



Ostentation and funk: An integrative model of extended and expanded self theories under the lenses of compensatory consumption



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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, economic growth have created in Brazil and other emerging countries a 'new middle class', a group that left the poverty line and entered the consumption markets. In this scenario, a musical movement with many traces of this 'new middle class' has emerged. Known as Funk Ostentação (ostentation funk), the movement is formed by young singers whose lyrics and promo videos refer to the consumption of designer's clothes, cars and aspirational products. We have studied Funk Ostentação by means of its promo videos, personal interviews and a group discussion with its fans (young adults) and found meaningful relations between consumption and identity building. We developed a framework that integrates the extended and expanded self theories under the lenses of compensatory consumption. This framework can be applied to studies with other groups that have similar characteristics of vulnerability with other niches of the 'new middle class' in emerging markets.

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1. Introduction

Emergent economies offer many market opportunities due to their recent economic growth, international trade increase, domestic market expansion, investment acceleration and empowerment of the civil society (Buckley & Hashai, 2014; Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Yamin, 2014a; Nadvi, 2014; Khanna & Palepu, 2013; Luo, 2007; Goldthorpe & McKnight, 2006; Luo & Peng, 1999). The growth of the middle class in these economies (Lopez-Calva & Ortiz-Juarez, 2014) drive researchers and practitioners to explore the preferences and configurations of this segment in the developing world (Brown, Cavusgil, & Lord, 2015; Cavusgil & Kardes, 2013).

The literature on middle class in developed countries is vast and describes individuals in such countries as driven by professionalism and education, with consumption patterns and attitudes that differentiate them from the lower classes (Davidoff & Hall, 2013; Mills, 2002; Lamont, 1992). These traditional middle class characteristics are present in emergent countries like Brazil, China and India (Luce, 2013; Tsang, 2014; Upadhyaya, 2011). However, these countries have faced economic growth and distributional

shifts that allowed more than a billion people to recently form a new middle class (Sinkovics, Yamin, Nadvi, & Zhang, 2014b). A massive movement of individuals that have emerged worldwide from poverty to the new middle class in a short period – between 2000 and 2010 – almost exclusively by acquiring economic capital characterises this new phenomenon (Ravallion, 2010). Such process fostered changes in their consumption preferences, leading to the increase of the demand for products with higher value (Sinkovics et al., 2014a).

Since the recent global crisis in the developed world imposed a loss of purchasing power and a saturation of the Western countries, the growing economies of developing and emerging markets have become more attractive for businesses (Ravallion, 2010). In emerging economies, however, firms are not necessarily able to emulate the marketing strategies and business models developed in rich countries (Sinkovics et al., 2014b). The fight for the middle – that is, competition not aiming at the top (Brandt & Thun, 2010), but at the upper–lower middle segment (Williamson et al., 2013) – requires capabilities to meaningfully connect with the target strata. In such a context, there is a need to understand the consumption behaviour of the new middle class (Sinkovics et al., 2014a).

Like other emerging countries, Brazil used to have a closed, protected economy. Its opening, along with improvements of living standards and increases of purchasing power, resulted in more acceptance of foreign brands. Almost 30 million people in the country joined the new middle class in the last decade, accelerating

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the purchase of discretionary goods (Cavusgil & Kardes, 2013). The increase of consumer credit is also partially responsible for this trend (Ponchio, Aranha, & Todd, 2008).

Nevertheless, sustainable growth in Brazil is vulnerable due to low investments on education (about 3% of household spending in 2010), shortage of qualified labour, weak social and economic development, income inequality and gender gaps (Cavusgil & Kardes, 2013; Agenor & Canuto, 2013). These characteristics have driven the country to a 'middle-income trap' or the stagnation of rapidly growing economies at middle income levels without reaching the standards of high income countries (Aiyar, Duval, Puy, Wu, & Zhang, 2013). Many peripheral areas – even in the city of São Paulo, Brazil's biggest municipality – lack basic sanitation, street paving and lighting. Although 68% of young people in the country have studied for more years than their parents did, the majority attended public elementary and secondary schools (G1, 2011), which are poorer in quality compared to private educational institutions. Most of this new middle class youth fail to pass the application for public universities, which are at the top of Brazilian education (Vellei, 2014). The living conditions of the youth in the suburbs of the Brazilian cities form an environment of social and economic vulnerability, even though these young adults have increased their participation in the consumer markets.

The idea of the vulnerability of the new middle class embraces economic insecurity and the risk of returning to poverty (Lopez-Calva & Ortiz-Juarez, 2014), which has social and psychological meanings and is a key element to the understanding of identity formation processes related to consumption. For comparison, a similar process involves the traditional middle class, which has partially built its identity with a basis on consumption and has become socially and psychologically vulnerable to the threat of financial hardship and to the risk of losing its lifestyle (Newman, 1988).

Previous research has addressed the conspicuous consumption of groups with low power or social status as compensation for feeling a lack of belonging (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2013). Studies reveal that compensatory consumption relates to the identity of these groups, as observed in the origins of the North American Hip Hop (Purinton, 2009) or with the adolescents in emerging economies like Hong Kong (Chan, 2008). It is common for research on consumption and identity (see McCracken, 2003; Gronmo, 1988; Wooten & Mourey, 2013; Chan & Prendergast, 2007) to make use of the theories of the extended self (Belk, 1988) and expanded self (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). These approaches differ in the sense that in the theory of the extended self, the individual projects his features onto something or someone, while in the theory of the expanded self, an individual absorbs aspects from others into himself (Connell & Schau, 2013). So far, studies have not integrated these two theoretical perspectives with compensatory consumption as a background, even though both have

been central to the understanding of aspirational and conspicuous consumption.

In this paper, we empirically examine how Funk Ostentação, an urban musical movement of the young people of the new Brazilian middle class, conveys aspects of its fans' identities by means of consumption. Based on the results, we also develop an integrative model of the theories of the extended self, the expanded self and compensatory consumption. Funk Ostentação praises the consumption patterns and dreams of a niche of the new middle class youth of São Paulo. With references to aspirational brands and products, this cultural movement is an emblematic field for catering to the processes of identity building for a group of consumers who recently joined the new middle class in the suburbs of the largest city in Brazil.

In the next section of this article, we address the literature on consumption and the self, particularly on conspicuous consumption and the theories of the extended and expanded selves, with compensatory and aspirational consumption as the background. We progress by describing our processes of data collection and analysis in Section 3. In Section 4, we contextualise Funk Ostentação as our research object. We present our results in Section 5 and discuss them in Section 6, as we offer the integrative framework. We offer our conclusions with their implications and opportunities for future investigation in Section 7.

2. Theory

In this session, we will discuss the relation of compensatory consumption to the building of the self, specifically addressing the extended self and expanded self theories. We start by differentiating the extended self (Belk, 1988) from the expanded self (Aron et al., 1991), as represented in Fig. 1. Then, we relate compensatory consumption to the self by defining and highlighting the properties of the extended self and expanded self theories that may serve this objective.

The theory of the extended self has the individual (represented in Fig. 1 by the circle) projecting features of himself onto something or someone (the projection of identity is represented by the arrows). In the theory of the expanded self, the individual absorbs aspects from others into himself. This absorption is represented by the intersection of the two circles (Connell & Schau, 2013).

2.1. Compensatory consumption and the self

Goffman (2002) employs dramatisation metaphorically to explain how people represent their identities in social relations. He attests that social groups have certain characteristics and that people adapt themselves to these characteristics through self representation to fit in groups. Apart from the manner of talking

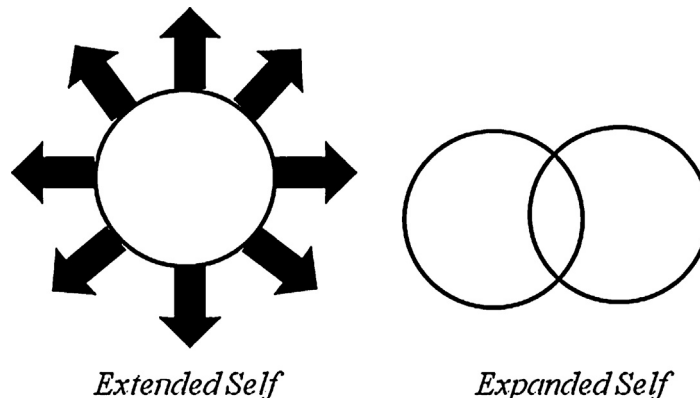


Fig. 1. Representation of the theories of extended self and expanded self. Adapted from Connell and Schau (2013), pp. 75–76.

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