

# Women's Clothing Microenterprises: A Qualitative Analysis of Consumer Perception

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**Abstract:** In the context of the pandemic, an increase in the unemployment level originated, but on the other hand, new businesses such as microenterprises were also started, this with the purpose of generating income. The image of Peruvian entrepreneurship has changed during the pandemic, before the pandemic mainly adult men generated entrepreneurship, but now women, young people and low-income Peruvians initiate this challenge. The main research objective is to explore the consumer perception about women's clothing microenterprises in the city of Metropolitan Lima, capital of Peru. The methodological approach was qualitative with a descriptive scope and phenomenological design; the sample was selected for convenience, with a total of 12 women who buy in women's clothing micro-enterprises, who are around the age range between 18 to 35 years of socioeconomic level B and C between professionals and students; who were subsequently conducted in-depth interviews through telephone calls. The instrument consisted of 12 questions per interview divided into 3 dimensions and 4 sub-categories for each dimension. The users expressed their experiences in the use of women's clothing, which made it possible to generate a consumer profile of this type of business by analyzing the quality of information, speed of response and after-sales service. The interviews were transcribed and then the data were analyzed taking into account the most important and differential points of each response obtained. Among the main results, it was found that the users prioritize the quality of service, the veracity of the product images, the differential value of the garments and tolerance. Negative factors such as distrust and lack of attention to queries were found, elements that should be improved for a better closing of sales. In conclusion, after determining certain positive and negative factors on the perception of women's clothing micro-enterprises, users emphasize the importance of product warranty, which produces a feeling of improvement in quality and customer service.

**Keywords:** Clothing, Consumer perception, Customer behavior, Entrepreneurship, Microenterprise

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## 1. Introduction

Faced with the current crisis caused by Covid 19, there was an increase in the unemployment rate and a shortage of resources around the world, leading people to reinvent themselves and show their entrepreneurial spirit, exposing their ability to face the new demands of the commercial market (Soriano and Martínez, 2007).

Consequently, a new stage began for small businesses called microenterprises, being a profitable initiative for a person or a family, despite the fact that in its initiation stage it does not generate formal profits for the participants or a fixed monthly salary (Ramaswamy and DeClerck, 2018). For this reason, small businesses look for ways to promote their products and services with few resources, social networks being the best option due to their low cost and because they are a fundamental tool for intercommunication with various markets (Carranza and Ávila, 2020).

Therefore, the present work has the following research questions: What is the consumer perception about women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city? And what are the determining factors for consumption in women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city?

### 1.1 Objectives

The objective of the research is to explore the perceptions of consumers about women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city, capital of Peru, seeking to analyze the determining factors to make a purchase in microenterprises that sell their products through social media networks, in addition, to being in

the initiation stage and not having a physical store, but with the support of customers who have already made purchases.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Fayolle and Basso (2010), entrepreneurships have the quality of transforming business ideas into a profitable livelihood, since it allows promoting products and opening new markets, containing leadership skills and risking innovation in the face of possible rejection by the company of the commercialized products.

Likewise, according to Rodríguez (2014), perception is the fundamental emotional cause that impacts consumer behavior, since it is related to the exploration of a person towards a certain product or service to know what are the factors that influence the end choice of one over others. Regarding the theories related to consumer perception, Schiffmann and Kanuk (2005) describe the procedures and systems that are generally used to analyze knowledge about a product and the impressions that users communicate after having made a purchase, mentioning that there are positive and interpretative approaches, the positive ones are essential for decision-making within businesses, while the interpretative ones are generally qualitative and are usually applied to small samples with unique consumption patterns.

Likewise, by Nieves and Morales (2022) the variety of perceptions and consumer satisfaction depend on the organization's assortment relationship, both internally with product suppliers and externally towards the customer, satisfying their needs with a variety of products, being more attractive, creating differential values, and becoming more competitive even in product categories unknown to some users.

Regarding the measurement of the variable "perception of consumption of microenterprises", Malo et al (2016) mentioned that the public prefers small businesses for the quality of more personalized attention, unlike large corporations that do not have that closer treatment, reaching a proportional level of trust based on the results they can offer.

According to Vergara (2021), the quality of information is extremely important for a company's decision-making, systematizing objective research in the field for the time of launching new products. Burton et al (1994) mention different ways of interacting with the information collected where the findings are considered as fundamental raw material for the identification of purchasing habitats, preferences, places where people get their products, quality, price, among other determining factors by the consumer for the purchase of a product in a certain brand. The same way, Yong et al (2021) refer that the relative knowledge of the information systems allows to quantify the data about the way of perceiving of the consumers.

Additionally, according to Farhangmehr, Marques and Silva (2000) the speed of response to a consumer's question will have a positive effect on the purchase of a product, as well as the most optimal care during the purchase process or in response to a possible complaint, in this way, the company can be differentiated from others.

In addition, Kearns and Hair (2008) mention that the after-sales service is a decisive factor before the repurchase of a customer as to whether he can provide a positive or negative opinion, which will influence the loyalty to the brand. Ramaswamy and DeClerck (2018) refer that the opinions and demands made by customers in different media such as social media, emails, etc., influence the market share and longevity of a company. "Analyzing textual reviews can provide deeper insights than exploring overall customer experiences and overall satisfaction" (Xu et al, 2017, p. 675).

Zeba and Ganguli (2019) also clarify that when the consumer is aware of the purchase, it is not only done for an emotional factor, but also evaluates and inquires about new designs and varieties of a product. Likewise, Ansari and Gupta (2021) mention that online product reviews have a great influence on the purchase decision.

In addition, Turnes (2020) refers that women's clothing has a relationship with fashion, which is a key factor for the development of products marketed for the female market, breaking down important points such as non-verbal communication through the type of clothing to be marketed and allowing to define the target audience and guidelines according to what the entrepreneur seeks to convey.

Given the lack of articles related to research on the perceptions of women's clothing consumers, it is of interest for micro-enterprises to know their impressions, in order to adopt measures that allow capturing a larger market and devising innovative strategies, not only to achieve a sale but also to generate the repurchase; therefore, this article seeks to provide useful information to the trading community and improve understanding of the scope of the problem.

### 3. Methods

The research has a qualitative methodological approach with a descriptive scope and phenomenological design; which is the analysis of experiences whose objective is to describe the phenomenon of study achieving a more accurate description based on the reality and manifestation of the people who lived this event previously.

The study population was the consumers of a women's clothing micro-enterprise, which has almost 2,600 followers on Facebook and approximately 5,100 followers on Instagram after its launch in early 2021. Subsequently, the sample was selected for non-probabilistic convenience. The unit of analysis is the brand's consumers, mostly women, between 18 and 35 years old. In addition to taking into account the opinion of customers who bought more than once in 2021 and excluding those who made only 1 purchase.

### 4. Data Collection

The data collection was carried out through the interview form, an instrument adapted from Aguirre and Acosta (2019), it also has the validation of experts who approved the proposed dimensions based on the achievement of the research objective.

In-depth interviews were conducted through telephone calls, the users could be contacted through the database provided by the company, which allowed knowing the answers about the experience they had with the women's clothing micro-enterprise and knowing the point of view they have about this type of business by analyzing the quality of information, speed of response and after-sales service.

The instrument consisted of 12 questions per interview divided into 3 dimensions and 4 sub-categories for each dimension (Table 1), where a code book was built with which the explored dimensions were analyzed, being a fundamental step for data cleaning and subsequent analysis of the findings, taking into account the data saturation criterion, which showed that after the first 12 interviewees there was a certain similarity in the ideas of the interviewees that did not allow obtaining additional elements and where the search for more data was stopped.

**Table 1: Study Dimensions**

Categories	Sub-Categories
Quality of the information	Product description (C1)
	Product photos (C2)
	Checking the size (C3)
	Shipping cost (C4)
Quick response	Speed in transmitting information (R1)
	Updated information (R2)
	Clear indications about the purchase process (R3)
	Product price (R4)
Post-Sale Service	Product Warranty (S1)
	Product replacement (S2)
	Money back (S3)
	Post-sale customer service (S4)

The interviews were transcribed and then the data was analyzed taking into account the most important and differential points of each response obtained and based on the differences between the possible similarities, the responses among the users were also compared according to the perspective and acceptance of the undertakings.

### 5. Results and Discussion

Next, the results of the research and the demographic details of the interviewees are presented, being women between 18 and 35 years of socioeconomic level B and C between professionals and students (Table 2).

Likewise, the following categories were determined: quality of information, speed of response and post-sale service; in addition, the shopping experiences in other stores with similar qualities are analyzed.

**Table 2: Demographic Details of the Participants**

Participants	Number	Academic level	Socioeconomic level	Love Marks Clients
Women ≥ 30	4	Professionals	B	1
Women ≤ 29	8	Students	B and C	4

### 5.1 On Information Quality

In the case of those interviewed over 30 years of age who were called adult customers (AC), their analysis at the time of making a purchase is different from that of the interviewees under 29 years of age who were called young customers (YC). ACs are more technical when executing a purchase, they take into account not only the image of the product but also the quality of the fabric, colors, size, price, shipping cost, and they hesitate when faced with a heavily edited photo due to their previous shopping experience. For this reason, they prefer to ask for simple, unedited photos that show the quality, type of fabric, and exact color of the garment. Likewise, they exhibit greater precision on the sizes and evaluate paying a high shipping cost. As one of the interviewees comments: "...when I go to make a purchase, I usually ask the sizes on the websites that I am interested in... knowing the sizes is important to me" (C3). Similarly, another participant mentioned: "Well, the first thing you see in a virtual store or entrepreneurship on social media is the description of the product, which is what encourages you to order or go to the store. It is important that businessmen and stores have a good description to avoid so many doubts and speed up the purchase process" (C1).

On the other hand, YCs are carried away more by the visual than by the additional information about the products; they prefer to see the product modeled on a person and thus have an idea of how it would look on them. Regarding checking sizes, they don't have much problem since the brand is aimed at a specific market and they offer standard sizes that fit most young users; but they do not neglect the shipping cost and look for alternatives before closing a purchase. As one of the interviewees mentions: "The truth is that I don't give so much importance to the description, it's more visual. I see the model and analyze if I like it a lot because of the color or model... I also see the importance of the material and the prices since as a result of this pandemic the prices have risen a lot. I check the price of what they are selling me since it must be in accordance with the quality of the fabric, I don't know much about fabric but I try to find out on google so I can verify that the cost that they are indicating is really due to the fabric that offer in their products" (C2 and C4).

The results show similarities with the studies of Yong, Lay and Wei (2021), Zeba and Ganguli (2019), Aguirre and Acosta (2019), León (2018) and Jiménez-Silva et al (2019) where there are also cases where the purchase depends more on a visual factor, the veracity with which a product or service is transmitted being decisive. On the other hand, these studies also disagree on the point that there are users who analyze a brand based on previous problems when making a purchase of a product.

### 5.2 Speed of Response

In the case of ACs, they are more organized and make purchases in advance, so they are more tolerant of a response, this does not mean that they would wait a week, but a few days. In addition, they know the dynamics of the purchase process, and although the store gives them confidence, they pay before receiving the product. Regarding the evaluation of the price, they go more for the differential, how unique the product can be and if the quality is in accordance with the sale price.

The YCs are more impatient but they are more attentive to the publications in case a product is out of stock, sometimes they do not trust the purchase processes of these stores and generally they pay when they receive the product. Regarding the price, they evaluate if the same products exist in other brands; and when faced with a very low price, it generates distrust, because in their previous experiences the product was not what was offered to them. As mentioned by some of the interviewees: "...as a buyer I review several brands or a very similar model that I like in several stores, so what I do is ask them all. I take into account the store that seems best to me, the price of the garment, the price of shipping and the attention when they respond, some people are very closed and don't give you a choice, but others are very kind and that builds trust" (R4).

Other participant mentioned: "Yes, I think that the issue of kindness is important, the "yes, don't worry, if it doesn't fit you we can change it as if it were face-to-face", but there are people who are very closed... and they answer "No" so sharply, then I say it is better not to ask them anything because I feel that I am making them uncomfortable" (R2 and R3).

*"Of course, I take into account that a query at 11 pm at night will not be answered immediately, well I could normally wait during the day, but I think that a maximum would be 2 days, after 2 days there is already the lack of interest from the store, right?... I believe that the prompt response is according to the urgency that I have, be it that shirt or that jean, it is obvious that I will be insisting there so that they give me an answer. Yes, it is important to me" (R1).*

The results related to the dimension on the speed of response coincide with the research of Farhangmehr, Marques and Silva (2000), Vergara (2021), Schiffman and Kanuk (2005), Burton et al (1994) and Bernal et al (2018) about how a brand is perceived that has the ability to respond more quickly to its users, this being a decisive factor for the choice of purchase and allowing to attract the largest number of clients; likewise, the attention and the way in which the response to the requests and doubts of the potential clients is carried out, which can make a difference in the guarantee of the purchase and in addition to future purchases.

### 5.3 After-Sales Service

Depending on the experience of the ACs, they are a little more demanding when faced with a problem about the sale and they make their discomfort known among their group of friends and on social media, either because of a good treatment or bad experiences, in general they do not ask guarantee for the products but they know that in the event of any damage they have complete freedom to ask for a solution, either by changing a garment, the return in the event of disagreement with the garment or that the product is not in stock that they initially bought .

While the YC expect a greeting and more concern for them after the sale of the product is finished, they generally do not ask for a product guarantee and in the event of a defect they do not think that they can ask for a change or a refund of the money, they prefer to avoid problems and prefer to leave the product aside according to the majority of interviewees.

As mentioned by some of the interviewees:

*"Of course, what happens is that very few pages give you your money back, they always force you to choose one of their products as compensation since a money refund is not possible. There were times when I had to choose a model that I suddenly didn't like but I did it to avoid problems, but I've also had problems when asking to be exchanged for another product... The truth has never happened to me, but I have friends who have returned their money" (S2, S3 and S4).*

*"Well, I think that it does have a good after-sales service, they understand that it is important to retain customers because obviously the product arrives and perhaps it is not what you expect, the person in charge did worry about my discomfort and about the issue suddenly as a woman's whim that does not suit me, and they have really loyalized me, I always buy there, I check their pages and I have had a good experience" (S1, S2 and S3).*

*"I think so, I put myself in the place of the people behind it, some of whom don't have free time in the production area and the fabrics; and more or less I see that because my aunt manufactures pajamas so I see the whole process, so I put myself in the other's place and say maybe they are busy, but it is good that they follow up on an after-sales service" (S1).*

The above results indicate similarities with Kearns and Hair (2008), Ma, Gu and Liu (2017), Rodríguez (2014), Vega and Bermúdez (2019) and Luis et al (2015) regarding the loyalty of the customer who expects to be served in the same way as when the sale began, analyzing the decision-making made by a small business when faced with a problem, product change or possible request for a refund of money that most of it is not offered as an initiative in micro-enterprises, being a point that could enhance the confidence determined by the clients.

In addition, the results showed the importance of informing about this type of after-sales service in terms of any inconvenience with the garment, since users are often unaware, and this can be an opportunity to build loyalty and learn more about the buyers.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research carried out determines certain positive factors about the perception in women's clothing micro-enterprises such as: quality of care, quality of the fabric, veracity of images of the products, differential value of the garments and tolerance. Among the negative factors were obtained: distrust and poor attention to queries, these incur the qualities that this type of business must meet for the final purchase of the users since the results indicated the experiences of the users both in the studied brand as previous experiences in similar businesses.

With respect to the variable on the quality of the information, having different results depending on the age difference of the interviews, it was possible to obtain that according to the age range they take much into account the descriptions of materials and at the same time they are visual; because they are not carried away only by the first image or what the product may describe, but are more analytical in making decisions when making a purchase. In addition, the knowledge of sizing could be appreciated since, according to the experiences of the users, most micro-enterprises handle standard sizes due to their low level of production, being attracted by a photo of a model with the product that has physical measurements similar to the person who wishes to acquire the garment.

Regarding the speed of response, they are more tolerant since there were participants who had acquaintances who had also started micro-enterprises and knew the work process, the time and effort it takes, which could cause a delay in responding to their inquiry. Regarding the updated information, all the interviewees prioritized this point since they have had cases where they wanted the product but could not acquire it because it was out of stock, therefore it was also important for them to know the purchase process, especially in users who did not consume much. In micro-enterprises, therefore, at the time of choosing the price, they analyzed the shipping cost and the final price of the garment in different stores. Additionally, it was evidenced that depending on the service provided, they were willing to pay as if they were buying in a retail store, feeling more comfortable buying in a microenterprise because of how warm the treatment of the saleswomen is and because it is more personalized, unlike a purchase in a large store.

Additionally, it was also possible to gather that this type of business does not offer a guarantee for its products, which would be a differential value that could generate greater confidence for the choice of users and thus be able to make more sales. As for whether the product can be exchanged or returned, there were users who mentioned that due to the small size of these stores, it did not even occur to them that they could provide this service after the sale, showing that the users who had the need to request some type of exchange or return had a positive experience in the brand and negative experiences in other small businesses.

Among the limiting factors of the investigation was the current situation of the Covid 19 pandemic, which prevented personal interviews from being carried out, so telephone calls were used; likewise, there were also refusals from prospective candidates due to the bad experience with the product and the lack of time or lack of interest in an interview.

Finally, future studies are proposed in the field of micro-enterprises that sell women's clothing and how they affect traditional trade; in this way, motivate researchers to carry out more articles about the consumer's perception of women's clothing.

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