

# **New Trends in the Apparel Industry: Exploring New Access-Based Consumption Models in the Mexican Market**

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*Building on the access-based consumption and sharing economy literature, this research explores new trends of apparel consumption among Mexican women. The methodology used is a qualitative approach based on 12 in-depth interviews. The field research took place in the three main cities of Mexico: Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara. The analysis found different ways to access apparel: a) lending; b) renting from a physical store; c) renting from an online website; d) shared purchase; e) online purchase; and f) purchase from a physical store. Therefore, participants mentioned more alternatives for access-based consumption than for traditional purchase models. The possession of things (ownership model), especially status possessions such as clothes and accessories, is far from disappearing. However, it is important to better understand the scope and impact of the access-based consumption model in developing countries.*

*Keywords: access-based consumption, apparel, trends, developing countries*

## **INTRODUCTION**

A new consumption trend is gaining strength in the market worldwide: people are opting for access rather than ownership. For many consumers, access-based consumption of products and services is becoming more important than its ownership. This market trend is observed in many industries and markets. It includes business models like Uber and Airbnb, which offer users access to transport or hospitality services and diminish the need of buying a car or owning a house.

Indeed, the sharing economy has changed many of the paradigms of consumption. The apparel industry has followed this trend and for many women renting a dress or an accessory for a specific occasion rather than buying a new one is just the new black. Although this market trend is more prominent in developed countries like USA and China (Lang *et al.*, 2019), developing countries, like Mexico, are now experiencing a boom in access-based consumption.

To our knowledge, few researchers have studied this new consumption phenomenon in an emerging market such as Mexico. This research attempts to fill this gap. In addition, access-based consumption is a new growing research field that deserves more attention as academics and managers are showing increased interest (Burgiel & Zralek, 2019).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The sharing economy is a complex ecosystem. Sharing transactions may differ in relation to whether a transfer of ownership occurs. The sharing economy could include transactions where no transfer of ownership happens, for example, in renting as an accessed-based consumption. The economic model of collaborative consumption is based on swapping, sharing, trading, or renting products and services, enabling access over ownership (Botsman, 2013).

### Access-Based Consumption

This type of consumption is part of a growing interest in collaborative consumption schemes starting with the seminal work of Botsman and Rogers (2010). Despite a vast literature, there are still gaps in our understanding of these kinds of consumption models. On one side, there is no general agreement about calling and defining them (Perren & Kozinets, 2018); on the other side, there is a narrow and conservative perspective in studying them (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019).

Based on this literature, we defined access-based consumption as: “*A scalable socioeconomic system that employs technology-enabled platforms to provide users with temporary access to tangible and intangible resources that may be crowdsourced*” (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019, p. 7). Access is defined as the opposite of possession, implying there is no transfer of ownership that takes place (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Chen, 2009; Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019). In the fashion industry, access-based consumption is reflected through rental platforms such as *Rent the Runway* and *Le Tote*. Apparel brands, like *Urban Outfitters*, are also creating their own renting platforms.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach using in-depth interviews was used. The qualitative case study methodology allows the study of complex phenomena within their local contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The process analyzed multiple cases to explore differences within and between cases (Yin, 2003).

For this study, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted in the three major cities of Mexico: Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara. Most interviews were done online via Zoom or Skype platforms, and in some specific cases face-to-face. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed for coding and analysis.

### Sample Profile

The sample is composed on women only. This choice of focusing only on women was supported by two main arguments: 1) women tend to have stronger interest in clothing/fashion to emphasize their attractiveness (Singh, 1993) and 2) the literature indicated gender differences in the motivations associated with possessions (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988); therefore, concentrating first on one gender for access-based consumption seems to be a pertinent path to follow. In future studies, we can extend this research to other demographic segments.

The age of participants varies between 22- and 56-years-old, all of whom have already rented a garment or accessory. The average age of the sample is 32-years-old. Among the interviewees, seven were single and five were married. All participants have a bachelor’s degree and seven of them have a master’s or MBA degree.

**TABLE 1**  
**PARTICIPANT'S PROFILE**

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
<i>Daniela</i>	38	Married	Master/MBA
<i>Sheila</i>	34	Married	Bachelor
<i>Ana</i>	32	Single	Bachelor
<i>Sara</i>	28	Single	Master/MBA
<i>Mariana</i>	31	Single	Master/MBA
<i>Sophia</i>	31	Single	Master/MBA
<i>Katia</i>	22	Single	Bachelor
<i>Fernanda</i>	22	Single	Bachelor
<i>Sara O.</i>	54	Married	Bachelor
<i>Diana</i>	35	Married	Master/MBA
<i>Mayela</i>	27	Single	Master/MBA
<i>Andrea</i>	35	Married	Master/MBA

## MAIN FINDINGS

In the past, Mexican women did not always have the option to rent; only men were able to rent their tuxedos for weddings and graduation ceremonies. It was clear that there was a gap in the market to rent night dresses for women. Yet, the common belief was that dresses for rent were not the best ones; that is, they were perceived as battered, old-fashioned, and ugly dresses. Likewise, the quality and cleanliness of rented apparel was questioned; however, this perception seems to be changing (at least before the pandemic).

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that renting night dresses has become trendy in Mexico. This new perception could be explained by the following factors: a) recommendation by family and friends; b) people being more open to share in social networks that they are renting clothes (not buying them!)—this generates a kind of social approval for renting; and c) there is an enhanced and growing market on offer: *“dresses for rent are beautiful and fashionable with modern designs, quality textures and even from well-known brands.”*

The research scope covered the analysis of drivers, barriers, and trends to access clothes and accessories, considering both the consumers' and entrepreneurs' (owners of apparel access-based companies) perspective. However, for this paper, the focus is on presenting the different types of patterns to access clothes (specifically night dresses) and accessories (e.g., jewelry, bags) that were identified in this exploratory study. Among the paths mentioned by participants to access clothes and accessories are: a) lending; b) renting from a physical store; c) renting from an online website; d) shared purchase; e) online purchase; and f) purchase from a physical store. Two of these six paths to access clothes/accessories are related with ownership while the other four paths are linked with access-based consumption. In other words, participants mentioned more alternatives for access consumption than for traditional purchases.

### Lending

Most participants mentioned that when they were younger and with fewer economic resources, they tended to lend clothes and accessories from family and friends. The reason for lending was that they did not want to repeat their clothes in social events. For the older and married participants, lending behavior decreases with age and it is limited to lending special party dresses or clothes to use during pregnancy.

### **Renting From a Physical Store**

All participants rent from physical stores but only night dresses. They rent from physical stores for practical reasons and also due to the social influence of their friends who are also renting; hence, they follow the trend. Another reason is the accessibility of many physical stores renting this type of product in their neighborhoods.

### **Renting From a Website**

The only type of product that participants rent online are night dresses. Experiences of renting online are mixed: some are positive and others negative. For example, two participants rented a night dress in the same online store, "*Conspiración Moda*." One of the participants told that she rented online just to explore; for this purpose, she rented a dress for an unimportant event, ordering a second dress as a backup just in case the other did not work. Two dresses arrived and both fit her so *she was happy!* The other participant mentioned that for her it did not work at all, although she also received two dresses, neither of them fit her so *she was disappointed!*

### **Shared Purchase**

In the Mexican context, this practice seems to be done only for casual clothes and luxury products. Some young participants are more prone to do a shared purchase with family and friends as it helps them extend their wardrobe. But for most participants this is not an attractive practice. However, some of them will be willing to do a shared purchase to have access to a luxury product, investing just a part of its full price, but they will only do that with trusted persons or family members. At the end, they prefer to save money to acquire the luxury product rather than sharing it with other parties.

### **Online Purchase**

All participants mentioned that they only buy casual clothes online. They found online purchase practical as they receive the merchandise at home. Participants tend to buy in an online store that they already know and purchase brands that they have already experienced and know their sizes. Only two participants have had bad experiences, especially related to size issues and money returns.

### **Purchase on Physical Stores**

Herein, participants buy casual clothes, night dresses, jewelry, accessories, bags, shoes, and luxury products, in their favorite stores. However, most participants expressed that regarding night dresses, they are increasingly renting rather than buying them.

## **CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS**

Many drivers could explain this new trend of access-based consumption, such as convenience and savings as mentioned by participants. In addition, consumers have access to more sophisticated and expensive garments at a lower cost and not originally available to them in traditional purchase models.

This research underlines different types of behaviors to access clothes (specifically night dresses) and accessories (e.g., jewelry, bags): a) lending; b) renting from a physical store; c) renting from an online website; d) shared purchase; e) online purchase; and f) purchase from a physical store. This diversity of access-based consumption models in a developing market like Mexico opens new avenues for deeper research. Although the possession of things, specially status possessions as clothes and accessories, is far from disappearing, it is worthy to assess this slow but persistent trend that is reshaping business and consumption markets.

This qualitative study focused on exploring new trends in the apparel access-based consumption models among women in Mexico. Though there was data saturation with 12 respondents, the sample size could be enlarged and explore potential differences among cities, consumer segments among women, and product categories. In order to better understand this phenomenon in developing countries, a deeper analysis of

consumers' access-based consumption patterns and emerging business models is needed in order to take advantage of this market trend.

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