

## Anthropology of Consumption, Fashion and Identity in Emerging Class

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### Abstract

*Study on young people and the influence of fashion consumption in the formulation of their identity and culture; seeking to understand the interrelationships between consumption and identity. The focus is on fashion consumption (clothing and personal appearance) as it is a representative consumption of contemporary society; also for its intensity in containing the dynamics of supply and demand and, furthermore, its potential to encompass symbolic elements in its purchase, use and subsequent experience.*

*The present study has the utility of being able to reconfigure identity typologies in social spaces, for the study of contemporary young people, incorporating the contingency created by the contexts and roles played by the subjects. This provides an observable method of the public, since the superficiality in the society of images and stimuli, carries its own depth and complexity of analysis variables in itself.*

**Key-words:** Consumption, Anthropology, Fashion, Emerging Class, Ethnography.

**Codes JEL:** CODE 1, CODE 2, CODE 3.

### 1. Introduction

The study of the youth of the periphery of Lima has been abundant in terms of studies of a political and socioeconomic nature, seen from the perspective of the voting population and in the light of social problems. But this youth population is also approached as an anonymous mass, without understanding its impact on the cultural implications of consumption and fashion as generative elements of contemporary social reality, perceptions and symbolism (Bajoit, 2003).

Approach error given that the young people of the emerging middle class are agents of change in every society. They generate from new positions to transformations in the way of understanding the world, aesthetics and consumer orientations that redirect supply and demand. These ways of stocking up on material drive us to re-conceive the well-being ideals of our postmodernity. The rapid

penetration and influence of information technologies are causing changes in the way of socializing; it is precisely young people who adopt these media early and the forms of interaction that they bring with them.

The journalistic incursions of the season on the new trends in fashion and entertainment of the young people of the Lima periphery, support the vision of the other alien and exotic, for an audience that assumes classic and urban (Diaz-Albertini, 2000). They intensify an adult gaze, sometimes moralistic, when it is in charge of registering the social phenomena triggered by some cultural consumption such as music, dance and its connection with adolescent eroticism; as well as tattoos and gangs, youth media idols, drug use, graffiti, and neighborhoods (Esteinau, 1991). The positive end of this informative interest in the discourse of economic progress rises to a documentary attempt to find subcultures, movements or new lifestyles; where urban art decorates these chronicles in the form of theater, adventure sports, musicians who overcome social exclusion, among other stories with melodramatic overtones (Tomlinson, 2001).

The journalistic tone changes when he is in charge of composing a letter about the entrepreneurial effort in the emerging young population, highlighting humble origins and his path to success (Huber, 2002). Concept of achievement understood, unequivocally, as the ability to acquire material goods. In this case, each life dedicated to overcoming the barriers to survival of innumerable social and economic obstacles becomes spectacular, climbing a new sociodemographic scale. In this media mythology, the consumption of fashion by young people is the most visible and mediatic effect of social change (Jacinto Pazo, 2012).

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The socioeconomic surplus enjoyed by this population has generated new relationships with the city and with its own identity, being a public that has taken the spaces of its interpretation of global cultural models: “In this sense, migrants from the coast, more close to the urban situation, they have a greater capacity for integration in urban sectors comparable to the rural segments from which they come and have less need for aggregation in a group with a common reference of origin” (Golte, 1987).

This population is the most important electoral mass and its music, fashion and particular language are what highlight the universe of current meaning. Therefore, it is their perspectives on fashion consumption that would shape their new social identity, their forms of relationship that can overcome or hide the inclusion difficulties that their relatives had in the capital (Castells, 1998).

## 2.1. The "Monopoly of Taste"

The emergence of new economic and social actors, product of the generational transformation of the pioneers of popular overflow (Matos Mar, 1988), which makes it necessary to consider the social and cultural dimension of consumption. Economic and labor development have generated new social dynamics, moving the symbolic center of the market from the traditional areas of the middle class to new centers and areas such as the so-called Lima Norte (Arellano, 2004). And in the current scenario of shortening economic and social borders through education, this permeability of the centers of cultural influence can be one of the most difficult aspects to assimilate by the traditional sector, which from its former higher purchasing power he may have enjoyed his ability to model behaviors (Fritz Haug, 1989). Therefore, it is essential to understand the social role that consumption plays, since through the desirability and symbolism of the products, it recreates a language of social codes; having as the most obvious sign the ostentatious consumption of fashion (Bauman, 2010).

For this particular case, it would be worth further exploring the correlation between etiquette and ethical standards, which are popularized today through modeling academies; that accompany the emergence of an ascending middle class in the process of educating themselves not only academically, but also in the external forms typical of the classical wealthy population (Giddens, 2000).

For Bourdieu, tastes also serve as judgments on which a social classification operates, the acceptance or rejection of groups through their apparent signs. In this sense, the struggle for the dominance of fashion is not given only to achieve an aesthetic appearance (Lipovetsky, 1988), but a sufficient social acceptance of the subjects: "Tastes (that is, manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference"(Bourdieu, 1988).

In Lima, the middle class adds their traditional behavioral values to perceptions of racial difference, stratified academic castes, health care preferences, cultural tastes, and reserved entertainment. Middle class that socializes its members based on these differences, making essential expenses such as education, health or food represent an unavoidable opportunity to reaffirm a desirable social relationship. It exercises social difference through the acts of buying and using products that the traditional middle class sees today in dispute. This also undermines the foundations of their power reproduction mechanisms, which were based on a close network of personal relationships.

In this scenario of relativization of the power of taste, the segments considered idle according to Veblen (such as housewives or student children), enter productive activity with no greater purpose

than to ensure their subsistence: they would seek to ensure their capacity for social influence through spending on entertainment, fashion, aesthetics, home improvement and other consumption considered sumptuous (Yonnet, 2005). This is due, in the first place, to the economic blows received by the salaried and professional middle class, in the periods of economic hyperinflation of the late 1980s, and to the economic shock and layoffs derived from the liberal economic regime of the early 1990s. Overthrow of the traditional middle class that, however, did not stop conspicuous consumption in shopping malls and supermarkets.

This triggers a process of early labor incorporation of the traditional student middle class, which would be motivated by a certain need for social ostentation through work: "At all times, except in the lowest cultural stages, the normally constructed man is helped and sustained in his own respect for "decent appearances" and the exemption from "menial jobs" (Veblen, 1955). Therefore, the role that study plays in their lives seeks to displace them from the minor trades traditionally developed by their ancestors towards liberal professions that, beyond income, rewrite family history.

But they are also defenestrated in the massification of characters and popular themes through the media: multiplication of popular newspapers, rise of Andean-Amazonian urban music such as chicha and tecnocumbia, television programs about popular idols, station entertainers of migrant television. source. Visible massification of the media surrendering to the economic evidence of emerging spending capacity.

The symbolic and cultural character of fashion allows us to understand the importance of the social study of consumer phenomena, understanding its implication in a possible current struggle for the seizure of the bastille of control of taste, between the emerging and traditional sectors of the Lima middle class.

## **2.2. Consumption, Fashion and Identity**

The Anthropology of Consumption, in the context of emerging economies, allows building the cultural codes of the growing and new middle class of the country. This is relevant, since they are consumption models in the near future given their growing economic, social and cultural relevance; along with its notorious prominence in the media (Auge, 1998). Anthropology also contributes to finding deviations from the borders of "normality", focusing on the processes of change and cultural intersection, distancing itself from conformity with the average referent or the schematization of human behavior (Douglas & Isherwood, 1990). For this reason, cultural studies of consumption are

relevant to understand the dynamics of the market, allowing to recognize the constant social transformation of groups; Strategic aspect to operate in a context of accelerated changes in information, social and economic matters. Likewise, they would fulfill an inclusive role, by generating visibility of previously marginalized sectors by turning them into important consumer actors; but still today with a materialistic and exotic approach.

As before they were public squares, shopping centers are ideal spaces for the study of social dynamics and transformations in the current generation. For emerging young people, Shopping Centers are anchored in their local realities since they are witnesses of how they are transforming the daily beach into places of consumption, work and affective relationships; becoming Almost Places that create contexts of socialization that promote a subtle and daily struggle for recognition and inclusion, in a historical framework where citizenship seems to be acquired from becoming subjects of consumption. The ethnological analysis of consumption puts concrete objects in perspective, allowing us to interpret their symbolic role in current markets and advertising. As the individual and his groups enter the dynamics of the market, the symbolic of consumption becomes more necessary and explicit.

Commercial brands, beyond the real need for consumer objects, would act as mythologies that give meaning to the theater of social roles; creating a symbolic reference system that operates by creating empathies or distinctions between young people, but reinforcing the identities present. Cultural consumption of brands that are expressed in social rituals of consumption, which imprint the postmodern emotionality of the new Lima generations. Along these lines, clothing brands are pieces of a puzzle for the construction of role-playing games; a repertoire of what is recommended, desirable, or acceptable for the social groups they need to join. But these social meanings, provided by brands, are not interpreted in a linear, submissive or hypodermic way, by consumers; otherwise, they are re-decoded under particular belief systems according to economic and cultural contexts. In this particular case, emerging families with the ability to integrate into classic spaces when necessary, but also to create their own order in the modern neighborhoods they are building. And specifically in North Lima, with a large concentration of migrants from the north coast of the country, the cultural traits of extroversion and affability train them in socialization skills with diverse people and have more related themes to function in a coastal capital; different from those that could have Andean origins with more endogamous cultural traits.

As a reflection on the method, the ethnography of consumption requires the creation of a climate of trust, contingency and empathy that provokes conversation in a natural environment. It

allows to reveal unexpected angles of the subject, relativizing the importance of consumer objects in the context of the consumer's life. The ethnographer is exposed to discover and does not just ask. The battery of ethnographic techniques allows a deep, systematic and detailed recognition of homes, communities or public spaces; understand culture as an integrating system of social identity.

In the postmodern scene, ethnographic conversations before structured interviews allow us to capture the emotional situation of the subjects because it requires an understanding of the context in which it occurs, as well as the state of the person to intervene. Likewise, it is not a question of a subject in question subjected to questions from an interlocutor located in the condition of an expert, but of a dynamic that flows from two or more subjects under the same material and symbolic situation.

### **3. Methodology**

The design used was of an interpretive type of a phenomenological nature, which sought to investigate people's perceptions, the meaning of subjective experiences and collectively constructed perspectives (Baptista, et al., 2008). This research sought to understand the correlation between fashion consumption and identity construction; based on a case study of young university students from Lima Norte. The methodology used in this research was qualitative: in-depth interviews (20), semi-structured, which considers the different variables of consumption, identity and fashion; Focus Group (02), Divided between (06) men and (06) women who study in North Lima; Field observation in public places (03): shopping malls, discos, universities, including a field record of the selected target audiences. Additionally, self-observation was incorporated, divided between (10) men and (10) women students of higher education from Lima Norte.

The group of participants was made up of young people, between women and men, taking into account that they were between 18 and 24 years old, and that they resided for more than 5 years in the northern districts of Lima. All of them have the common characteristic of having attended or are currently pursuing higher university studies.

The present ethnographic study was carried out in the city of Lima, in the North Lima area, for 24 months, which is based on a progression and crossing of information gathering stages.

For the present study, we seek to analyze the role of consumption, specifically fashion, in defining the identity of young people and their cultural configurations; understand how these

elements would be related from a case study in young university students from the emerging area of Lima Norte.

The main questions of this research revolve around the relationship between identity models and fashion consumption of young students from Lima Norte:

- a. How are fashion consumption and identity models related to university students?
- b. How do social influences operate in your definition of identity and in your fashion consumption?
- c. What identity models are forged in young Lima university students from economically emerging areas?

The focus is on fashion consumption (clothing and personal appearance) as it is a representative consumption of contemporary society; also because of its intensity in containing the dynamics of supply and demand and, furthermore, its potential to encompass symbolic elements in their purchase, use and subsequent experience. The study focuses on the youth of North Lima, as it is the sector with the greatest social, economic and demographic dynamism in the capital of Peru; in a context of internationally recognized economic growth. The youth and university population is segmented, which would constitute a sign of generational change and paradigmatic social mobility in this context.

#### **4. Results**

From what has been analyzed, the following conclusions are established on the relationships between Identity and Fashion Consumption in young university students from Lima Norte; as well as its implications for the practice of Consumer Anthropology in emerging economies:

First: On the relationship between fashion consumption and identity models in young people; They choose their identities from the personified catalogs that represent the academic, professional, and friend groups they join. This personal and group redefinition, rather than being a mechanical cycle of fashion adoption, becomes an interactive experience of cultural codes.

In emerging postmodernity, identity becomes plastic and ductile. Just as preservation of origin is strategic, so is camouflage by combining personal appearance and conspicuous consumption of fashion objects. The body is not only covered with clothing and accessories, but also creates an exoskeleton of social roles and functions, which interact flexibly in different social theaters;

Therefore, it is difficult to assume a unique identity for the entire emerging young population that experiences continuous social and professional changes. A rhizomatic game of surfaces, skins and images is forged that offers a large amount of information and multiple possible logics. This postmodernity of individual and social roles, which is materialized through fashion consumption, would not imply a transformation of personal or individual identity; but a pragmatic and different management of socialization at work, the university and neighborhood theaters; that it would become tangible in a chameleonic way of dressing between the tailored suit (discreet) and the comfortable clothes (colorful) in the environments of his neighborhood. Clothing mutations that would seek to be notorious to mark the changes of scenario and role assumed; given that the work and living spaces are distant from each other and remain different (downtown shopping area in front of the dormitory city, 2 hours by public transport). These individuals would then use the distinction through fashion consumption to present themselves as socially and culturally different in each setting, accumulating status and class each day on each trip between work and the neighborhood.

For this reason, fashion consumption exceeds a stage of purchase out of necessity, for the satisfaction of social desires. It would function as a language that allows access to the group and differentiates itself, marking the limits between what is accepted and what is exclusive, for a young population in social, educational and work transformation. In emerging youth, it would not imply an annulment of personal, family or neighborhood identity in the sense of alienation, like a renouncement of their family antecedents or an annulment of their own identity that the critical current supposes of consumerism. In short, fashion consumption implies an assembly or adaptation to the means of survival, which covers its pillars of ancestral values, without eluding the moral control that mothers exercise over them; More than the reproduction of aspirational paradigms, it would become a means of communication, which enables the expression of their philosophy of life that is sustained by a transgenerational struggle for family improvement.

Second: On the forms of functioning of social influences in the definition of identity in their fashion consumption; mothers are the most relevant and notorious social influence, exercising their dominance through the financial logistics of fashion consumption. And it is that through the clothing of their educated children, they mobilize their own surname and family identity towards new educational and work groups, where they have to be constantly questioned about their origin and future. For this reason, Fashion Consumption allows to reveal the social dynamics of generational conflicts in relation to the body and morals, as well as the economic and social transformations within

the family. Changes that outline strategies for mastering the mechanisms of social and productive inclusion.

Likewise, in fashion consumption the tensions between modernity and conservatism are externalized; dividing the trend hunters from the following en masse. Fashion pioneers have the social credibility to assume a role that transgresses the prevailing paradigm in fashion, until it is later appropriated by the market for mass dissemination. These stages involve processes of choice, assembly, acculturation and socialization; of great interest for current social analysis. Fashion consumption is a thermometer of contemporary identity discourses (Diaz, 2000). In this sense, the search for "comfort in clothing" is a strategy to face the multiple social spheres in which these young people coexist (modern and in the process of urbanization), but rooted in their family and regional structures. Through fashion consumption, the dilemma between identity and personal image is also expressed, which forces the intervention of third parties in decisions about personal appearance, invoking the voice of social consensus (between duty and wanting to be). The limits of individual freedom and expression in public space are tested through personal appearance; before the omnipresent sanction of taste or social acceptance, which is still exercised by the traditional middle class. In short, a familiar Trojan horse for the conquest of work and academic spaces; managing and decoding the mechanisms of "taste" that the typical middle class still maintains, but that is filtered by this emerging generation.

Third: On the identity models that are forged in young Lima university students in economically emerging areas; They define themselves as a population with academic, economic and social solidity. With this, they evade the mechanisms of racial segregation that, historically, limited their relatives; generating a movement of neo-sincerity, which breaks the monopoly of appearances of taste governed by the Creole middle classes. This generates a discourse of effort as the only means to achieve personal and family goals; generating two different strategies to achieve personal success: the pragmatic way of rapid labor insertion versus the commitment to an artistic intellectualism (post-materialist, ensured by an elevation of the accumulated conditions of their migrant grandparents). They are projected into the future with an image of leadership that would border on a certain authoritarianism, reproducing power roles and transferring them to the interior of Lima Norte society, depending on the educational and commercial access scales; Segmentation mechanism typical of the consumerist and capitalist system of modern Perú.

Figure 1 - Opinions on Fashion Consumption

	<b>Nombre</b>	<b>CONSUMO DE MODA</b>	<b>CÓDIGO</b>
1	Melina	Casi siempre me pongo un polo que tenga algún detalle o alguna forma especial	Diferencia
2	Carolina O	No me gusta que otra persona tenga la misma ropa que yo lo detesto, y como mi papá vive en Japón nos manda ropa y como es muy difícil que alguien tenga la misma	Diferencia
3	Gladys	Recuerdo los paneles que pasan de Saga, Ripley. Para no quedarme dormida en el bus, recuerdo los colores vistosos y las promociones que publican	Paisajismo
4	Marilú	Iría a comprar a Plaza San Miguel, con amigas... Me tomaría 6 horas, con break. Iría a una tienda y luego otra	Lúdico
5	Karina	Me visto no muy llamativa, algo que me sienta cómoda yo y que me vea bien.	Comodidad
6	Claudia	súper casual... bueno cuando hay que vestirse al sastre se hace, sino súper casual	Situacional
7	Carolina	Voy de frente y compro, veo algo y compro. No veo revistas, no me informo.	Des-intermediada
8	Julia	Gastó en lo más necesario, por ejemplo gasté la vez pasada en ropa de vestir, ropa ejecutiva, por el trabajo	Laboral
9	Patricia	Yo te mezclo de todo, sport, casual, generalmente sport jeans	Ecléctico
10	Carla	Me informo de las últimas tendencias de la moda de las revistas, las de Saga y Ripley que me llegan.	Mediada
11	Richard Ch.	Cuando trabajas te da acceso a un grupo de personas diferente y a un tipo de ropa diferente.	Laboral
12	Walter	Antes usaba todo negro, era mi época metalera, es de cuero, la puedo usar para todo incluso para la universidad, una reunión o formal	Alteridad
13	Juan Luis	Comprar algunas cosas que te hace falta	Agenciamiento
14	Emilio	Compro ropa que me gusta visto normal no estoy pendiente a lo que me mira la gente.	Camuflaje
15	Óscar	Me puedo vestir urbano, otras veces más formal y otras veces en la forma de comportarme puedo ser así bien loco y otras veces comportarme en ciertos momentos.	Actitudinal
16	Antonio	Transmitir tu personalidad en el vestir sobretodo	Actitudinal
17	Daniel	Casual, porque como estoy yendo a la universidad tengo que estar cómodo	Comodidad
18	César	No usando prendas muy ajustadas o muy sueltas q no permitan el libre desenvolviendo físico; o llamando la atención de forma innecesaria y exagerada	Comodidad / Camuflaje
19	Miguel	No porque esté a la moda me voy a poner algo, me pongo algo con lo que me sienta bien	Comodidad
20	Roger	“A la champa”, lo que encuentre primero	Comodidad

Source: self made

The youth of North Lima are in a transition stage in terms of classes and social identities, economic access, drastic generational differentiation with their migrant parents and a constant struggle for acceptance in the academic, social and labor circuits. The challenge is even greater if we consider that they have no prior antecedents or references to effectively socialize in these new settings. Therefore, the role of the media is essential. In a context in which any common subject can become stellar thanks to social networks (in the media trend of discovering talents), fashion consumption communicates a tactical identity. This generation, rather than reproducing messages mechanically, has the ability to self-produce collective content through interactive channels, going from being recipients to means of communication of the message itself.

Precisely, the next stage to be conquered by this emerging population is the monopoly of taste against the traditional middle class; Symbolic struggle to define who will become the visible face of a country that is currently booming in the economy and in the media, in which cultural production and consumption are key elements.

Figure 2 - Autoethnography of Fashion



Source: Self made

## 5. Conclusion

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With the development of the Internet and the media, consumerist prophecies predicted the isolation of young people from an electronic device. This is in apparent contradiction to what was proposed by the sociologist Marshall McLuhan who, in the 1960s, proposed the beginning of a global village where the citizens of the world reconnect through the media.

But what we would be witnessing is that in the era of social networks, the generation of contemporary young people breaks the barriers of space and time, and we would face a process of re-tribalization of subjects and groups in virtual universes. But at the same time, this generation would be disconnecting from their immediate social environments. This would force us to modify the research approaches and understanding of the identities of people and groups in contemporary societies.

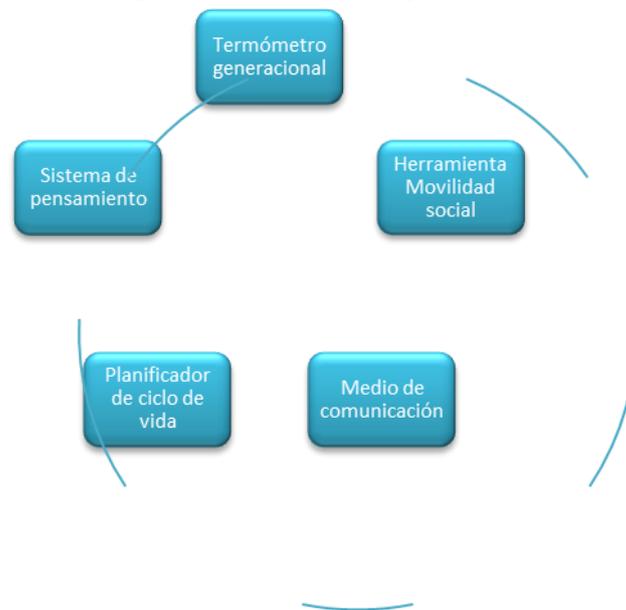
In the postmodern era, consumption would become the socializing activity of people, family activities and as a purpose of work activity. In this, anthropology plays a key role in urban life; spaces of re-tribalizations based on innumerable social interactions fostered by consumption (Badot et al, 2009). Global village that integrates the immensity of worlds scattered through telecommunications networks, in a scenario of group reintegration and intercommunity connection unprecedented in history.

Postmodernity has as a condition the universality of its connection and medium, and that it would feed on the difference to constantly nourish itself from its contents. In this sense, the

postmodern anthropologist would leave the paradigmatic work of defender of permanencias to that of chronicler of changes and exchanges (Bartra, 2007). Postmodernity that is, in its multiplicity of contents, a source of study subjects in a growing process of exploration of knowledge, groups and forms of socialization. Cosmopolitan cities such as Paris, New York or Shanghai are today a melting pot where different societies converge and where intense processes of acculturation are carried out between local, native or foreign communities; transfer the frontiers of otherness from the periphery to the city; own of its process of sociocultural magnetism. Borders in the plural given that beyond the dispute between the foreign and the local, today in disuse in large cities where migratory confluences, social mobility and commercial convergences (García-Canclini, 1998).

This, added to the corporate concentration of businesses, and with it of the commercial brands that are unifying the discourses of the offer with their promises of well-being, satisfaction, choice, real and perceived needs, among other promoted values. Challenge that urban anthropology welcomes marked by the dynamics that markets impose on social interactions; generating a magma of social realities in motion.

Figure 3 - Fashion Consumption Matrix



Source: Self made

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