final service-side verification	Ordinary but savvy consumer position	Dominant accounts: P01, P02, P04, P08, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15. Boundary anchor: P05's low-risk food access
Gap Bridger	Mediated access through another actor's channel, resource, or information bridge	Source legitimacy plus institutional recognition	Beneficiary or informed risk-taker relying on another actor's structural capacity	Anchor cases: P17, P09, P13. Boundary movement: P05 and P10 when access depends more strongly on institutional recognition or another actor's channel
Perk Trader	Circulation and	Two-sided	Partial market	Anchor cases: P03, P06, P16.

Participation configuration	Core value logic	Risk orientation	Role perception	Indicative accounts and anchor cases
	monetisation of controllable or underused entitlements	vulnerability across buyer and seller positions	actor or user-trader position	Complex role-movement case: P07, where the participant moved from proxy-buying to buying and selling tickets, relying on fan-based trust, identity verification, and moral boundary work.

Appendix E: Table 4

Table 4. Cross-cutting engagement practices.

Practice	Deal Hunter	Gap Bridger	Perk Trader
Final institutional verification	Confirms that a cheaper route works in an ordinary service setting.	Tests whether another actor's channel is institutionally recognized.	Determines whether an entitlement can survive circulation as a deliverable or resellable asset.
Source stance	Source concern can be bracketed when the transaction is low-stakes and easy to verify.	Source legitimacy becomes more important because the seller's channel or qualification matters.	Source concern becomes two-sided because both entitlement origin and post- transfer behavior matter.
Time pressure	Activates occasional deal-seeking in concrete consumption moments.	Raises the cost of delayed non-realization, especially in travel or scheduled access.	Creates circulation value through expiry dates, promotional timing, scarcity, or buyer urgency.
Platform protection	Provides basic procedural safety through escrow, ratings, and delayed confirmation.	Helps but cannot fully protect against late institutional rejection.	Becomes ambivalent because either side may be exposed after code or screenshot delivery.