H&M is testing a blockchain-based clothing rental service

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The Swedish retail giant is continuing its commitment to making fashion more responsible by leveraging new technologies. In partnership with the circular fashion specialist Lablaco, H&M is trying out a rental service in one of its Berlin stores. This service is based entirely on blockchain, making it possible to trace the journey of each individual item.

What does blockchain -- the ultra-secure technology that allows data to be stored and transferred in a decentralized network -- have in common with sustainable fashion? At first glance, nothing. But the former could soon come to the aid of the latter, in order to ensure greater transparency for consumers. This is currently a focus of interest for the ready-to-wear brand H&M, which has partnered with Lablaco and its circular fashion platform SPIN, to test a new clothing rental service.

Until the end of the year, customers at H&M's Mitte Garten store in Berlin can rent -- or, more precisely, reserve and pay for -- one of the 12 pieces from the collection proposed for this trial in just one click. They can then keep the item for a period ranging from five days to three weeks, before returning it. The item is then checked, cleaned, and put back out for rental by other customers. So far, so unoriginal, you might think, since that's the way most of the clothing rental services work... Except that here, all the information relating to these successive rentals is stored on blockchain via SPIN by Lablaco.

Using blockchain to ensure transparency

In practice, the store's customers can scan the care tags of rented clothes with a smartphone to see the rental history, or the different journeys made by the items. The whole process offers total transparency about the clothes in the collection, with each item's history being recorded on blockchain. Customers will also be able to add information to the blockchain themselves by uploading, for example, memories and looks for each piece.

For the moment, the rental service is only being offered at this Berlin store, and until the end of the year. However, it could be extended to some of the brand's other stores. This is not H&M's first attempt at innovation in its drive for responsible fashion. In October 2020, the Swedish giant introduced Looop, billed as "the world's first in-store recycling system," nested in its Stockholm store. Looop offers customers the opportunity to transform their used
clothes into brand-new items, without water or dye, right in the store.