

A Study on the Perception of Congolese Students towards Sape

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Abstract Sape or dandyism is a fashioning behavior which is very popular in some communities of Congolese. Characterized by well dress, beautiful clothes, expensive or designer labels, Sape as psychosocial phenomenon, doesn't have a same perception in student's area. **Aims of the Study:** The study measures perception of Congolese students towards Sape. **Instruments:** Questionnaire technique was used to collect data from 64 women and men students aged from 18 up to 40 years old leaving in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. **Results:** It emerges from our investigations that Students of Kinshasa (66.6%) and Lubumbashi (86%) have a positive perception towards Sape. **Conclusion:** Fashioning behavior of Sape must be organized in intend of pushing all fanatics of clothes to buy and employ local fashions in state of spending too much money in foreigner designer labels.



Keywords: Sape, Congolese student, perception, dandyism, fashion behavior

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1. Introduction

1.1. Design of the Sape

The Sape was placed in the spotlight of all the media of the whole world after the sudden death of one of its faithful singers, in the person of *Papa Wemba*¹.

¹ Also nicknamed as: *Kuru yaka*, Jules Presley, 100% star, *Ekumani*, *Bakala Diakuba*, *Fulangenge*, Formateur des idoles, Mwalimu, *Maitre d'école*, *Vieux Bokul*, *Mzee*, *Notre père*, *Mangrokoto grand prêtre*, *Kolo histoire*, "*Rossignol*" de la rumba...

His real name Jules Shungu Wembadio Pene Kikumba, a musician from Democratic Republic of Congo, Papa Wemba died on Sunday April 24 2016 at dawn in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, "*following a malaise on stage*", A "cardiac arrest" or what the medical world refers to as "massive infarction", while singing as a true *Sapeur*. Declaration of death announcement read by Salif Traoré, General Commissioner of the Festival of Urban Music of Anoumabo [1].

The Sape remains the social object of imitation by a partisan people. It also evokes the harmony in the perception of values, styles or old and current fashions, depending on whether the dress tendency, the Sape leaves

the impression behind every adept of the well-dressed empire.

Kinshasa *Sapeurs* are recognized for being much more performed, often using soccer stadiums or street corners for their gatherings while their more conservative Brazzaville counterparts prefer meeting in cafés [2].

The beauty of the *Sapeur* is found in the choice of cloths, the glitter of glasses and the smoothness of velvet or leather of the *Sapeur*, but also in the knowledge to dress and synchronize the colors. The price comes after, well after the "good feeling" of the *Sapeur* and his spectator. The *Sapeur* feels himself attaining the perfection of his clothing in the admiration which others display by seeing him well-dressed, but also by the self-admiration which the *Sapeur* dedicates to himself.

It should be pointed out that the *Sape* is not only clothing, it is also and above all a set of behaviors as much clothing, as gait and conduct in society. One does not recognize a *Sapeur* solely by his clothing, but also by his gait, his luxurious clothes and by his actions and gestures. Thus, the *Sape* is not only a fashion, but above all a way of life.

The acronym *S.A.P.E.* (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes²) appears at the beginning of the Seventies. It designates a popular clothing movement that is developing around music, in Brazzaville and Kinshasa, in connection with stays in Europe by Congolese [3].

Though the origins of the movement are of some debate, both in terms of location and impetus, the most cogent trajectory of la *Sape*'s existence unfolds in three phases spanning the last century, beginning surreptitiously in colonial Kinshasa (circa 1950) and changing force and direction during the early 1970s in the early years of the post-colony before shifting once again in the late 1990s as president Mobutu's political regime began to unravel [2].

Adrien Mombele Samba N'gantshie, known as Strervos Niarcos³, is considered to be the Pope of the Kitendi religion (*Sape*) surely for spreading it through the songs and at the music concerts in the band of Papa Wemba that he used to attend. The latter will testify in particular that Strervos Niarcos was a master and a faithful precursor of the habits and customs of the *Sape*.

When Strervos Niarcos returned in Kinshasa in 1989, there were motorcyclists who escorted him from the airport to *La Voix du Zaïre* where he gave his first interview. We have fashion like Jitrois jackets, Issey Miyake pants; Weston shoes [4].

Sapeur is characterized by demonstration processions or "colonization" of others, striking power of his clothes, shoes, belt, socks, hat or headband, glasses, pipe or cane, or even his ring or watch. We recognize a *Sapeur* from his exhibitions of clothes, his arrangements, and his harmony of cloths.

Clothing behavior is perceived differently by individuals and in terms of their own experience. The art of dressing well, that is the *Sape*, does not derogate from this principle. Students do not perceive in the same way the phenomenon of *Sape*, and especially that this mode of clothing did not begin in the student's area.

There is a need to seek the image as the perception of each individual or group of individuals on the *Sape*:

fashion clothing, belief or culture of a group of fanatics of the "well dressed".

If previous generations have experienced dandyism, the *Sape*, like an art and clothing fashion, seduces degree of perception of a particular audience that was completely there, and astonishes another audience that finds this dress behavior strange.

Dandyism is a lifestyle modeled around 1790 by English elites, one of whose pioneers was George Bryan Brummell (1778-1840), alias Beau Brummell [5].

Far from being an unusual phenomenon or an exclusive creation of the inhabitants of Kinshasa and Brazzaville, the *Sape* is close to the dandyism. Dandyism and *Sape* have obvious similarities in the actions, such as self-admiration and over-valorization through clothing and gait.

The difference between the *Sape* and Dandyism lies in the time and place of their manifestation (England-1820 for dandyism and Brazzaville-Kinshasa-1960 for *Sape*) as well as in the main motivations of their followers (if dandyism was a men behavior wanting to resemble women from the point of view of refined clothing, careful manner and talks in salons, cafeterias or bars, the *Sape* on the other hand is a quest for over-valorization of young artists wanting to reach higher social class).

1.2. Literature Review on *Sape* Studies

A series of studies on the *Sape* as a social phenomenon, carried out by sociologists, anthropologists and even stylists, emerged. Our research analyzes the perception of Congolese students towards *Sape*. It differs from the previous studies by the compressed in lines below.

"*Sape* as phenomenon" was carefully decrypted by Gandoulou [6] in many points like *Sapeurs* adventure trail; Parisian life of the *Sapeurs* and their life in the Congo; origins of the *Sape* movement; political significance of the *Sape* movement and the role of colonization; Socio-anthropological view of the *Sape* movement.

Reporting on the fashion name "*Sape*" in the political world of Congo-Brazzaville, Bazanguisa [7] established a link between politics and luxury clothing; attempted to reply to the question "Why does *Sape* interest the Congo so much"; and analyzed the historical transformations of political structures to show how the *Sape* is a subculture.

If Gondola [8] studied the *Sape* and African *Sapeurs* established in France; also described the cultural itinerary and dreamlike journey of the *Sapeurs* in Europe. Hanon [3] analyzed the semantic field of *Sapeurs* living in Brussels in an anthropological study carried out in 2003-2004 in the circles of Congolese immigration in Brussels on a series of words derived from the particular language of the *Sape*.

Coulibaly, Brodin & Ladwein [9] expected the representation of luxury in *Sapeurs* and the identity mechanisms that are involved in the choice of luxury brands and / or designer labels.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Description of Study Area

The students surveyed in our inquiries come from the pedagogy's high Institute of Gombe, (in acronym:

² Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes: Society of Tastemakers and Elegant People.

³ Dubbed as Mukaravia Malela, Eddie Barra, Niarka Kouroubio, Papa na Maty, Gianni Versace, the N'gantshie.

ISP/Gombe), in Kinshasa, and from the University of Lubumbashi (UNILU in acronym).

The ISP/ Gombe is located in Kinshasa downtown precisely in the Gombe municipality [10]. It is a public high institution in the Democratic Republic of Congo and organizes 10 departments, including psycho-pedagogy.

UNILU is a public high school institution in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Localize in the city of Lubumbashi, it includes fifteen faculties and schools, counting the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences.

Situated at the extremities of the country, in the West and in the South-East, for a distance of about 2000 Km (about 1242,742 miles), the two sites which make up our field of investigation (Kinshasa and Lubumbashi) are the first two Cities of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country of Central Africa with continental dimensions and the immense potential riches of its soil and subsoil.

Kinshasa and Lubumbashi are culturally and morally threatened cities due to the cultural and traditional mixing of foreign and neighboring cultures.

The city of Lubumbashi, with an area of 747 km², is an important city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Originally a mining town, then administrative, it has a tropical two-season climate (dry and rainy).

Kinshasa is largely inhabited by people from all provinces of the DRC and various countries of the world [11]. It is therefore a cosmopolitan city that knows an exponential demography estimated to date to more than twelve million inhabitants.

As the African capital of music, Kinshasa better highlights the expansion and expression of the *Sape* movement. In almost every one of its twenty-four municipalities, there are distinguished groups of young men who devote themselves to the *Sape*.

Kinshasa originated from *Teke*, a local language, Kinshasa means: a little *Salt Market* (insasa, insa or insa-insa). This name became official after the country's independence in 1966, replacing that of Leopoldville, which was given in 1881 by the explorer Henry Morton Stanley in honor of the King of the Belgians, Leopold II, whose service he was.

Lubumbashi is a name originated from *Lubumbashi River*. That in *Lamba*, local language, Lubumbashi means: *ulubumba* (clay). The clay that women used to shape vases and pots (*lubumba* also means potter producing clay pots). And founded in 1910 by the Belgians under the name of "Elisabethville", the city was renamed Lubumbashi in 1965.

2.2. Description of the Study Sample

To constitute our study sample, we preferred to investigate in two student's circles, one of which is considered to be the bastion of the phenomenon studied that is the *Sape* (the City of Kinshasa), while the other is a remote medium of this reality (the City of Lubumbashi). And a non-probability sampling design (convenience sample) was used to draw the sample.

Our study sample consists of 64 students, whose characteristics are represented in the [Table 1](#) below by *gender* (women and men), *age* (18 up to 40 years old) and *survey site* (Kinshasa and Lubumbashi).

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

	Variables	Number	Percentage
Gender	<i>Women</i> :	23	35.9
	<i>Men</i> :	41	64.1
Age	<i>36 – 41</i> :	1	1.56
	<i>30 – 35</i> :	6	9.38
	<i>24 – 29</i> :	19	29.69
	<i>18 – 23</i> :	38	59.38
Survey site	Kinshasa :	30	46.9
	Lubumbashi	34	53.1

The characteristics of our sample, summarized in the [Table 1](#) above, show for gender, it included 35.94% of women students and 64.1% of men students; for age, it had more than half of the respondents aged 18 to 23 (59.38%), followed by those aged 24 to 29 (29.69%); and finally, for survey site, it contained 53.1% of students from Lubumbashi and 46.9 % from Kinshasa.

2.3. Technique of Data Collection and Aim of the Study

We used the questionnaire technique to collect data. But, before administering the questionnaire, we observed a parade of the *Sapeurs* in front of the court of the Parliament on the eve of the burial of Papa Wemba (musician and leader of *Sape*). As an inspiration for this study, this observation allowed us to identify, through the public getup, the different categories of *Sapeurs*.

Thus, the object of this study is the perception that 64 students (aged 18 to 40) of Kinshasa (called *Kinois*⁴) and Lubumbashi (called *Lushois*⁵) have of the *Sape* and the *Sapeurs*, as psychosocial phenomenon that takes place in their environment of life.

The aim of this study is to measure the perception of Congolese students about the *Sape* phenomenon by answering to four open ended questions detailed as follows:

- 1) What is the understanding of the word *Sapeur* (dandy)?
- 2) What motivate someone to be engaged in *Sape* (dandyism)?
- 3) What are the methods of acquisition luxury clothes by *Sapeurs* (dandies)?
- 4) Who are names of some *Sapeurs* (dandies) of Kinshasa?

We have applied for three students' promotions at University of Lubumbashi and two promotions at ISP/Gombe in Kinshasa were we administrated our questions.

3. Results

In the following section, we expose results (in percentage based on number of responses) regarding participants' notions of *Sapeur*, on *Sape* motivations, on Modes of provision of clothing for *Sapeur* and on Names

⁴ *Kinois*: inhabitant of Kinshasa

⁵ *Lushois*: inhabitant of Lubumbashi

of some *Sapeurs* of Congo. Additionally, we present the perception view concerning hitch table of the results which can be positive, negative or neutral.

3.1. *Sapeur* Notions

Results regarding participants' notions of *Sapeur* are summarized in Table 2 below, categorized by their level of perception.

The Table 2 shows that the notion of the word fashion named "*Sape*" differs among the subjects questioned. There are three perceptions (per percentages of choices) that motivate any *Sapeur*: positive perception, negative perception and neutral perception.

As positive perception towards *Sape*, for Kinshasa students, a *Sapeur* is a person who "likes to dress well" (25.6%); who puts on "beautiful, expensive or designer labels clothes" (17.9%); who "Knows how to dress and synchronize colors" (7.7%); who is "showing off his clothes" (7.7%); "having a lot or plenty of clothes" (5.1%) and who like "being clean" (2.6%). For Lubumbashi students, positive perception towards *Sape* are who "likes to dress well" (47.2%); who puts on "beautiful, expensive or designer labels clothes" (16.7%); who "Knows how to dress and synchronize colors" (13.9%); who like "being clean" (5.6%); who is "showing off his clothes" (2.8%); "having a lot or plenty of clothes" (2.8%).

As negative perception towards *Sape*, 7.7% of Kinshasa students consider it in "bizarre clothes, exaggerated and strange".

3.2. *Sape* Motivations

Results regarding participants' responses on *Sape* motivations are summarized in Table 3 below, ordered by their level of perception.

The Table 3 shows that according to the students of Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, there are three perceptions (per percentages of choices) that motivate any *Sapeur*: positive perception, negative perception and neutral perception.

As positive perception towards *Sape* for Kinshasa students, motivations of *Sapeur* are "to be admired", to be a star" or by "passion" (11.8%); "dressing well and loving clothes" (8.8%). and "to promote oneself" (2.9%). And for Lubumbashi students, motivations of *Sapeur* are "to promote oneself" (20%); "to be admired" (17.1%); "to be a star" (8.6%) and by "passion" (2.9%) or "dressing well and loving clothes" (2.9%).

As negative perception towards *Sape* motivations, Kinshasa students consider Lack of occupation (unemployed) (8.8%); To display one's wealth (5.9%); Lack of good education (2.9%); To convince oneself of having a lot of clothes (2.9%) and Want to complement in what one lacks (2.9%). when Lubumbashi students consider only to display one's wealth (14.3%) and Pride/ arrogance (11.4%).

Table 2. Analysis of the notions about the *Sape*

Perception	Notions	Kinshasa %	Lubumbashi %
Positive (66.6 Vs 86%)	Likes to dress well	25.6	47.2
	Beautiful clothes, expensive or designer labels	17.9	16.7
	Knows how to dress and synchronize colors	7.7	13.9
	Show his clothes	7.7	2.8
	Plenty of clothes	5.1	2.8
	Clean	2.6	5.6
Negative (7.7%)	Bizarre clothes, Exaggerated, Strange	7.7	0.0
Neutral (25.6 Vs 11.2%)	Different from others	5.1	5.6
	Talk about clothes	5.1	2.8
	Imitate clothing of others	5.1	0.0
	Others (Employee at the <i>Sape</i> , Humorous clothes)	10.3	2.8

Table 3. Analysis of motivations that drive someone to engage in the *Sape*

Perception	Motivations	Kinshasa %	Lubumbashi %
Positive (53Vs 51.5%)	To be admired	11.8	17.1
	To promote oneself	2.9	20
	To be a star	11.8	8.6
	Passion	11.8	2.9
	Dressing well and loving clothes	8.8	2.9
	Taste of cleanliness	5.9	0.0
Negative (23.4Vs 25.7%)	To display one's wealth	5.9	14.3
	Pride/ arrogance	0.0	11.4
	Lack of occupation (unemployed)	8.8	0.0
	Lack of good education	2.9	0.0
	To convince oneself of having a lot of clothes	2.9	0.0
	Want to complement in what one lacks	2.9	0.0
Neutral (23.5Vs 22.8%)	Influence or imitation	20.6	17.1
	At the sight at designer labels or fashion	2.9	5.7

4. Discussion

We recall that our result fixed for a majority students of Kinshasa (66.6%) and Lubumbashi (86%) to have a positive perception towards *Sape*.

Before discuss about this perception towards *Sape*, we must note that psychological variables (attitude, perception, self-concept, personality and motivation) are significant predictors of fashion consumption behavior [12]. But social stereotypes are a special case of interpersonal perception and may guide and influence the perceiver's interactions with the target [13].

Also, let underline that people judge each other on first impressions [14] and dressing is considered as the factor for representing the social status of the person [15], that way clothing reflects the values, attitudes and interests of the wearer [16,17,18].

As for wearing strange, exaggerated or strange clothing, forms of clothing, colors and eccentricities make it an originality and provide clothes (kitendi) with an extraordinary power, a supernatural force that transcends the understanding of the spectators and gives the wearer (*Sapeur*) a sensation of a superman, of differentiation, of reincarnation in a new creature endowed with a power of domination, overtaking, exaltation and victory: that is what the *Sapeur* calls colonization.

Moreover, we recall that motivations of *Sapeur* cited are "to be admired", "to be a star", "to promote oneself", by "passion" and "dressing well and loving clothes"; other than their ways to get clothes are purchase, donation and borrowing.

The obsession with clothing is reflected in the *Sapeur* by a passion for always dressing well and better. It even becomes his religion; he believes in clothes, kitendi, and devotes all his energies and financial resources to dress.

Passion is also one of the clear reasons that would easily explain the actions of the *Sapeurs*. A *Sapeur* is always passionate about his art; it is a second nature for him. The *Sape* is, for him, a euphoric substance (or a drug) that plunges him into a second state, which gives him a feeling of gaiety, total and complete sufficiency.

The *Sapeur* claims to hover over others, dominate his self-esteem and achieve a level of satisfaction that is remarkable for his smile, enlightened gaze, and mental or psychic exuberance of fullness whenever he spreads his "well-good and better-dress".

Many of the *Sapeurs* receive clothing donations from their acquaintances that live in the West and buy clothes for them, especially during promotion periods (ranging from 30%, 50% or even 70%) in luxury clothing boutiques. Other *Sapeurs* still, especially those who go around musicians, receive donations of clothes from their idol or protector musicians, who are models, dressed in haute couture houses.

Though expensive and overpriced, the luxury clothes of the *Sapeurs* are bought after harsh sacrifices. It is this symbolism of possessing objects of great value that accentuates megalomania in the *Sapeur*. He will say that he is reigning by displaying his clothing trophies like a cup conquered on enemy lands.

This endowment of luxury clothes increases the feeling of recognition of *Sapeurs* towards their mentor "mikilists"

(Congolese diaspora living in the West most often) or high priests musicians.

A *sapeur* devotes his money and life to dress himself with expensive and elegant brand clothes from West cities and to display them ostentatiously in public [19].

Another kind of *Sapeurs* borrows clothes from relatives, for a rental fee. They rent these clothes for 24 to 48 hours; put them to show themselves in front of a known or unknown public in order to satisfy so little their ego bruised by the conditions in which they live.

In the case of loans, certain *Sapeurs* collaborate with clothing shops and serve as street models who wear clothes for a few hours, to inform the interested public about the product ranges they display and places where they "buy" them.

Indeed, a *Sapeur* will often wear clothes, without removing the labels, in order to address all those who want to buy these kinds of clothes, and well-sapped as is the one who carries them.

Finally, the *Sapeurs* receive donations of clothes from various people, whom they affectionately call great donors *Preso, Mopao, Fulangenge*.

We will add another mode of procuring clothes: personal creation. Some *Sapeurs* themselves make the clothes they wear because they are couturiers. Still others, themselves make the shoes they put on, for they are great shoemakers. This is the case of Papa Griffes, a creator of shoes that he wears or makes available to other *Sapeurs* who reign at the *Sape* competitions held in Kinshasa.

However, about names of *Sapeurs*, the perception is different among the students of Kinshasa and those of Lubumbashi. Coutant [20] inform us that Papa Wemba & Emeneya are the pivot of the great *Sapeurs* of Kinshasa. Going in the same way, we discover that Kinshasa students put Papa Wemba (30.2%), Emeneya (20.8%) and Stervos Niarcos (9.43%) at the head of the list. When Lubumbashi students cited more only Papa Wemba (29.5%), following by some musicians like Koffi olomide (17.9%), Fally Ipupa (12.8%), JB Mpiana (7.69%), Werrason (7.69%). Emeneya (6.41%) and Stervos Niarcos (1.28%) are at the foot of the list.

African fashion industry is emerging in Africa as many talented designers and investors make their ways, like young fashion designers of Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroun, Senegal and Burkina Faso are growing continuously ranging from haute couture to streetwear [19,12-21].

5. Conclusion

Papa Wemba, Emeneya or Stervos Niarcos, Papa griffes, Mama africa, Bilele, Tekasala, El canto, Didier Mwanza, Colonel Jika and Maman clémentine are *Sapeurs*. But, who is *Sapeur*?

Sapeur is a person who "likes and knows dress well", puts on "beautiful, expensive or designer labels clothes", and "showing off his clothes". He is motivated by "admiration of others and promotion of himself" to satisfy his ego.

The means or modes used to obtain clothing vary from one *Sapeur* to another. They buy, receive donations or borrow. Some category of *Sapeurs* even uses the theft of

clothes, fraud or prostitution when other category exchange clothes between them or with no-Sapeurs.

However, the Lushois also consider that the *Sapeurs* resort to robbery or swindling to get the luxury clothes they put on. For a Lushois, it is inconceivable that a person who has difficulty can dispose of trunks full of luxurious clothes (doubtless suspicious), whereas for the Kinois nothing is impossible (*chance eloko pamba*⁶).

The *Sapeur* will no longer be content to dress well in luxurious garments and in harmony of color and form. But, he will also be a model, a popular star, a star that everyone grumbles. And much more, the *Sapeurs* create their own clothing. They no longer content themselves with luxurious clothes, but can buy clothes in second-hand stores and modify them as they wish.

Fashioning behavior of *Sape* must be organized in intend of pushing all fanatics of clothes to buy and employ local fashions in state of spending too much money in foreigner products.

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⁶ Chance eloko pamba: a Lingala statement (Bantu language spoken in Kinshasa) which justifies acquisition of the goods or accession to a position below his capacities and means. In other words, "luck belongs to everyone ...".