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**THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE ERA OF MODERN  
CONSUMERISM**

**HOW HAS CONSUMERISM AFFECTED THE LIFESTYLE AND  
CONSUMPTION OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BANGKOK  
WITH THE CASE STUDY OF FASHION?**

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***Abstract***

*The purpose of this research was to find how young women in Bangkok spend their money, especially in terms of fashion consumption in the new context of globalized consumer society. The research was conducted through general observations and interviews with designers and fashion shop owners in order to find out their views of fashion and consumption among the young women in the city as well as through interviews with female university students in order to find out their consuming behavior of fashion commodities, lifestyle, views of fashion and what influenced their spree. In the highly globalized, urbanized and commercialized society today, youth became the target of consumerism due to their relatively high spending power and the ability to absorb new trends and culture. Fashion became a significant element of the consumer society and Bangkok was no exception. Young women became more fashion conscious today than in the past and spent a great amount of money on fashion apparels. Consumption has turned into consumerism in the globalized environment.*

**Keywords: consumerism, students, women, consumption, shopping, fashion, Bangkok**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Aims of Study**

Thailand has experienced rapid industrialization and economic development in the past four decades and the accelerated urbanization of the capital Bangkok has led to various social and cultural changes, particularly among the youths. The shift in consumption behavior, culture and lifestyle are great among the young urbanites, who tend to be more exposed to the media as well as to the impact of commercialization and urbanization than in other parts of the country and other demographic groups within the highly globalized and informative society. Among these structural developments and social and cultural transformation, consumerism is rather an evident phenomenon among the young urbanites.

The impact of consumerism has brought about several social and cultural issues in Bangkok. The most obvious issue is the way young people spend their money. Today, young Bangkokians spend a lot of money on leisure and entertainment and fashion, the latter particularly among the young women. Youth lifestyles now include shopping, going to cinemas, clubbing, chatting on mobile phones, surfing the Internet and hanging out with peers at shopping centers. Shopping and fashion play a significant role in young people's lifestyle and consumer culture in Bangkok. Young women today tend to be more fashion conscious than the past decade and spend more money on shopping fashion clothes and accessories. These women are exposed and much influenced by the media and other cultures. Their views of identity and modernity have been expressed in fashion and physical appearance is significant in social and cultural sense. The structural, social and cultural transformations in Thai society due to the process of globalization and commercialization have caused young women in Bangkok to become fashion consumerist.

Not only the social transformation and the media have created consumer society in Bangkok, commercialization encourages numerous establishments of shopping centers throughout the city, not to mention the open markets and stalls selling all kinds of consumer commodities, particularly fashion merchandise. The availability and accessibility of fashion goods at cheap price throughout the city, perhaps the country, has exacerbated consumerism among young female fashion consumers.

In discussing consumerism, it is often youth oriented as young people are more likely to absorb and easily get influenced by the new cultures, new trends, and new lifestyles than their parents or older generations. Also, they often tend to have higher disposable income and thus more purchasing power than the other groups. Fashion is often associated with women and their consumption of clothing and accessories in order to make themselves look modern, fashionable and up to date. Fashion, consumerism and women are thus closely interconnected.

The aim of the thesis is to find out how young women in Bangkok spend their money in the new context of globalized consumer society as well as to explore consumerism in relations to fashion and youth and how young people express themselves. Part of the research will also find out how the media and other apparatus of consumerism have got young women hooked up in consumerism and unending desires as well as to see why these women are willing to put so much effort in making themselves fashionable. In all, it is to understand young women and their lifestyle in the new consumer society.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

It is relevant to see how consumption has turned into consumerism in the globalized and informative society today. In this paper, modern consumerism will be explored and explained with the case study of Bangkok, Thailand and how it has particularly affected the lifestyle of the female university students in Bangkok based on their shopping behavior and fashion consumption. This study not only proves that consumerism is prominent among the young urbanites in Bangkok but also seeks to understand the lifestyle and consumption behavior of young women and to what extent the media and globalization influence them to consume. If youth is a nation's future then it is significant to understand their views of consumption and lifestyle in the new informative and globalized consumer society.

Bangkok is chosen for this study because it is interesting to see that although Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country that has never been colonized, yet it has rapidly developed and modernized to catch up with other industrializing economies in the region. The Thai society has experienced various changes and developments as a

result of globalization, particularly in the capital Bangkok, where modernization, urbanization and commercialization are highest and this makes the city a good case study about modern consumerism.

Female university students are used for this study because young women are more easily influenced by fashion and are very conscious about their appearance. Their lifestyle and social activities with peers are more consumerist related as shopping tend to be the top rated activity in leisure time.

### **1.3 Theoretical Frameworks**

The concepts used in this research are many but with the emphasis on consumerism based on the work of Stearns (2001) and his theories of how consumerism originated in the West, where it then spread across the Atlantic to the United States in the eighteenth century and became a global phenomenon later on. Consumption is the act of purchasing and consuming but consumerism is when people over-consume and spend more than necessary and this is what is happening to today's societies, where consumption, owning material things and luxurious lifestyle mean better living.

What facilitate the spread of consumerism are many. From colonization and trades in the past to new technologies and new developments of the media in the modern society. The media, marketing and advertising are the apparatus of consumerism and are accounted for influencing the societies to consume. Grogan (1999) believes that women magazines have a lot of influence on women and their views of themselves and thus consumption. On the other hand, Danziger (2004) believes that the availability of consumer products from various retails and stores create more consumer choices and thus intensifies consumerism. Youths are the target of consumerism due to their high disposable income and high purchasing power as well as their interests in novelties. Also, they are more easily influenced by the media. Young people are more interested in fashion and the way they dress and women are more likely to be more fashion conscious and spend a lot of money on shopping and buying new clothes. Hence, consumerism, young women and fashion are closely interconnected and this research reveals how young women in Bangkok spend their money and react to the media in terms of fashion consciousness and fashion consumption in the modern society by applying the concepts of consumerism in the

new globalized society and its impact on youth and consumption with the case study of fashion.

#### **1.4 Research Methods**

The methods to be used for the thesis include interviews and observations, where the interviews are semi-structured with a series of closed and open-ended questions. The interview was chosen as the primary means of collecting data for this research is because interviews can obtain information of the life experiences and opinions of the interviewee through personal interaction. This is a qualitative research aiming to explain and describe a certain phenomenon so it is better to interact with the respondents in order to obtain the maximum explanation and description of their life experiences, in this case, how they respond to fashion consumption in the new consumer society. The qualitative research interviews are theme oriented and aim at obtaining descriptions and explanations from different qualitative aspects of the interviewee's experiences of the world. This research works with words and not numbers, hence qualitative interviews are used as they seek to understand the world and the subjects' relation to it from their own perspectives.

#### **1.5 Data Collection**

The respondents include four shop-owners and designers in fashion areas such as Siam Centre, and fifteen female students from Assumption University randomly selected from the classes and also through the help of a university instructor in providing certain students for interviews outside the campus. Shop owners and designers are the supply side. They are the ones providing the consumer goods, in this case, fashion clothes and accessories, to the public and hence, it is useful to gain an insight on what they think about university students today in terms of their sense of fashion, lifestyle, dressing style and most important, how they spend their money on clothes. Assumption University female students are the focus groups because most of the students here are from middle class upward and most of them are from business families, which indicate that they are well to do in terms of finance. Also, the female students at the university have the reputation of being highly fashionable, international and modern. They tend to spend a lot of money on clothes and making themselves look good. In general, when people in Bangkok hear the name

Assumption University, they think of rich kids. And the interviews have verified such claims as well as their spending behavior in this consumer society.

The interviews take place at the stores or offices in the cases of fashion designers and shop owners and at Siam Center, one of Bangkok's famous shopping complexes in the city center, for the university students. Most of the interviews with students also take place at Assumption University, where more students can be located and this also gives an opportunity to take a good observation of the environment in general.

Although the interviews include fashion designers and boutique owners, the analysis of this research is primarily based on university students. As the sample was randomly selected from one single university, which is Assumption University where most of the students are from well-to-do families, the results may only apply to the students from this university and not to the students of other universities, who may come from less well-to-do families and receive lower monthly income than Assumption University students and therefore the limitation of this study as findings are applied to only one specific group of people. Also, the research is conducted in the urban city of Bangkok, hence the findings do not generalize the whole population of the country.

With all primary and empirical data collected through interviews and analysis of the media, secondary sources are also collected and these include books and articles from previous researchers on fashion, consumerism, youth and other social and economic aspects of Thailand.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

The rest of the paper is divided into four parts. The first part is based on previous research on consumerism. This section explores consumerism in the West, where the origin and development of consumerism will be looked at along with how globalization facilitates and intensifies modern consumerism. Youths in relations to fashion consumption will be explored along with the consumerism apparatus, which are the media and advertisements, and how they affect youth and further facilitate consumerism. Consumerism in Thailand will also be looked at with the focus on the historical perspective of Thai economy and fashion before modern consumerism hit the country.



The second part includes the analysis of the fieldwork data of the case study of female university students in Bangkok. Based on the interviews with shop owners, designers and female students from Assumption University, this part reveals young women in Bangkok today and how they spend their money and their views of lifestyle, consumption and the media in the new consumer society. The third section reveals the summary of the research findings of the case study.

The last part concludes the whole idea of this research. Consumerism exacerbates and intensifies female university students to become more fashion conscious and preoccupied with spending their money to catch up with the latest fashion trends as they are more exposed to the various media and advertisements, which bombard their senses everyday. This resembles a vicious circle, consumerism creates the never-ending desires to consumerists through the media and these desires encourage the ever new creations, variety and availability of the consumer products, in this case fashion apparels.

## **Chapter 2: Research on Consumerism**

In our modern society today, we have enjoyed many things that were once not available to us in the past, let's say, a century ago. These may be in terms of the Internet access, computers and other electronic devices that make our lives easier and more pleasant, fashionable clothing and accessories, and a vast selection of other consumer commodities that seems to expand everyday, where technology and developments have greatly contributed to make this possible.

As the world develops and modernizes, we gain more access to these commodities or we can say that these commodities were made more available to us. We begin to consume more and thus created a consumer society, where we just keep spending on unnecessary things perhaps for the sake of pleasure, conforming with the society, signifying modernity, displaying wealth through acquiring materials or consuming for other purposes. We have become more involved in consumerism than were once in the past, perhaps through globalization that intensifies and accelerates the phenomenon.

Among the consumer commodities, clothes are also considered the most evident form of consumerism. Clothes are external material and they signify the person, their taste, lifestyle and most important, who they are. It may take years of savings to buy a house or a holiday abroad but clothes can be bought cheaply and practically anywhere. Clothes today come in a huge variety of designs and styles according to the latest trends and fashion and being fashionable is equivalent to being modern and up-to-date. Thus, people, especially women, go about shopping new clothes to express themselves and be fashionable. Fashion is believed to be a Western phenomenon that is now a global one and this is also no exception in Thailand. Bangkok, its capital, is filled with numerous shopping centers, not to mention countless of open markets and stalls that scattered throughout the city. The young female urbanites adorn themselves with clothes and accessories of the latest fashion. Have these young urbanites become consumerist fashion victims? Such shopping spree among the young women in Bangkok as the result of consumerism is thus the focus of this study.

In understanding consumerism, it is wise to look at its origin. In this chapter, consumerism in the West will be explored along with its elements and factors that help to spread the phenomenon worldwide. This section will also look at the concepts of youth and fashion consumption in relations to consumerism in the new globalized and informative consumer society. Lastly, consumerism in Thailand will be explored from a historical perspective, where the Thai economy, young urbanites and their fashion consumption will be briefly discussed.

## **2.1 Consumerism in the West**

Consumerism is believed to be brought by the process of globalization or rather intensified by globalization. Many scholars and academic writings argue that consumerism and globalization have originated in the West and that the concepts of globalization, consumerism, capitalism, materialism and Westernization are often used interchangeably. In his book, *Thinking Asian* (2001) and his second volume, *Thinking Asian II* (2003), Paisarn Suriyawongpaisarn writes about how Westernization and globalization brought changes in cultures and lifestyles to other societies worldwide and the notion of capitalism that encourages people to consume extravagantly in various aspects because in the West, consumption and convenient

lifestyle means better living. Suriyawongpaisarn argues that Westernization and globalization brought new cultures to the world and one of them is consumerism where people are hooked up on convenience, pleasure and leisure in the consumption of material and non-material things and thus extravagant consumption. Such phenomenon is predominant among the young urbanites (Suriyawongpaisarn 2001, 2003).

### ***2.1.1 Consumerism: the beginning***

For a more historical perspective of consumerism, in his book, *Consumerism in World History*, Peter N. Stearns argues that consumerism has its root in Western Europe in the eighteenth century and was carried across the Atlantic to the United States, where it spread to the rest of the world and became a global phenomenon. Stearns suggests that consumerism is not a new phenomenon. There were signs of consumerist interests in the past but that full consumerism did not spring due to poverty and that people who were not desperately poor lived just above subsistence. Back then, most trades were conducted through the exchange of other goods or barter system so not much money was circulated and the opportunity to buy consumer goods were limited. Consumerism in the past is different from modern consumerism today because in the past, not only most of the people were living in poverty but that luxury was the upper class thing. Modern consumerism, on the other hand, with the introduction of new technological, product and distribution developments, allows commodities and luxuries to be shared widely beyond the upper classes and consumerism becomes individual interests (Stearns 2001).

Stearns further suggests that consumerism did not bloom three centuries ago even for those who could afford to do so was also due to religious and social values. Several major religions emphasize on spiritual and otherworldly goals and that worldly goods should be detracted in the hope for salvation, especially Buddhism, which spread widely in East and Southeast Asia (Stearns 2001: 3). It is true for the case of Thailand, where Buddhism is the prevailing religion, that Buddhists should live a humble and simple life and detract from the worldly matters and material possessions in the hope to gain enlightenment. But the fact that things change and the world keeps developing and modernizing that also lead Buddhism to undergo changes to fit in the modern world and this perhaps facilitates modern consumerism. Thus, to Stearns, what

prevented consumerism from happening in the past centuries were prevailing poverty, exclusive luxury, social and religious values, whereas modern consumerism today is likely to break the rules of the past.

### ***2.1.2 The rise of consumerism***

The elements that have hindered or slowed the process of consumerism did not last for long as it is evident that we are living in a world of consumerism today. And most of the changes were perhaps happening after the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the eighteenth century, where technological, product, production and distribution developments took off. These factors have facilitated in the creation of consumer culture.

The apparatus of consumerism also played a great role. Stearns suggests that consumerism was facilitated by the explosion of shops and shopkeepers' ways of luring customers, "...the consumer revolution was based on the realization by shopkeepers and consumer goods producers that wants and needs were infinitely stretchable, not confined to what was required to live up to conventional standards or to subsist", (Stearns 2001:16). Hence, shopkeepers began setting up enticing window displays. Also, new marketing methods and extension of consumer credits were introduced along with the proliferation of advertisements in newspapers and fashion magazines. These elements have encouraged people to buy what they do not need (ibid).

After the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the apparatus of consumerism changed. Apart from the shopkeepers and their enticing window displays, new technology that allowed wordy advertisements to be replaced by capturing visuals was introduced. The range of consumer goods expanded and most important is the introduction of department stores, which housed a variety of consumer products ranging from fashion clothes and accessories to kitchenware, "the department store was an active agent in extending consumerism and the aspirations and fantasies it could involve" (Stearns 2001:45).

Department stores promote novelty and create desires by displaying vast arrays of consumer goods. They herald fashion and it is at this point that high-end fashion

becomes mass and available to the public. Fashion clothes are adorned on mannequins to attract shoppers and are often changed according to the latest trends to have customers to shop on a regular basis.

In sum: consumerism escalated during and after the eighteenth century involved changes in methods of production and distribution, product expansion and new media technology. However, despite all the methods and means to lure consumers and trap them in the world of consumerism, it is not only these elements that create consumer society. Other factors are also considered such as the social and economic changes, where the latter created new jobs and earnings for people and the change in consumers' views and goals of life as well as their behaviors that have also transformed accordingly. People begin to see happiness and emotional fulfillment through consumption and consumerism become naturalized in humans and society and hence created a vicious circle. Thus the elements of consumerism may include new money, new goods, new commercial methods and new desires.

### ***2.1.3 Consumerism: a global phenomenon***

As mentioned in the earlier sections that consumerism has its origin in the West, it is through globalization that the phenomenon spread to other parts of the world, especially when West Europe and now also the United States are considered the most powerful regions with great influences.

In the past, Western contacts proliferated through growing trade and colonialism, today, the globe is borderless and the movement of people, goods and enterprises across the globe are done easily. It is through these movements and establishments of multinational companies and manufacturing sights throughout the globe that consumerism intensified. As Seavoy suggests,

Global corporations evolved to service the needs of the global market. Their purpose is to efficiently integrate global industrial production and related services. In the twenty-first century the most visible result of their activity will be raising the level of material welfare for the citizens of nations that increase their participation in the global commerce. Put another way, global and multinational corporations are the most efficient institutions for creating consumer cultures in nations where they are encouraged to invest (Seavoy 2003:251).

Global and multinational companies also create stable and full employment to the industrializing countries and this helps to create new wealth to sustain the consumer society. According to Seavoy (2003), most global corporations evolved after 1960 and increased drastically about two decades later, where related services of banking, communication, information, and insurance services also underwent globalization (P.255). In the era of capitalism, many countries, especially in East and Southeast Asia, are forced to open their markets in the hope to develop economically and catch up with global pace. Such economic liberalization and commercialization encourage consumerism as consumption keeps the economy moving. The global extensions of consumerism are thus sometimes referred to Westernization.

Also, a number of societies made big jumps toward fuller consumerism in the final decades of the twentieth century and Thailand was one of them. Stearns argues that a larger, consumer-oriented middle class developed in many societies around the world along with the growth of cities and considerable industry. As cities became urbanized, the new urban spaces created comfortable setting for consumption-minded young people. The rise of international framework also further exacerbated modern consumerism as more corporations learned how to market products and services internationally and new technologies help to speed the acquaintance of consumer patterns around the world and people began to integrate consumption into their lifestyle (Stearns 2001:128-132).

#### ***2.1.4 Fashion and youth in the new consumer society***

Among other types of consumptions, fashion clearly indicates and expresses a person's freedom and individuality. In today's globalized and highly informative consumer society, fashion plays a significant role in creating an identity and signifying modernity. The image that most people associate with fashion would be the runway with women wearing clothes of the latest fads. Fashion is transient. It comes and goes quick and such rapid cycles lead people to spend a lot of money in buying new clothes to catch up with the latest trends. This unnecessary consumption then turned people into consumerists.

In the past, fashion was exclusively for the upper class and those who could afford to purchase but as new technologies developed in our modern society, fashion clothing became mass and available to the public. As Schudson (1990) suggests,

The availability of store-bought, ready-made clothing helped extend and democratize fashion. While clothing or ornament is used universally to mark sex, age, and status, “fashion” is primarily a Western and modern phenomenon, at least on a mass scale. Fashion differs from dress in that it is not a traditional expression of social place but a rapidly changing statement of social aspiration. /.../. The early emergence of fashion was limited by the number of people able and willing to be fashionable and by the supply of fashionable things. In the nineteenth century, more people could participate in fashion as the development of machine-manufactured clothing made up-to-date goods more widely available (P.50).

Consumerism is often associated with youth and young adulthood due to their interests in novelty and their high disposable income. Also young people, particularly women, are more interested in clothes and new fashion than the older generations. Today people are more conscious about their looks. People begin to recognize the significance of dressing right for every occasion and presenting a good self-image when out in society and at work. Such importance of physical appearance created the explosion of markets for clothes, jewelry and fashion accessories. Clothing is no longer thought to be a basic necessity as most clothing purchases are driven by fashion and not need. According to Danziger (2004), for many people, clothes and fashion are luxuries that make their lives more pleasurable, more fulfilling, more exciting, more rewarding and more fun. Also, women are more active in buying clothes and fashion accessories and the incidence rises with income and education, with the most affluent purchasing more.

### ***2.1.5 The Media and its role in facilitating consumerism among youth***

As the world advanced into the twenty-first century, many societies underwent social, economic, political and cultural transformations. As new technologies developed, the media also experienced alterations. In today’s highly informative and globalized society, the media plays a significant role not only in providing news and information worldwide, but also facilitating consumerism. The media is considered as an apparatus of consumerism and it ranges from advertisements, magazines, newspapers,

TV shows to the Internet. More often, the media provides information about fashion and trends as well as how to dress right and thus encourages consumer spending.

Sarah Grogan (1999) argues that women's magazines have powerful effects on their readers and that they tend to provide definitions of what it means to be a woman. In her view, these magazines may shape a woman's view of herself and the society's view of her and hence teaches her the socially acceptable ways to behave (P.95-96). Magazines are read by a large proportion of young women and the contents mostly involved women clad in trendy and fashionable clothes, fashion and beauty how-tos, and often the price of each item displayed. Here, the readers are informed of the latest trends in fashion and how to look modern and fashionable and thus be inspired to behave, purchase and dress accordingly. Twitchell (1999) also further argues that photographs in fashion magazines are significant in creating the branding and spreading of fashion. Fashion magazines are similar to the store window where they allow people to see themselves reflected in the world of fashion (P.206). Fashion magazines thus create desires for people to look similar to what they see in the magazines and consume more clothes than necessary.

Advertising plays a significant role in encouraging consumption in the new consumer society. According to Schudson (1990), "advertising is a relationship between a producer (or distributor) who advertises, an agency that creates the ad, a medium that carries the ad, and an audience of consumers to whom the ad is directed" (P.60). Advertisings aim to provide product information to the public and thus encourage consumption. Advertisements appear in magazines, newspapers, Internet, billboards, and various other places and are often targeted on young consumers.

Retailers and department stores also advertise and engage in promotional techniques. According to Diamond and Diamond (1996), retailer advertisements and promotions are concentrated on female customers who, according to many studies, accounted for approximately 75 percent of retail purchases, and with an even larger percentage for fashion merchandise. Other promotion techniques include sales and discounts, fashion shows, and window displays (P.46-48). These techniques encourage consumer spending.



TV shows and programs also promote consumption. Many of the entertainment programs today are directed toward youth. American movies and TV shows, in particular, led the way in international consumerism. Stearns (2001) argues that American movies and shows displayed to the whole world the American consumer lifestyle, prompting often an eager response (P.133).

### ***2.1.6 Other factors that facilitate consumption***

Apart from the media, marketing and advertising techniques that encourage consumption, the process of industrialization made new earnings available to a larger group of people so they have the ability to consume more. Commercialization also allows more new goods to be made available cheaply to the public promoted by commercial methods. Hence, consumerism intensifies. Also, in the new consumer society, people begin to measure achievement and create identity through consumption. Consumers buy things according to emotional needs rather than physical ones. Consumption becomes personal indulgence.

The availability and accessibility of consumer products also facilitate consumer spending. According to Danziger (2004), consumers' choices exploded as they can choose from thousands of perfectly acceptable alternatives sold at any price from hundreds of different retailers accessible directly from home as well. Apart from the spread of discount stores, department stores and other means of purchasing such as mail orders, Internet, TV shopping, etc., other open markets, minimalls, strip centers, and freestanding stores are also made available and accessible on almost every corner. Options are everywhere and continue to grow and expand.

## **2.2 Consumerism in Thailand**

In understanding how modern consumerism performed in the Thai society, particularly in Bangkok, it is useful to look at Thailand's economic development from past to present as well as some political and social transformations in the country. This section also discusses fashion and its rise in the Thai society.

### ***2.2.1 The Thai economy***

Throughout the centuries of Thai civilization, the country is an agrarian society employing primarily wet rice agriculture. The country was rich in natural resources

and the natural landscapes of trees and farms were predominant even in the capital Bangkok until the post World War II era, where Thailand's contemporary economic development was set and Bangkok was rapidly urbanized along with the introduction of new transportation networks (Slagter and Kerbo 2000:33-35).

The Thai government also played a significant role in the country's economic development. Instead of following an authoritarian model like other Asian developing countries, Thailand embraced the ideal of capitalism and encouraged foreign direct investments in the hope to bring new money, development and technology to the country. As Slagter and Kerbo (2000) suggest that "Thailand's state has been less involved with economic planning compared to other Asian nations. But the Thai government over the years has passed many laws ensuring that outside investments are more likely to help rather than harm Thailand's interests" (P.41-42)

The country's industrialization and economic development fundamentally changed the character of the Thai society and economy as more jobs were created, more disposable incomes were distributed to a wider population and consumer commodities were made more available to the public.

For the past four decades, Thailand's economy has been developing and growing rapidly, making the country one of the East Asian miracles or the second-tier Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs). Such economic growth has also brought about other changes in the Thai society may it be in terms of culture, lifestyle, consumption behavior, the rise of the middle class and so forth.

Like any other developing countries, modernization tends to center around the urban cities or the capital. Despite the fact that there is a great disparity between the rich and poor, economic growth in Thailand has brought a better livelihood for the people in general, particularly the metropolitan Bangkok and its surrounding urban provinces. Such growth leads to higher purchasing power and a change in consumption behavior in the urban areas. With new money flowing into the economy and a vast range of new consumer commodities available, people in Bangkok begin to consume more than they need and fashion is among the top-rated consumed products in the Thai society.

### ***2.2.2 Fashion and Thai society***

In terms of clothing, Chaisingkananont (1999) suggests that the consumption of clothes was traditionally an exclusivity of the upper class and clothes were treated as symbolic property to represent the high social standing and wealth and any attempt to imitate the prestigious clothing was considered as an act of rebellion according to the dress codes imposed by the kings. This effectively blocked the lower classes to imitate the upper classes. However, their absolute dominance began to decline around 1855, when Siam, present-day Thailand, was forced to open the market for Western goods, where low price clothes from Bombay and England were imported and Western clothes, thus became the symbol of civilized culture. The flow of imported clothes and the decline of fashion exclusivity were further facilitated by the termination of the absolute monarchy and the establishment of military government in 1932, where the new government tried to create a civilized nation through several cultural and economic reforms along with encouraging a new lifestyle of mass consumption due to the fear of communism (P.1-4).

Under the new government, Thailand has experienced considerable cultural, social, political, and economic transformations. Politically, the ideology of liberty and equality was promoted, culturally and socially, the new lifestyle was encouraged and the demarcation of classes became blurred. Clothing became a social language and an expression of individual choice and freedom and fashion began to play a greater role in the Thai society in the 1960s where fashion shows and fashion magazines became increasingly widespread (ibid).

Consumerism began to intensify in the Thai society in the 1980s, particularly in urban settings, due to the country's economic development during that period as mentioned in the previous section. Fashion became mass and enjoyed by a greater public and clothing became an important element of the society. In his article, Chaisingkananont also suggests that

...the expansion of industrial capitalist economy, the growth of democracy, and the changes in political power created the liberal circumstance for fashion. The rise of mass production and the growth in ready-to-wear clothes displayed in department stores and other retail outlets and mail

order made it possible to buy imitations of high fashion at a low price. Styles of fashion became much more diversified through the development of marketing and advertising (Chaisingkananont 1999:7).

The economic expansion did not only promote the consumption of fashion but also gave rise to the growth of middle class and increased disposable income to various strata of society. Not only the new money and new consumer groups developed during the economic growth era, the new development of advanced technology in textile manufacturing and systems of mass production and distribution have further facilitated consumption. This was also accompanied by the rise of fashion and women magazines, the advanced advertising and marketing techniques, and an increase in fashion stores.

In sum, economic expansion, technological developments and forces of globalization have exacerbated modern consumerism and created a consumer society in Thailand. Although young people tend to be more easily influenced by the media and new trends and cultures, it can be said that the experiences of the past generations and the social, political, cultural and economic developments in the past partly laid the foundations of consumption and lifestyle for the younger generations of the new consumer society today.

### **Chapter 3: The Case Study of Young Female University Students in Bangkok**

This section reveals the case study of fifteen female students from Assumption University and their fashion consumption and lifestyles. The chapter also discusses about the importance of low price fashion goods and the increase in consumer choices that intensifies consumerism among young women and other elements such as social acceptance, the media, celebrities, peer groups, and consumption for satisfaction that play significant roles in facilitating fashion consumption in the new consumer society.

#### **3.1 Young Consumers in the New Consumer Society**

The interview results indicate that the students are consumerists and are blessed with financial resources. Most of the students come from well-to-do families where their parents run their own business and the fact that their parents can afford to pay the high

tuition fees for the university and provide their children with relatively high monthly allowance, this signifies that the respondents have rather high disposable income and strong purchasing power. Also, most respondents receive income solely from parents and many can still ask for extra allowance if they need to shop a few more items such as handbags and watches and clothes to attend a special function. As Stearns (2001) constantly mentioned throughout his book that one of the factors that facilitate and encourage consumerism is money and young urbanites tend to be gifted with income either through work for career people or through parents in the case of Thai university students. The amount of disposable incomes of these respondents indicate that they can spend freely and will remain economically powerful with relatively high purchasing power as their families still support them financially.

In terms of consumption, shopping is one of the essential activities for a lot of women and Assumption University students are no exception. Almost all respondents admit that they spend most of their leisure time shopping, cruising around the malls and other commercial areas and hanging out with friends. This clearly indicates the shift in youth lifestyle. If most of the young women were to stay home and study and help their parents with household chores some thirty years ago, the trend is definitely not so in the modern consumer society today. Most of the respondents reveal that they spend approximately half to slightly over half of their monthly income on shopping and buying new clothes and accessories. The amount spent on shopping indicates that these young women are shopaholic and overspend their money on buying fashion merchandise. Almost all of the respondents reveal that they prefer to buy new clothes and do not like to wear the same clothes. Many of them own up to 30 pairs of shoes, several handbags, numerous other accessories and a closet full of clothes, which is rather surprising for a student to own so many fashion items even though they may buy most of them at very low price. However, the fact that many can still request for extra cash or can earn a little by themselves helps to encourage and facilitate consumption.

### **3.2 Access and Availability**

Fashion is everywhere and trends are global and to be modern and fashionable, women spend a great fortune in making themselves look fabulous in their dress and the way they look. Although fashion cycle is transient and it costs to be pretty and

trendy, Thai women do not have to worry much about the price because fashion clothes in Thailand are made so cheap that everyone can afford to look beautiful and fashionable. Thailand boasts for its huge textile manufacturing industry and the country is able to produce garments on a mass basis and the ability to have fashion clothes and apparels on mass production makes them so cheap that everybody from every social stratus can afford. As Stearns (2001) and Schudson (1990) have argued that fashion clothes were once an exclusivity for the upper class and the wealthy but as new technologies developed, fashion became more mass as the machine-manufactured clothing made up-to-date goods more widely available.

Bangkok is filled with shopping centers, fashion outlets, open markets and numerous other freestanding stalls and booths offering fashion merchandise along the streets, footpaths, footbridges, bus stops and various other places. Most of the fashion outlets and department stores tend to cluster around the city center and these include the famous Siam Square, which is the epicenter of youth and fashion and Pratunam, a wholesale and retail fashion area, being the most frequently visited by the respondents. With fashion merchandise varying in different styles, designs and prices, ranging from non-brand to branded, available at various shops and outlets, this facilitate and encourage consumption among people, particularly the young urbanites. And since anyone can afford to buy fashion products whenever and wherever they want, it is rather common for young women in Bangkok to be well-dressed and consumerist. Danziger (2004) argues that consumers' choices increased as they can choose numerous products sold at any price from various retailers accessible through various means. The availability of open markets, minimalls and freestanding stores accessible on almost every corner of the city encourage consumption and facilitate consumerism and Bangkok is encouraging consumption through its availability and accessibility of fashion merchandise through its numerous malls and outlets.

Why there are so many fashion outlets and department stores in Bangkok is most likely based on economic purpose. Smith Intrapitak, Dapper's Chief Designer, believes that the country is attempting to create Bangkok as a shopping paradise in Asia, competing with its neighboring countries, in the hope to bring new money into the economy from visiting tourists. The recent establishments of the exclusive and luxurious Siam Paragon and Central World have created more opportunities for

shoppers to experience luxury shopping with more fashion brands both domestic and foreign. More money coming in from tourists may be doubtful but more fashion outlets and department stores may also lead young urbanites to spend more money on shopping. Smith may be right on the fact that the Thai government aims to promote tourism and shopping in Bangkok but the numerous open markets and free standing stalls selling fashion products are mostly aimed at fulfilling the desires of the locals.

### **3.3 Dress to Impress**

Fashion clothes are today's necessity among young people and choosing to wear suitable clothes at the right time helps to increase a person's credibility. In the Thai society, it is necessary to buy and wear fashion clothes due to proper physical appearance, image, social aspect and modernity and however unnecessary fashion consumption may be, the students still find pleasure in consuming and buying for the purpose of good physical appearance, being modern and fashionable and great satisfaction in owning new clothes and other fashion products. The students agree that they overspend their money on fashion products but find it rather difficult not to be tempted to consume as shopping and consumption have become naturalized in their lifestyle.

Danziger (2004) argues that for many people, clothes and fashion are luxuries that make their lives more pleasurable, more fulfilling, more exciting, more rewarding and more fun and that women are active shoppers. It is true that the students are active shoppers and find pleasure and excitement in clothes and fashion but most of them do not consider fashion as luxuries but necessity due to proper physical appearance and social pressure to look modern and fashionable. Physical appearance plays an important role in the Thai society. People who dress well tend to receive better treatments than do people who dress less well in the new social context. Hence, social pressure of needing to look immaculate in public can also play a great role in encouraging consumption and thus consumerism among young urban women. However, can fashion clothes revealing a lot of skin that are popular among the same groups of young women be called proper social image in the Thai society?

From the results of the interviews, it can be said that these respondents are fashion conscious and consumerist. The reasons behind the spree are hard to define but the

phenomenon can be accounted for the social transformation and the new consumer culture in the new globalized and informative society where the media plays an important role in facilitating consumption. Also as mentioned above that fashion merchandise can be found practically anywhere in the city and this also prompts consumption among young people who tend to spend most of their leisure time cruising around shopping centers and hanging out with friends. Clothes today are made so cheap that every woman from every class are able to clad themselves in latest fashionable clothes and look as good and modern as everyone else. Generations also play an important role as younger women tend to be more fashion conscious and consume more than the older generations. What also encourage these young women to consume and beautify themselves with new clothes are the satisfaction of looking great and the pleasure of consumption and owning new clothes. Apart from the socio-economic factors that encourage consumption, perhaps these young women's shopping sprees can be the result of biological factor as women tend to be more concerned about their looks and how they dress and also women are great shoppers. For these reasons, it is rather natural for the young women to be consuming and looking so well-dressed.

### **3.4 The Media in Thai Consumer Society**

The media also plays a significant role in turning consumption to consumerism. All respondents are familiar with fashion and women magazines. From the interviews, results show that respondents prefer to read international magazines than Thai ones. Grogan (1999) argues that women's magazines have powerful effects on their readers as they tend to provide definitions of what it means to be a woman and teaches her the socially acceptable ways to behave (P.95-96). When browsing the magazines, all respondents agree that the first things they look at are the fashion sections and how-tos. Most respondents agree that the contents and fashion advertisements in magazines have more influence on their fashion consumption and create the desires to shop and dress up than advertisements in other media types such as TVs, billboards, etc. This is because as Twitchell (1999: 206) suggests that the photographs in fashion magazines create fashion consciousness and the looks that people wish to have and are thus significant in creating desires for consumption. Fashion magazines tend to portray the latest trends as well as demonstrate how to wear certain styles of clothes to create certain looks and often provide the brands, prices and where to locate the clothes and



accessories. This creates desires and encourages readers to buy the looks although not the exact merchandise on displays.

Many respondents admit that apart from the fashion magazines; store displays, people and the environment can also be the informants of trends and fashion and thus create the desires for consumption. Celebrities also have some influence on the respondents' fashion consumption. Many students have agreed that they are sometimes inspired by the female characters in Thai movies and soaps but do not want to wear the exact same outfits due to lack of confidence in their body shape. As Stearns (2001:133) argues that American movies and shows displayed to the whole world the American consumer lifestyle, it may be modern and challenging for young people to have the Western lifestyle, that is to consume, but it is definitely more practical for these young students to follow the Thai fashion from the TV shows.

As Schudson (1990), Stearns (2001) and Danziger (2004) argue that the Internet can have an influence on consumption as it is a new way to purchase with convenience from home. However, the interview results reveal that the Internet is not a popular medium for the young respondents as they do not prefer to browse fashion from the Internet and never bought clothes online. They prefer to browse the clothes at the shops and try for themselves before the actual purchase. This is rather unusual as the Internet is supposed to be a new way of purchasing consumer products with the utmost convenience in the twenty-first century consumer society, yet the young women are not big fans of Internet shopping but prefer to shop in the traditional way.

## **Chapter 4: Empirical Results of the Case Study**

The following results indicate the consumerist lifestyle of the young women in Bangkok. This chapter reveals the summary of the empirical results of the case study.

### **4.1 Income and Expenses**

The interview results reveal some similarities. The respondents are between 20-24 years of age and all are in their senior year. The students receive a monthly income of an average of 10,000 baht, which is approximately equal to the average salary of a working person in Bangkok. Most of the students come from well-to-do families

where their parents run their own business and hence have relatively strong purchasing power as their parents support them financially. Also, most respondents receive income solely from parents, where only five respondents also earn extra income through part time jobs or running their own small business. Many students can also ask their parents for extra allowance in case they overspend on shopping or for other miscellaneous expenses.

In terms of consumption, almost all respondents admit that they spend most of their leisure time shopping, cruising around the malls and other commercial areas and hanging out with friends. Most of the respondents go shopping at least once a week depending on their free time and many would spend about 1,000-2,000 baht each time. Five students reveal that they shop about twice a month and spend about 5,000 baht each time alone on buying clothes and accessories. Among these five, two students receive an income of 20,000 baht each month. Thus, these students would spend money on buying clothes and accessories from 4,000 baht to 10,000 baht each month. The amount spent on shopping by the respondents is quite large compared to their monthly income but as many can still request for extra cash or can earn a little by themselves further facilitates their consumption.

The results show that students are fond of buying and perhaps collecting fashion clothes and accessories. Six respondents reveal that they own roughly over 30 pairs of shoes and one student admits she collects about 100 handbags and has never used many of them. Also, almost all of the respondents state that they don't like to wear the same tops for too many times. They get bored of their clothes easily and prefer to buy new clothes, especially tops. Tik, 21, told the author that she has about 30-40 pairs of shoes because she likes to wear different shoes to class as the university uniform provides no option for fashion except for jewelries and accessories. However, since Tik often buys new shoes, she prefer to buy cheap fashion shoes bearing no particular brand. The respondent also has a room to specially keep her clothes and other accessories and the reason for owning more than necessary is because she does not like to wear the same clothes and gets bored of them easily, hence, the purchase of new clothes.

The results indeed indicate that the students are shopaholic and consume more than necessary, which is rather surprising for students to own and invest in so many fashion articles even though they are purchased at very low prices.

#### **4.2 The Students' Views of Fashion and their Consumption**

Although these respondents may own so much clothes and accessories and most agree that they spend too much on shopping, however, they find it hard to stop or even reduce the amount of buying and shopping has become naturalized in their lifestyle. So why are these women so fond of shopping and consuming fashion merchandise? What is the motivation behind their need to dress up? Seven respondents particularly point out that physical appearance is very important in creating the right image in the society and that they need to dress right for the occasion. All respondents enjoy dressing up as they like to look good, beautiful and fashionable. They just simply find pleasure in shopping and adorning themselves in beautiful fashion clothes, hence creating a good image of themselves. A few mentioned that peer influence is also important in encouraging them to shop and dress up. Moobinnarak, 22, says that she likes to go shopping and buy clothes because she wants to look pretty and not outdated from the trends. Friends also have an influence on her consumption and the desire to buy fashion clothes. Sometimes when she sees her friends dressed nicely in new fashionable outfits, it also makes her want to dress in nice clothes and look great and fashionable.

If clothes are the basic essential for humans, then fashion clothes are also a necessity in today's consumer society. About half of the respondents suggest that fashion clothes can be both necessities and luxuries depending on how a person spends on it as over-consuming can be unnecessary. Also, clothes may be used for protection but choosing to wear suitable clothes at the right time also increases a person's credibility. Gift, 24, argues that fashion clothes are necessity because even though people have to keep changing and buying new clothes to catch up with the latest trend, it is natural because "no one wants to wear the same clothes forever. People develop new things and changes occur all the time and so do clothes and the way people dress". A few argues that it is necessary to buy and wear fashion clothes due to proper physical appearance, image, social aspect and modernity, whereas a few argues that it is completely unnecessary as clothes do not wore out in a few weeks and money could

be used for something else. But however unnecessary it is, they still enjoy living a luxurious life and consume all they want regardless of their overspending behavior.

All fifteen respondents agree that Thai women today are more fashion conscious and spend a lot of money on buying fashion merchandise than the past five to ten years. Many respondents have accounted the phenomenon to the increase in consumer choices and the availability of cheap fashion merchandise throughout the city. Many respondents also considered the media as having a great influence on young people and their fashion consumption. Mild, 23, believes that because more clothes in various designs and styles are made available at the very low price from numerous shops of numerous choices and these choices allowed women to be more fashion conscious and spend more money on shopping new clothes than in the past as the climate allows them to do so.

Although most respondents admitted that they spend too much money on shopping and find it a great pleasure in beautifying themselves with fashion clothes, they argue that they are not fashion victims. They commented that they dress according to fashion sometimes but they have to see what suits them and what not and they prefer to mix and match to suit their own style. Many students also believe that their shopping spree results from biological factor as women tend to be more concerned about their looks and how they dress and also women are great shoppers. For these reasons, many respondents find it natural to be consuming and looking so well-dressed.

#### **4.3 Fashion Areas in Bangkok**

The respondents normally shop at Siam Square, which is the epicenter of youth and fashion, Pratunam, a wholesale and retail fashion area, followed by other open markets such as Jatujak Weekend Market, and other shopping complexes such as Central, The Mall and The Emporium. From the interviews, when it comes to fashion clothes and accessories, many respondents prefer to buy clothes from open markets bearing no particular brand names as they are cheap. Fashion and trends come and go very fast so many of these young women prefer to buy cheap fashion clothes and accessories instead of expensive ones bearing brand names at the shopping malls. As

fashion comes and goes fast so the clothes are made ready to be worn and disposed at cheap prices.

Bangkok is indeed a shopping paradise as the city is scattered with numerous shopping centers, retail outlets, open markets and various other fashion malls, large and small. Fashion outlets and shopping malls are tend to cluster in the city center and there are more than ten shopping complexes in the city center alone. These include MBK Center, Siam Center, Siam Discovery, Siam Paragon, and Siam Square containing a great number of other fashion outlets. A few blocks away shoppers can find Zen shopping complex, Central World, Central Chidlom, Gaysorn Plaza, Amarin Plaza, and the two popular wholesale and retail centers for all kinds of fashion products, Platinum Fashion Mall and Pratunam Shopping Center. Siam Square, Platinum Fashion Mall and Pratunam Shopping Center are the three areas mostly visited by the respondents in terms of cheap fashion merchandise. There are also various other department stores and discount stores across the city and suburb areas, not to mention numerous other stalls and outdoor markets that scatter along the streets and footpaths. The accessibility and availability of fashion merchandise along with low price facilitate the consumption of fashion and thus consumerism among young women in Bangkok.

#### **4.4 The Media and its Influence on the Students**

The media also plays a significant role in facilitating consumptions among young people and therefore promoting consumerism in the urban city. All respondents are familiar with fashion and women magazines. While a few will read magazines if they have the opportunity, many read them on a regular basis with Cleo and Seventeen being the most read magazines, followed by Elle, Marie Claire, Kawaii, the latter a Japanese fashion magazine portraying Japanese fashion and lifestyle. The respondents prefer to read international magazines than Thai ones. When browsing the magazines, all respondents agree that the first things they look at are the fashion sections and how-tos. Most respondents agree that the contents and fashion advertisements in magazines have more influence on their fashion consumption and create the desires to shop and dress up than advertisements in other media types such as TVs, billboards, etc. This is because fashion magazines tend to portray the latest trends as well as demonstrate how to wear certain styles of clothes to create certain looks.

Many respondents reveal that apart from the fashion magazines; people and the environment can also be the informants of trends and fashion. As trends are everywhere, women loitering along the streets clad in skinny pants and kitten heels can also indicate the latest trends. Many respondents agree that seeing people dressed up in shopping centers, fashion areas or elsewhere in the city can also create desires to have the similar looks. Also store displays can entice a lot of shoppers to browse the store and eventually purchase. Pat, 21, reveals that she does not refer much to the fashion in magazines and streetwalkers but prefers to cruise around the shops and would try on some outfits if she spots them looking trendy and beautiful on the mannequins.

Celebrities also have some influence on the respondents' fashion consumption. Many have agreed that soap operas tend to have an influence on their fashion consciousness and consumption as well as create the desires to have similar looks as the female characters in the Thai soaps tend to clad themselves with the latest fashion outfits, accessories and hairdos. Although many students argue that they do not copy the exact costumes and styles from the TV soaps due to their lack of confidence in body shape, but many would try to buy similar looks because what is shown on TV is the trend at the moment.

Two respondents occasionally check fashion news on the Internet but with no particular websites, while the majority claims that they do not browse the Internet much. None of the respondents buy fashion goods from the Internet and all of them prefer to browse the clothes at the shops and try for themselves before the actual purchase.

Although the young respondents may reveal on how different types of media can have different impact on their fashion consumption as well as shopping behavior and sense of fashion, all agree that the media in general has a great impact on the society, especially young people in terms of their consumption behavior in the globalized and informative consumer society today. The media and its effect on consumerism is most obvious in the city, where urbanization and commercialization take place and where most of the city dwellers are young urban professionals. The results indicate that the

students are consumerist and spend a lot of money on shopping. They find great pleasure in buying new clothes and making themselves look fashionable and appealing to the public and shopping becomes naturalized in the lifestyle of these young women. Apart from the media that creates desires and influences these young women to shop and dress up, other elements such as peer groups, families, store displays, streetwalkers and the environment in general also encourage consumption among these young women in the new consumer society.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is not to say whether consumerism is right or wrong but to understand the social transformation in the capital Bangkok and its young inhabitants due to economic development and forces of globalization. The paper has discussed how young women in Bangkok spend their money in the new context of globalized consumer society and their view of fashion as well as the elements that facilitate and encourage them to shop, spend and adorn themselves in trendy clothes.

As discussed in the previous sections that consumerism has its origin in the West and became a global phenomenon as the world develops and industrializes. Thailand has experienced rapid industrialization and economic development in the past four decades and the accelerated urbanization and commercialization of the capital Bangkok have lead to various social and cultural transformations, particularly among the youths. The shift in consumption behavior, culture and lifestyle are great among the young urbanites, who tend to have high disposable incomes and purchasing power. Young people or the young urban professionals are more likely to be exposed to the media and receive much influence from it than other demographic groups and are inclined to be more interested in fashion and novelties. As discussed in the chapters that most young women in Bangkok are supported financially by their families and the fact that they are endowed with high incomes allows them to shop and consume freely. Thus, consumerism propagates.

Consumerism is evident in Bangkok due to the way young people spend their money and their shift in lifestyle. Instead of spending free time to do recreational activities, many young people prefer to spend their time cruising around the shopping centers,

hanging out with friends, going to movies, shopping, chatting on the phone, surfing the Internet and watching TVs. This is the new lifestyle for the new generations and this is how their disposable incomes are spent.

Looking from the fashion perspective, young women in Bangkok are consumerist in the sense that they spend a lot of their income on buying fashion products. Wearing fashion clothes and having the most up-to-date looks are significant in indicating modernity and beauty. Physical appearance is important in the Thai society and a lot of women are willing to go on a great extent in making themselves look attractive and modern. To these young women, shopping and being able to clad themselves in fashionable clothes and looking trendy and pretty are great satisfactions. And along with the desires the buy and look dashy, the increase in consumer choices in fashion products further intensifies consumption. The availability of fashion products from numerous shopping centers, fashion outlets and open markets is tempting and allows shoppers to buy whenever and wherever they wish and this is how consumption turns into consumerism.

The world has experienced drastic economic, political, social, cultural and technological transformations since the end of World War II. These changes have brought about certain developments, certain phenomena and its boons and banes to mankind and consumerism is one of the evident global phenomena. Many scholars consider consumerism to originate in the West as consumption to them means convenient and successful lifestyle and better living. Consumerism, materialism, individualism and liberalism are then regarded as values from the West and are thus related to Westernization process, where globalization, again originates from the West, spread the phenomena elsewhere in the world. It may be true in the sense that many countries in the world regard the West as superior and developed in almost every aspect, to them, the West is a great power and with the greatest influence and hence, following the West in economic and political aspects are necessary for developments and modernity of these nations.

As the world changes so does everything else existing on this planet. In the new globalized consumer society today, consumption has become so naturalized in our lifestyles that we do not see the need to go back to the ascetic or simple way of life.



We simply find pleasure in consuming. And most important, a nation will develop and grow if its economy is strong and consumption is what keeps the economy moving. What would happen to the economy if people suddenly stop consuming, especially if fashion clothes and accessories are very popular among young urbanites or even elsewhere in the country? In the society where physical appearance is significant and popular culture plays an important role, who could resist the influence of the media and the great looking celebrities and just wear old and outdated clothes to social gatherings or to work? If young people, who are endowed with high disposable incomes and purchasing power, refuse to spend but rather save for their future plans, would the economy be stagnated or even collapsed? There is no space to condemn consumerism in this paper but to understand the changes that have occurred in our new globalized societies today.

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## **Appendixes**

### **Enclosure 1: Interview questions for designers**

- 1) Your academic background
- 2) Can you define fashion?
- 3) Do you think young people buy clothes to create an identity or merely to indicate their wealth through spending a lot on clothes?
- 4) What inspires your designs?
- 5) What are the objectives of your designs?
- 6) Do you design according to Western fashion or trend?
- 7) Do you use foreign magazines and other media to keep up with the trend?

### **Enclosure 2: Interview questions for fashion boutique owners**

- 1) General background of the brand:
  - what style of clothes do you offer at the store
  - who is the main target
  - price range of the items
  - any branches or other outlets
- 2) Do you think looks and how people dress signify modernity? How?
- 3) Do you think the media, movies and celebrities influence fashion and encourage young people to spend more on clothes?
- 4) How do you advertise your brand and products?
- 5) Do you use Western models and celebrities to advertise your brand and products? Why?
- 6) What do you think of the spending behavior of young women in Bangkok? Do you think they spend too much on unnecessary things?
- 7) Do you think buying clothes is unnecessary and that clothes are just luxury items?
- 8) Do you think young girls in Bangkok are very much fashion conscious and preoccupied with spending their money on clothes than five years ago? Can you give examples?
- 9) Do you think young women in Bangkok have become fashion victims and consumerists? If yes, can you explain from your experience and opinion as to what has caused such behavior?

### **Enclosure 3: Interview questions for university students**

- 1) Define – institution
  - faculty/major
  - age
  - estimated monthly income
  - interests and hobbies
- 2) How do you earn your income? Through parents, government loans, part time job? If you receive income from more than one means, please state approximately how much on each, eg. from parents 5,000 bt and from part time job 10,000 bt.
- 3) Where do you normally shop your clothes? Which area(s) and to be specific, which stores and brands?
- 4) How many times do you go shopping each week? Please note that for this research, shopping means buying fashion clothes, shoes, handbags and other accessories such as rings, earrings, etc.
- 5) How much do you normally spend on each time you go shopping?
- 6) Can you list the items you mostly or normally buy? Jeans, shoes, necklaces, earring, etc.
- 7) Do you prefer to buy generic clothes available at open markets (eg clothes or accessories without brands at Siam Square, Bonanza, Pratunam, etc.) or brand name clothes? Why?
- 8) Do you buy accessories bearing brand names? If so, why?
- 9) If you buy brand name clothes and accessories, please state which brands. Eg., jeans from Diesel, tops from Greyhound or Soda, shoes from Footwork, Prada handbags, etc.
- 10) How many pairs of shoes and handbags do you approximately own?
- 11) Do you think you spend too much on clothes?
- 12) Do you think you are obsessed with fashion, buying clothes and making yourself look good? Please clarify your answer.
- 13) Why do you buy clothes or shopping in general? Is it because you want to create an identity through clothes? Peer pressure? To prove that you are modern and fashionable? To show off that you have money and you can afford to buy new clothes and look good? To buy clothes because you want to buy

them? Social pressure of having to look good and proper? Please clarify your answer.

- 14) Do you think clothes are necessities or luxuries?
- 15) Do you normally dress up according to fashion? Are you a fashion victim?  
Please explain your answer.
- 16) Do you tend to dress up like celebrities or other fashion icons? Eg. you may see an actress on TV dressed up in a particular style and she thus inspired you to dress in a similar fashion.
- 17) Do you think clothes and fashion signify how modern and up to date a person is? Clarify your answer.
- 18) Do you have a particular preference or style of dressing?
- 19) What influences you to buy clothes? Magazines, movies, celebrities, friends, families, etc. explain your answer.
- 20) Do you read fashion magazines? If so, state which ones and why you read them?
- 21) Do you prefer to watch foreign films or Thai ones? Why?
- 22) Do you check the latest fashion news from the Internet?
- 23) Do you buy clothes from the Internet? Catalogue mail order?
- 24) Do you think ads influence your style of dressing or prompt you to buy clothes?  
Ads in this case can cover a wide range of aspects, not particularly only on fashion ads. For instance, when you see any ads on TV, magazines, billboards, etc., do the characters in those ads influence you to buy the identical clothes or wanting to look like them?
- 25) Do you watch MTV? Do you think what you see on the programme influences you to buy clothes?
- 26) In conclusion, do you think the media in general influence and intensify your need to buy clothes?
- 27) What do you think of the young women in Bangkok today compared to the past 5 or 10 years, are they more fashion conscious and dress up more? Do they spend extravagantly on shopping?
- 28) Do you think it's good or bad that young women dress up and spend a lot of money on shopping today? Explain your answer.

29) Do you think the Bangkok Fashion City project has inspired and encouraged young women in Bangkok to consume more and become more fashion conscious? Why and how?