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# Masstige Consumption: A Motivation-Desire-Outcome Framework with Implications for Luxury Brand Management

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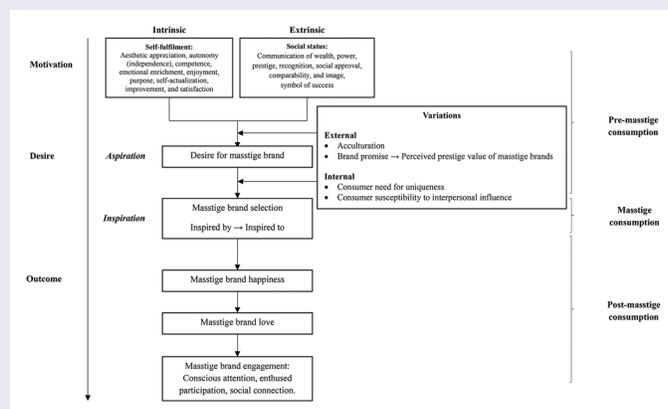
## ABSTRACT

Mass prestige (masstige) is the strategic blend of prestige and mass market appeal, targeting the aspirational middle class. Integrating extant literature on masstige consumption with extensive qualitative insights from both managers and actual users of masstige brands, this article presents a motivation-desire-outcome (MDO) framework to conceptualize masstige consumption, where luxury meets accessibility. We argue that a comprehensive understanding of masstige consumption extends beyond extrinsic social status motivations to include intrinsic self-fulfillment drivers. Through this framework, we unveil the psychological process of masstige consumption, encompassing *motivation*, *desire*, and *outcome*. Our framework also delineates how these dynamics are further influenced by *variations* such as acculturation, brand promise, need for uniqueness, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Importantly, the framework not only enriches the extant discourse on masstige consumption but also sets a forward-looking agenda for research and practical strategies in the masstige market. Through this lens, we invite masstige marketers and scholars to explore novel avenues that bridge the gap between aspiration and accessibility, thereby reshaping our understanding of luxury consumption in a mass-market context.

## KEYWORDS

Conceptual; luxury; mass prestige; masstige; self-fulfillment; social status; motivation-desire-outcome framework

## GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



## Introduction

### *The paradigm shift in luxury: From exclusivity to accessibility*

The twenty first century has witnessed a notable shift in the luxury market, fundamentally altering

its character and reach. Historically the domain of the affluent elite (Bilro et al., 2022; Jhamb et al., 2020), luxury has been democratized by the surging economic empowerment of the global middle class and their escalating aspirations for a better lifestyle (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). This

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democratization has been further accelerated by globalization and digitalization, which have made luxury products more accessible and visible to a wider audience (Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023). In response to these transformative forces, the concept of luxury has been redefined from a symbol of sheer exclusivity and wealth to a more inclusive notion of prestige that is accessible to a wider demographic (Kumar et al., 2020). This redefinition has given rise to the phenomenon of ‘masstige’—a blend of mass and prestige—which encapsulates the blending of luxury with mass appeal (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). This strategic shift by brands to embrace masstige has not only expanded the luxury market but also introduced a new vocabulary of consumer behavior that challenges traditional paradigms of luxury consumption (Alagarsamy et al., 2024). As brands navigate this new landscape, they are compelled to innovate and adapt their strategies to engage with an aspirational middle class that is increasingly influential in shaping market dynamics (Lim et al., 2022). This evolution marks a pivotal moment in the luxury sector, necessitating a reevaluation of how luxury is conceptualized, marketed, and consumed in the modern era.

### ***Beyond status: The complexity of masstige motivations***

The exploration of masstige has predominantly been anchored in the notion that such consumption serves primarily as a conduit for the middle class to manifest their elevated social status. This perspective, deeply rooted in the extrinsic dimensions of luxury consumption, suggests that masstige products are acquired as symbols of newly acquired wealth or aspirational lifestyle, reflecting a desire for social validation and inclusion (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Shahid et al., 2023; Truong et al., 2009). However, this conventional framework is increasingly being challenged by emerging research that illuminates the range of consumer motivations, revealing that the allure of masstige extends well beyond social signaling. Studies have begun to uncover a rich vein of intrinsic motivations, where self-satisfaction, personal gratification, and the pursuit of individual

happiness emerge as pivotal drivers of masstige consumption (Burhanudin, 2024; Pizzetti et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). These findings indicate that consumers are not merely using masstige brands as instruments of social positioning but are also seeking deeper, more personal connections with these brands that resonate with their inner values and aspirations. This duality of motivation—spanning the extrinsic and intrinsic—suggests that masstige consumption is a more complex and multifaceted phenomenon than previously understood, warranting a broader and more integrative analytical lens to fully capture the essence of this modern luxury paradigm.

Accordingly, this article proposes a new integrative framework: the motivation-desire-outcome (MDO) framework of masstige consumption. Drawing on the methodological approach by Vivek et al. (2012, 2014) in conceptualizing consumer engagement, this study systematically explores existing literature on masstige consumption to conceptualize the underlying motives and outcomes that define the desire for masstige brands. We further validate this conceptual framework through qualitative insights from both managerial and consumer perspectives on mass-masstige consumption. In doing so, our study offers a series of propositions that outline the journey toward masstige-based consumption, providing a structured pathway for conceptually understanding this contemporary consumer behavior.

Building on the MDO framework, the study offers both theoretical and managerial implications, along with promising directions for future research on masstige consumption. In light of the interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations highlighted by recent studies (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Pizzetti et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2023; Truong et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2024), the MDO framework suggests that masstige consumption requires a synthesis of status-driven (extrinsic) and self-fulfillment (intrinsic) motives. This integrative approach recognizes consumers as complex individuals who seek to balance societal recognition with personal contentment. Purchasing masstige brands enables consumers to signal aspirational status to their peers while simultaneously satisfying personal desires for self-fulfillment.

This dual-motivation lens leads to a more dynamic consumer-brand relationship, characterized by consumer desire for masstige brand, resulting in outcomes such as masstige brand selection, happiness, love, and engagement.

In addition, the MDO framework proposes that the interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and the desire for masstige brands is influenced by various socio-psychological and marketing-induced factors, including acculturation, brand promise, need for uniqueness, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Acknowledging these variables offers a richer understanding of masstige consumption, providing insights into when and why consumers shift between external displays of status and internal quests for fulfillment. Through this comprehensive lens, we aim to not only advance the theoretical discourse on masstige consumption but also offer actionable guidance for brands striving to navigate the complexities of the masstige market.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: we first provide a literature review on masstige consumption. Next, we present managerial and customer perspectives on masstige consumption using a qualitative inquiry. Subsequently, we leverage these insights to conceptually establish an integrative (MDO) framework of masstige consumption and present propositions for each stage of the consumption journey along with key variations. Finally, we outline theoretical and managerial implications and suggest multiple avenues for future research.

### Literature perspectives of masstige consumption

The landscape of consumer behavior and luxury is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by shifts in economic dynamics, societal values, and market innovation (Canguende-Valentim & Vale, 2023; Ma & Coelho, 2024; Naseem & Yaprak, 2023; Sharma, 2024; Tsai et al., 2021). This literature review is structured into two pivotal sub-sections that together provide a comprehensive exploration of these changes and their implications for both theory and practice. The first sub-section on 'luxury and masstige' examines the evolving nature of luxury and how masstige fits into this landscape. The second

sub-section on 'prestige-seeking behavior and masstige' explores the multifaceted nature of prestige and its implications for consumer behavior, particularly in the context of luxury and masstige markets.

While articulating the literature on the luxury landscape and its transition toward masstige, we explored articles published in this domain from 2003 through mid-2024. The year 2003 marks the introduction of the term 'masstige' by Silverstein and Fiske in their *Harvard Business Review* article. Web Appendix Table A1 provides details of the 'masstige' studies reviewed in line with reviewing guidelines and practices (Kraus et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2022; 2024; Paul et al., 2021; Tham et al., 2023).

### Luxury and masstige

Luxury, as a concept, defies a singular definition due to its inherently multidimensional and subjective nature. From a marketing and socio-economic perspective, luxury has traditionally been associated with exclusivity, high quality, and rarity (Kapferer, 2014; Wiedmann et al., 2009). However, the conceptualization of luxury is continually evolving, shaped by changing consumer perceptions and market dynamics. While some scholars like Keller (2013) emphasize intangible brand associations and premium imagery in defining luxury, others such as Vickers and Renand (2003) adopt a more holistic view, integrating functionalism, experientialism, and symbolic interactionism. This diversity in perspectives underscores the complexity of luxury as a concept and highlights the ongoing debate among scholars regarding its defining attributes (Miller & Mills, 2012; Sharma et al., 2022).

The landscape of luxury has been further complicated by the introduction of concepts like premium luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009), affordable luxury (Shahid et al., 2023), new luxury (Eckhardt et al., 2015), luxury democratization (Godley & Williams, 2009), and masstige (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). These terms reflect a strategic shift toward catering to the middle-income consumer segment, offering products that provide a sense of luxury at a more accessible price point (Lo & Yeung, 2020). Among these, masstige—a

blend of mass and prestige—stands out for its significant traction both in the marketplace and within the scholarly community (Baber et al., 2020; Das et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Joshi & Garg, 2021; Kumar et al., 2020, 2021; Lee & Cho, 2023; Lim et al., 2022; Purohit & Radia, 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Xue & Chawdhary, 2023).

Coined by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) and popularized by Paul (2015, 2018, 2019), the concept of masstige delineates itself from traditional luxury through several defining characteristics:

- a. *Product positioning.* Masstige distinguishes itself by adopting a unique positioning strategy aimed at democratizing prestige. Unlike traditional luxury, which often caters exclusively to the upper echelons of society, masstige seeks to broaden the reach of prestige, making it accessible to a wider audience. This approach capitalizes on the aspirations of consumers desiring premium experiences without the prohibitive price tags associated with luxury, effectively bridging the gap between high-end luxury and mass-market products (Kumar et al., 2020).
- b. *Value proposition.* In contrast to traditional luxury brands that often emphasize exclusivity and a ‘dream’ value, masstige brands focus on fulfilling the aspirational needs of the middle-income class by offering a compelling blend of value and prestige. This value proposition is tailored to consumers who seek products that not only elevate their social standing but also provide tangible quality and utility, making masstige an appealing choice for those who prioritize both practicality and prestige (Bae & Jo, 2024).
- c. *Pricing strategy.* From a pricing standpoint, masstige occupies a niche segment that is strategically positioned above mass-market offerings yet remains noticeably more affordable than high-end luxury products. This pricing model is central to the masstige concept, as it aims to attract the middle-income consumer by offering products that exude prestige and quality at a price point that is attainable, thereby offering a sense of luxury within reach (Paul, 2015).
- d. *Promotion strategy.* The communication of masstige brands diverges from the traditional luxury narrative of sophistication and exclusivity. Instead, masstige brands emphasize value for money, underscoring the prestige and quality consumers can access at an attainable price point. This focus on delivering value while retaining an air of prestige enables masstige brands to resonate with a consumer base that is cost-conscious yet aspirational, seeking premium experiences without the luxury price tag (Das et al., 2022b).
- e. *Place strategy.* While luxury brands may employ exclusive distribution channels to maintain an aura of rarity and exclusivity, masstige brands typically adopt a more targeted distribution strategy. This approach, characterized by controlled and selective distribution, ensures wider accessibility of masstige products without diluting their perceived prestige value. Such a strategy allows masstige brands to reach their target audience effectively while still maintaining a sense of exclusivity (Kumar et al., 2020).

These distinctive features of masstige highlight its strategic divergence from traditional luxury, showcasing how masstige brands have carved out a unique niche that caters to the evolving preferences and aspirations of today’s consumers, particularly those from the middle-income segment. This evolving understanding of masstige, set against the backdrop of traditional luxury, necessitates a reevaluation of how brands navigate the complex interplay of accessibility, aspiration, and prestige. Table 1 encapsulates the gradual evolution and deepening scholarly exploration of masstige, illustrating its distinct positioning within the luxury market.

The evolution of masstige, as delineated in Table 1, traces the trajectory from its inception to its present state, highlighting significant contributions and shifts in focus over time. This journey reflects an expanding scholarly interest in understanding how prestige and mass-market appeal can coexist within a brand or product (e.g., goods, services), challenging traditional notions of luxury and accessibility.

**Table 1.** Origin and evolution of masstige concept and research.

Key literature and timeline	Contributions and findings	Focus
<b>Origin</b>		
Silverstein and Fiske (2003)	Coined the term 'masstige' to describe products that bridge the gap between mass-market affordability and prestige luxury, offering premium quality at a price point accessible to a wider audience.	Origin and meaning
Truong et al. (2008)	Introduced 'new luxury' to represent masstige, emphasizing the role of status and conspicuous consumption in driving demand for these products.	Positioning
Truong et al. (2009)	Viewed masstige as a strategic positioning for brands, using empirical methods to explore the relationship between perceived prestige, price premium, and consumer attraction to masstige offerings.	
<b>Evolution</b>		
Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012)	Examined bandwagon luxury consumption, where purchases are influenced by a product's popularity within social groups, linking this behavior to masstige products.	Psychological (bandwagon)
Magnoni and Roux (2012)	Highlighted the implications of step-down line extensions for brand-consumer relationships, addressing concerns of luxury dilution in the context of masstige.	Luxury dilution
Granot et al. (2013)	Introduced the concept of 'populence,' characterized by the mass production of premium goods and services, further expanding the understanding of new luxury paradigms.	New luxury paradigm of populence
<b>Scale and theory development</b>		
Paul (2015)	Introduced the masstige mean score scale (MMSS) to quantitatively assess the mass prestige value of brands, providing a tool for empirical research in masstige marketing.	Scale development for masstige
Paul (2018)	Formulated the masstige theory and introduced the hexagon model and a three-stage process model for building prestigious brands, along with validating the MMSS.	Theory development for masstige
<b>Practical application and differentiation</b>		
Kumar and Paul (2018)	Utilized the MMSS to estimate the masstige value of laptop brands, demonstrating the scale's practical applicability in assessing brand positioning.	Practical application of masstige scale
Das et al. (2021)	Investigated the differentiation between bandwagon and snob luxury purchase motives, emphasizing the role of consumer need for uniqueness, social comparison, and psychological entitlement.	Practical differentiation of masstige and traditional luxury
<b>Socio-cultural influence</b>		
Bilro et al. (2022)	Explored how masstige strategies can shape customer sentiments and attitudes toward brands on social media, indicating the importance of digital strategies for masstige brands.	Social sentiment and media strategy for masstige brands
Das et al. (2022c)	Studied the mass prestige quotient of masstige brands among different ethnic groups, highlighting the influence of ethnic identity and acculturation based on Barry's model.	Cultural influence of masstige perception
<b>Further scale development</b>		
Alagarsamy et al. (2024)	Demonstrated the effectiveness of the MMSS as an alternative to traditional consumer-based brand equity scales, underscoring its utility in masstige brand evaluation.	Masstige scale as a brand equity measure
<b>Scope extension</b>		
Saha et al. (2023)	Extended the concept of masstige to the B2B market, opening new avenues for research and application of masstige strategies beyond the consumer market.	Masstige from B2C to B2B
Das et al. (2024)	Explored the effects of monetary discounts on consumer response toward masstige brands, highlighting that discounts positively influence potential customers but negatively impact existing customers due to differing perceptions of status while revealing that metaphoric communication can effectively mitigate these effects and align both customer groups with the brand.	Masstige brand responses to monetary discounts
Zhang et al. (2024)	Differentiated between the consumption motives of domestic and foreign masstige brands, revealing that foreign brands are often chosen for social-oriented reasons while local brands cater to self-oriented objectives.	Masstige for domestic and foreign brands
<b>Further theory development</b>		
The present study	Developed an integrated (MDO: motivation-desire-outcome) framework for masstige consumption.	Theory development for masstige consumption

### Origin and meaning

The term 'masstige' was first introduced by Silverstein and Fiske (2003), marking a pivotal moment in the study of luxury products. Conceptualizing products that offer premium quality at accessible price points, they laid the groundwork for a new category that blends mass-market appeal with prestige. Truong et al. (2008, 2009) further developed this concept by

introducing 'new luxury' and empirically testing masstige as a strategic positioning for brands, emphasizing the interplay between perceived prestige, price premium, and consumer attraction.

### Evolution

The evolution of masstige is characterized by an exploration of consumer psychology and market dynamics. Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) explored

bandwagon luxury consumption, linking the popularity of products within social groups to masstige. Magnoni and Roux (2012) examined the impact of step-down line extensions on brand-consumer relationships, addressing luxury dilution concerns. Granot et al. (2013) introduced 'populence,' expanding new luxury paradigms to include mass-produced premium goods and services.

### ***Scale and theory development***

Paul's work (2015, 2018) represents a significant leap in masstige research through the development of the masstige mean score scale (MMSS) and masstige theory. These contributions provide robust tools and theoretical frameworks for understanding and measuring the mass prestige value of brands, laying the foundation for future empirical research.

### ***Practical application and differentiation***

Kumar and Paul (2018) demonstrated the practical application of the MMSS by estimating the masstige value of laptop brands. Das et al. (2021) further differentiated masstige from traditional luxury by investigating consumer motives, highlighting the importance of uniqueness, social comparison, and psychological entitlement in luxury purchase behaviors.

### ***Socio-cultural influence***

Bilro et al. (2022) and Das et al. (2022c) explored the socio-cultural dimensions of masstige, examining how digital strategies can shape customer sentiments and how ethnic identity and acculturation influence the mass prestige quotient. These studies underscore the importance of cultural and social factors in masstige brand perception and strategy.

### ***Further scale development and scope extension***

Alagarsamy et al. (2024) validated the MMSS as an effective alternative to traditional brand equity measures. Saha et al. (2023) extended masstige concepts to the B2B market, Das et al. (2024) examined existing and potential customer responses to masstige brands under monetary discounts, and Zhang et al. (2024) explored the differing consumption motives for domestic and

foreign masstige brands, highlighting the motivations behind masstige consumption.

### ***Further theory development***

Building on the aforementioned foundational studies, this article proposes an integrated (MDO: motivation-desire-outcome) framework for masstige consumption, aiming to synthesize existing knowledge and address gaps in understanding the complex interplay of motivations that drive masstige consumption. This framework seeks to advance the theoretical discourse by incorporating both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, offering a more holistic view of the masstige phenomenon.

To summarize, the evolution of masstige from a novel concept to a well-established area of research underscores its dynamic nature and the shifting boundaries of luxury consumption. This journey highlights the interplay between societal trends and strategic marketing responses, illustrating how masstige has redefined the relationship between prestige and accessibility. As the concept has matured, it has evolved from focusing on brand positioning and status signaling to encompassing deeper motivations such as self-fulfillment and sociocultural influences. These developments not only broaden our understanding of masstige consumption but also set the stage for future research to explore its complexities across diverse markets and segments.

### ***Prestige-seeking behavior and masstige***

Prestige, a complex and multifaceted concept, has long intrigued scholars across various disciplines, leading to diverse definitions and measures that reflect its contextual variability (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Historically, prestige has been associated with societal recognition and esteem conferred upon individuals or groups, essentially reflecting a form of social approval or admiration (Roucek, 1957). This social approval is linked not only to what an individual is or does but also to their associations with valued entities or symbols. The drive for prestige is motivated by both intrinsic desires for self-fulfillment and extrinsic needs for social recognition, indicating a deep-seated interplay between personal satisfaction and societal validation (Roucek, 1957).

The rise of materialism and a growing emphasis on appearances catalyzed a shift toward more conspicuous forms of prestige-seeking, with luxury products becoming prominent symbols of status and social distinction (Powderly & MacNulty, 1990; Truong et al., 2008). The domain of luxury marketing, and more recently its modern extensions, has been pivotal in exploring the cultural, psychological, and sociological underpinnings of prestige-seeking behavior (Boisvert et al., 2023; Robertson et al., 2022). Drawing on Leibenstein's (1950) foundational work, Vigneron and Johnson (1999) encapsulated prestige-seeking within two key phenomena: the Veblen effect, emphasizing the conspicuous value of products, and the bandwagon effect, highlighting the social value derived from widespread adoption or popularity.

The advent of *masstige*, a concept blending mass accessibility with luxury prestige, has introduced a new dimension to the traditional landscape of prestige-seeking (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Wang et al., 2022). *Masstige* brands strategically position themselves to appeal to middle-class consumers by offering prestige at a reasonable premium, thus facilitating social status enhancement and self-worth affirmation through accessible luxury (Granot et al., 2013; Truong et al., 2009). This strategic positioning diverges from conventional luxury marketing, which traditionally emphasizes exclusivity and high price premiums to maintain brand prestige (Paul, 2018). *Masstige* marketing, therefore, represents a pivotal shift in brand positioning, enabling brands to penetrate new markets with offerings that encapsulate mass prestige (Boisvert et al., 2023; Paul, 2015).

To summarize, prestige-seeking behavior reflects a dynamic interplay between individual motives and societal influences, shaped by evolving market strategies that bridge traditional luxury with accessible prestige. The rise of *masstige* brands signifies a transformative phase in consumer culture, where the pursuit of prestige becomes a more inclusive endeavor, reflecting societal shifts toward democratized luxury. Consequently, the literature on luxury and its transition to *masstige* reveals a fundamental reconfiguration of consumption motives and

outcomes, redefining how prestige is perceived and pursued in contemporary markets.

### Managerial and customer perspectives of *masstige* consumption

As the nature of luxury consumption evolves, it is crucial to gain a good grasp of the managerial and customer perspectives surrounding *masstige* consumption. To capture these views, in-depth interviews were conducted with managers and actual users of *masstige* brands, employing a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). An extensive review of existing literature, which is not unusual even when using grounded theory (Lim, 2025), identified the following *masstige* brands as the focus for these interviews: Dell (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Suzuki & Kanno, 2022), Honda (Ishaq et al., 2023; Paul, 2018), iPhone (Gilal et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2024), as well as Calvin Klein, Fabindia, Maruti Nexa, and Ray-Ban (Das et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2024; Moorlock et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2022).

Managers with direct customer interactions in these *masstige* brands were approached. Of the 32 contacted, 21 (16 men and 5 women) consented to participate. Additionally, 87 customers owning the identified *masstige* brands were contacted, with 65 agreeing to be interviewed. Interview dates and timings were arranged through email or phone at public locations convenient for the participants. While the manager interviews focused on uncovering the motives behind *masstige* consumption, the customer interviews explored their motives, desires, and outcomes.

Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the findings following Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved independent transcription, detailed examination of the transcripts, and identification of key words and phrases indicating motives, desires, and outcomes. The findings were then refined through open coding (MacPhail et al., 2016) and axial coding, wherein initial codes were categorized based on similarities, differences, and emerging patterns (Goulding, 1999). Subsequently, thematic maps were prepared (Spiggle, 1994), with two independent maps developed. A collaborative session among all

authors confirmed the final map (Lim, 2025). To ensure trustworthiness (Lim, 2025), inter-coder reliability (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) and member checking mechanisms (Birt et al., 2016) were employed.

### Managerial perspectives of masstige consumption

The managers interviewed ranged in age from 25 to 56 years. Among the 21 executives who agreed to participate, 2 were from Dell, 3 from Honda, 3 from iPhone, 3 from Calvin Klein, 4 from Fabindia, 3 from Maruti Nexa, and 3 from Ray-Ban. Their work experience varied between 2 and 15 years, and they represented diverse Indian states, including Bangalore, Kolkata, and Tripura.

The discussions were conducted in a public and relaxed environment over a cup of coffee or tea, adhering to the principles of open-ended inquiry (Van Eeuwijk & Angehrn, 2017) to elicit candid and insightful responses from participants.

Follow-up and probing questions were used to explore salient points raised by the participants. The study's objectives were first explained, emphasizing the commitment to anonymity and confidentiality, followed by broad, open-ended questions (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) about their association with the brand and other relevant information. Gradually, the core question—"In your opinion, why do people buy your brand?"—was introduced (Leech, 2002).

The conversations provided valuable insights into why customers purchase masstige brands. Analysis of the statements revealed both intrinsic (self-fulfillment) and extrinsic (social status) motivations as dominant forces driving the desire to own masstige brands. Intrinsic motivations included autonomy, competence, enjoyment, purpose, and self-actualization, whereas extrinsic motivations encompassed the communication of wealth, power, prestige, recognition, and social approval (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Managerial perspectives of masstige consumption.

Third-order theme	Second-order category	First-order code	Quotes	
Intrinsic motivation	Self-fulfillment	Autonomy	"Choosing Nexa allows a customer to take control of their driving experience due to its features and customization options. This [sense of] freedom fuels their desire [and] inspires them to own one." (Rajeev, M, 45, Manager) "Fabindia epitomizes the freedom to express individual style [through] tradition. [The] diverse and versatile clothing lines offered by the brand empower both professional and personal aesthetic in line with cultur[al] values. The subtle statement 'I am my culture' inspires [customers] to buy from the brand." (Ritu, F, 39, Merchandizing Manager)	
		Competence	"Choosing Calvin Klein reflects [an] understanding of sophisticated scents. [It instills] confidence [in] identify[ing] a fragrance that resonates [one's] style. Such confidence [drives the] desire to own one as a sense of everyday presence." (Jyoti, F, 41, Store Manager)	
		Enjoyment	"Buying an iPhone is not always [about] show[ing]-off. It's a sheer enjoyment driven by seamless user experience, intuitive design, and innovation. The satisfaction of explor[ing] the boundaries of [technological] innovation inspires [the choice] as a symbol of pure pleasure." (Avishar, M, 33, Service Engineer) "Dell offers the enjoyment of navigating smooth performance [and] functionality in a trendy design. The pleasure [of seamlessly meeting] both personal and professional needs inspires choos[ing] Dell." (Neena, F, 37, Sales Professional)	
		Purpose	"A Ray-Ban aviator gives a sense of purpose by investing in timeless, high-quality accessories that offer both functionality and style. The iconic design resonates with lasting fashion choices, fueling [the] desire to [own] one." (Javed, M, 49, Store Manager) "Buying a Honda car aligns with the purpose of choosing a reliable [vehicle] that supports long-term goals of sustainability. [The] strong quality and sustainability reputation fuel the desire to own one." (Navneet, M, 44, Sales Manager).	
		Self-actualization	"Reliability, features, and innovative design of Honda spark a desire to invest in aspirations for a fulfilling lifestyle. It's a step toward [achieving] growth and self-fulfillment." (Jatin, M, 52, Sales Manager)	
	Extrinsic motivation	Social status	Communication of wealth	"A Honda communicates wealth and success. It represents sophistication and upward mobility. The desire to exhibit financial achievements inspires [many] youth to choose one." (Daljeet, M, 55, Manager)
			Power	"A Honda embodies a feeling of power and acknowledgement among peers [due to] its [strong] reputation, driving the desire to own one." (Daljeet, M, 55, Manager)
			Prestige	"A Nexa car signifies desire for prestige, as its sleek design and premium features set it apart from other brands among first time buyers. The status accompanying first-time ownership enhances social image." (Rohit, M, 39, Showroom Manager)
			Recognition	"[The] iPhone, as a status symbol, [garners] recognition within social circles. It's admir[ed] for [being] a sought-after device ... inspire[ing] the desire to elevate [one's] standing within the community." (Nidhi, F, 40, Store Manager)
			Social approval	"The chic and modern aesthetics associated with Calvin Klein command approval among friends, peers, and colleagues. [The social] approval [inspires] the choice." (Gargi, F, 35, Sales Manager) "Purchasing Fabindia clothing resonates [with] social approval, as the brand is celebrated for its culturally relevant designs. The compliments and admiration from friends and social circles inspire [customers] to buy Fabindia." (Ankur, M, 44, Store Manager)

### Customer perspectives of *masstige* consumption

The customers interviewed ranged in age from 21 to 59 years. Among the 65 participants, 12 were Dell laptop users, 5 were Honda car owners, 13 were iPhone users, 8 used Calvin Klein perfumes, 9 were Fabindia customers, 8 were Nexa car owners, and 10 used Ray-Ban glasses. Respondents represented different Indian states, including Bangalore, Kolkata, and Tripura. Two core questions were posed (Leech, 2002): “Why did you buy the brand?” and “What is your experience post-usage?”

Multiple insights emerged regarding the motives and outcomes of consumption desires for *masstige* brands. Analysis of the responses revealed that intrinsic motivations (aesthetic appreciation, autonomy and independence, emotional enrichment, mastery and competence, self-improvement, and self-satisfaction) and extrinsic motivations (recognition, social comparability, social image, and symbol of success) play a key role in creating consumer desire for *masstige* brands. The desire for *masstige* brands also led to positive brand-related outcomes, including brand happiness and brand love, which in turn fostered brand engagement as reflected through conscious attention, enthusiastic participation, and social connection (Vivek et al., 2014) (Table 3).

mastery and competence, self-improvement, and self-satisfaction) and extrinsic motivations (recognition, social comparability, social image, and symbol of success) play a key role in creating consumer desire for *masstige* brands. The desire for *masstige* brands also led to positive brand-related outcomes, including brand happiness and brand love, which in turn fostered brand engagement as reflected through conscious attention, enthusiastic participation, and social connection (Vivek et al., 2014) (Table 3).

### Toward an integrative framework for *masstige* consumption

The literature review, along with managerial and customer perspectives on consumption motives and outcomes, form the basis for the MDO framework of *masstige* consumption. This framework outlines

**Table 3.** Customer perspectives of *masstige* consumption.

Third-order theme	Second-order category	First-order code	Quotes	
Intrinsic motivation	Self-fulfillment	Aesthetic appreciation	“I was instantly drawn to the design of ‘wayfarer oval.’ These glasses are beautiful and feel true to who I am.” (Anuradha, F, 28).	
		Autonomy and independence	“Honda cars resonate with my sense of beauty.” (Deepti, F, 45) “It does not matter how others [perceive my scent]. I use Calvin Klein [because] I genuinely believe I smell good.” (Anshika, F, 22) “[The] iPhone helps me stay true to myself.” (Rishi, M, 38)	
	Emotional enrichment	Mastery and competence	“Every time I use my Ray-Ban, it’s just a small moment of joy in my day.” (Varun, M, 30) “The design, smell, [and] elegance of Eternity enrich my [emotions] to another level.” (Sandeepa, F, 30) “[The] Honda Elevate strikes the perfect balance between style and value.” (Rohit, M, 39)	
		Self-improvement	“I always look for brands that give me the best value, and Fabindia fulfills my quest.” (Raktim, M, 55) “[For me, the] iPhone is [about] leveling up my lifestyle without going overboard.” (Rina, F, 42) “My [Maruti Nexa] S-Cross is a testament [to] my self-improvement [journey].” (Rana, M, 44)	
		Self-satisfaction	“Fabindia offers great quality and culturally rich outfits without [having me to] overpay, and it just feels good to treat myself.” (Nisha, F, 32) “I feel great knowing I’ve invested in something [Dell laptop] that’s both affordable and high-quality.” (Tapan, M, 39)	
	Extrinsic motivation	Social status	Recognition	“Many of my colleagues own an iPhone. Owning one puts me on the same level.” (Mahima, F, 40) “Driving a [Honda] City definitely helps me fit in [with] my corporate circle.” (Brijush, M, 37)
			Social comparability	“Most of coworkers use Dell laptops, so getting one makes me feel [I’m] on the same level.” (Shiva, M, 48) “Wearing Calvin Klein gives me a sense of belonging without feeling out of place among my friends.” (Nanda, M, 20)
			Social image	“Wearing Fabindia gives me a cultured look, elevating my social standing.” (Arohi, F, 37) “[The] iPhone 16 boosts my standing in society.” (Dhriti, F, 38)
			Symbol of Success	“Buying an [Maruti Nexa] XL6 at the age of 25 shows that I’ve made it and I’m doing well for myself.” (Rishu, M, 25) “Wearing Ray-Ban is my way of showing success to others.” (Riddhi, F, 20)
		Brand happiness	Happiness	“Ray-Ban Aviators instantly elevate my style and make me feel cool. It’s a happy feeling.” (Basant, M, 39) “Capturing memories with an iPhone and cherishing them when [I’m] alone is a happy feeling.” (Sourin, M, 32)
Brand love			Love	“Fabindia [represents] my love for traditional craftsmanship.” (Jishnu, M, 58) “[Honda] City is just not just a car for me ... it’s an extension of what I love the most.” (Ruparel, M, 48)
Brand engagement		Conscious attention	“The more I use Calvin Klein, the more I get curious [about] how they blend the scent.” (Reshmi, 20, F) “People notice the culturally rich [and] unique designs Fabindia offers ... it makes me feel proud of my choice.” (Suruchi, F, 25)	
			Enthusied participation	“Every time I drive my [Honda] City, I feel excited. It’s an invitation for adventures and spontaneous trips with friends.” (Ruparel, M, 48) “[Working on] group projects [with] my [Dell] laptop always get me energized. Dell is reliable and easier to handle in collaborative work.” (Smiti, F, 22)
		Social connection	“Using my iPhone is always fun when I’m sharing photos with friends or playing games together. Socializing [has never been] more enjoyable.” (Tripti, 33, F) “Long drive or just cruising around in my Nexa with friends is always an experience to cherish.” (Rajdeep, M, 41)	

the consumer journey from initial motives to final consumption outcomes. The MDO framework is guided by the integration of four well-known theories: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2015), expectation-confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), and the engagement model (Vivek et al., 2012, 2014), to capture this journey comprehensively.

Self-determination theory integrates personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning to explain human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The theory suggests that two main types of motivation—intrinsic and extrinsic—drive goal-directed behavior. While extrinsic motivation arises from external factors, intrinsic motivation originates from within, driven by core values, interests, and personal sense of morality. Based on self-determination theory, the MDO framework posits that both intrinsic and extrinsic motives influence masstige consumption behavior, as supported by the literature and empirical data.

We further connect these motives to desire through goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968), which posits that goals serve as key drivers of human behavior by directing attention, effort, and persistence toward achieving desired outcomes. We argue that when consumers are extrinsically or intrinsically motivated toward a masstige brand, they establish a clear goal to obtain the brand, thereby generating a desire (the need to experience) for the brand.

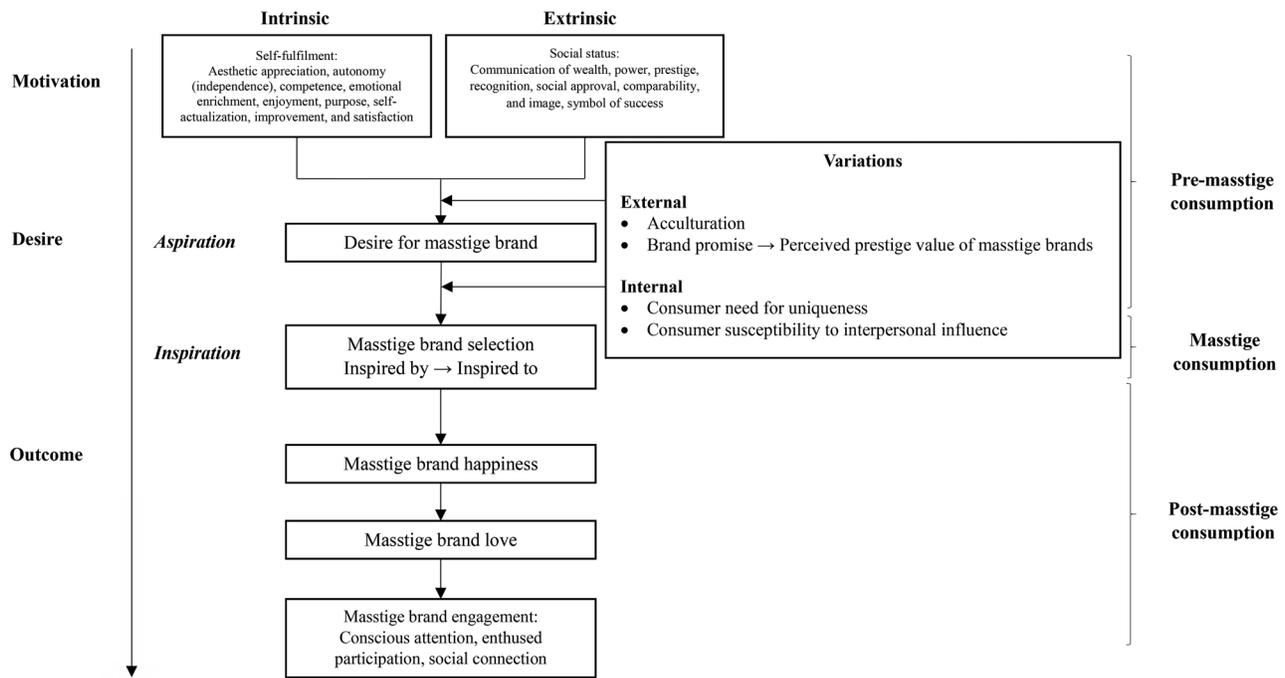
The MDO framework then integrates expectation-confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) to explain the consumption outcomes of brand happiness and brand love. Expectation-confirmation theory posits that positive consumption outcomes (confirmation) are influenced by belief systems formed through evaluating performance against expectations. Grounded in this theory, we argue that the interaction between desired and actual consumption triggers two critical emotional outcomes: brand happiness (the initial satisfaction derived from consuming the brand in line with expectations) and brand love (a deeper emotional connection that emerges when brand happiness is sustained).

Finally, the MDO framework incorporates the engagement model proposed by Vivek et al. (2012, 2014) to illustrate that brand love leads to

brand engagement. Vivek et al. (2012) define engagement as “the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or activities, initiated by either the customer or the organization” (p. 133). Further, Vivek et al. (2014) classify engagement into three dimensions: conscious attention (the degree of interest in interacting with the focus of engagement), enthused participation (zealous reactions and feelings associated with interacting with the brand), and social connection (interaction enhanced by the inclusion of others, indicating mutual or reciprocal actions in a social context). Based on these theoretical foundations and empirical findings, we posit that brand happiness following consumption leads to brand engagement, reflected through these three dimensions. [Figure 1](#) below illustrates the MDO framework of masstige consumption, encapsulating the consumer journey from initial motivations to the eventual outcomes.

The MDO framework in [Figure 1](#) synthesizes the progression of masstige consumption, delineating the connections between motivations, desire, and the subsequent outcomes. It presents a coherent, literature-based mapping of the consumer journey, starting from initial attraction to masstige brands and resulting in enduring engagement. This framework captures the essence, experience, and processes that characterize masstige consumption.

According to Kasser and Ryan (1996), extrinsic motives are oriented toward achieving recognition and social acceptance while intrinsic motives focus on fulfilling personal and internal needs such as self-fulfillment (Kim et al., 2003). Hence, the interplay between how individuals perceive themselves within society (Truong, 2010) and their personal fulfillment (Chaplin & John, 2007) shapes consumer engagement with masstige brands (Purohit & Radia, 2022; Sheldon et al., 2004). When an individual’s aspirations ignite a desire for masstige brands, they enter a state of inspiration—a motivational stance encompassing both being “inspired by” and being “inspired to” (Ryan & Deci, 2003). This connection bridges the gap between intention (aspiring to a masstige brand) and action (acquiring a masstige brand), resulting in the behavioral manifestation of brand selection and purchase intention (Das et al., 2022b).



**Figure 1.** The motivation-desire-outcome (MDO) framework for masstige consumption.

Notes: The framework depicted in Figure 1 presents the motivation-desire-outcome (MDO) framework for masstige consumption, which encapsulates the journey from pre-consumption motivations to post-consumption manifestations. This framework unravels the complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that fuel the desire for consuming masstige brands.

The acquisition and consumption of masstige brands are associated with brand happiness, which is supported by neoclassical economic theories positing a positive relationship between consumption and well-being (Noll & Weick, 2015). Studies by Kumar et al. (2021) and Nobre et al. (2023) reinforce this notion in the context of masstige, illustrating how masstige consumption contributes to brand happiness. This sense of happiness fosters emotional connections (Blackston, 1995), paving the way for brand love—a deep emotional predisposition toward a brand (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). These emotional bonds facilitate consumer engagement, defined as the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with the masstige brand or the offering organization, as reflected through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Das et al., 2022b; Harmeling et al., 2017; Junaid et al., 2019).

It is crucial to recognize that the journey through the MDO framework is not uniform for all consumers. The literature on masstige acknowledges potential variations within the framework, influenced by various socio-psychological and marketing-induced factors. For instance, the acculturation patterns of consumers can shape

consumption preferences and experiences (Das et al., 2022b) while the brand promise can shape the perceived prestige value of a brand, altering the allure and desirability of masstige offerings (Wiedmann et al., 2009). An individual's need for uniqueness (Rodrigues et al., 2024) and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Das et al., 2021) can also play pivotal roles in determining the extent to which intrinsic or extrinsic motives drive masstige consumption.

To summarize, the MDO framework while providing a structured path from masstige consumption motivations to outcomes, also accommodates the diversity and fluidity inherent in consumer motivations. This approach enables a deeper understanding of masstige consumption, recognizing that consumer engagement with masstige brands is a complex, dynamic process influenced by a constellation of factors. The subsequent sub-sections will dissect each component of this integrative framework in detail.

### Motivations

Understanding the motivations behind consumer behavior is essential for comprehending the

complex decision-making processes that lead to the purchase of masstige brands. Motivations are the driving forces that explain why individuals engage in particular behaviors, including the consumption of the luxury brands (Graham & Weiner, 2012).

Luxury consumption is predominantly driven by the desire to exhibit social status, project wealth, and affirm social standing and personal success. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption remains foundational, suggesting that luxury products serve as visible markers of affluence. Subsequent studies have further reinforced this notion. Wiedmann et al. (2009) identified status value, rooted in exclusivity and social symbolism, as a key motivator for luxury consumption. Similarly, De Barnier et al. (2012) and Shukla et al. (2016) indicated that consumers often seek differentiation through luxury products to signal success and elite status. Seo and Buchanan-Oliver (2019) emphasized the role of social visibility as a luxury consumption motive to enhance one's social image. More recent research by Amatulli et al. (2021) and Jiang et al. (2023) continues to emphasize the significance of luxury products as status symbols, even in emerging markets.

Early studies on masstige consumption also highlighted social status as a predominant motive, but with a focus on middle-income consumers (e.g., Kim et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2020; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Truong et al., 2009). Foundational research by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) and subsequent work by Truong et al. (2009) underscore the role of masstige brands in fulfilling consumers' desires to showcase their achievements and affiliations. Kumar et al. (2020), in their review article, also identified social status as the predominant motive for masstige consumption. However, later studies challenged this notion, arguing that masstige consumption can also be intrinsically driven and deeply rooted in self-fulfillment, encompassing the pursuit of personal contentment and satisfaction. For example, Boisvert et al. (2023) illustrated that the quest for self-esteem and social validation can stimulate middle-class consumers' willingness to pay a premium for masstige brands, reflecting an internalized motive that transcends mere status signaling.

Purohit and Radia (2022) highlighted that the drive for status can spark aspirations for elitism among the middle class, thereby intensifying the intention to purchase masstige brands. Loureiro et al. (2018) and Mansoor and Paul (2022) have also identified self-pleasing and self-indulgence as intrinsic motives that further fuel consumers' desires for masstige brands.

Our qualitative exploration of managerial and customer perspectives also indicates the prominence of both extrinsic and intrinsic motives in shaping desires for masstige consumption. Specifically, intrinsic motivations include aesthetic appreciation, autonomy (independence), competence, emotional enrichment, enjoyment, purpose, self-actualization, improvement, and satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivations encompass the communication of wealth, power, prestige, recognition, social approval, comparability, and image, and symbol of success.

These findings suggest that desires for masstige engagement are guided by both external portrayals of success and the internal gratification derived from the product. This dual motivation underscores the need for masstige marketers to understand and address both the visible and invisible forces that shape consumer preferences and purchase behaviors. As such, marketing strategies should be designed to resonate with the aspirational nature of the masstige market, catering to the consumers' need for external recognition as well as their pursuit of personal satisfaction and happiness.

### ***Desire***

Desire can be understood as a product of aspiration and inspiration. Aspirations encapsulate the ambitions and hopes that guide consumer attitudes and drive behavior toward achieving certain goals (Javalgi & Grossman, 2016). Kasser and Ryan (1996) dichotomize aspirations into two categories: extrinsic aspirations, which are concerned with attaining external recognition, and intrinsic aspirations, which are focused on personal growth and self-fulfillment. These aspirations act as catalysts, fostering desires that transition into inspiration, initiating a motivational force that propels individuals toward

decision-making and action (Das et al., 2021; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kim et al., 2003).

Within the context of masstige consumption, extrinsic aspirations are particularly salient as they resonate with the social fabric of the middle-income class, for whom prestige and status are significant (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005). The intrinsic aspect of aspirations is equally vital; it is often reflected in the pride and personal satisfaction derived from owning a masstige brand, such as being an Apple smartphone owner (Bauer et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2021).

The desire for masstige brands serves a pronounced social function, often influenced by significant interpersonal effects and the desire for social integration within certain reference groups (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Extrinsic benefits such as conformity, social status, and recognition are powerful drivers of consumer desire for masstige brands (Correia et al., 2019; Das et al., 2021; Loureiro et al., 2018; Ramadan, 2019). On the intrinsic side, personal effects like emotional attachment to a brand also catalyze aspirations, nurturing an intrinsic desire for masstige brands (Das et al., 2022b; Loureiro et al., 2018). Desire is defined as a psychological state where an individual is motivated to act or achieve a specific outcome, representing a crucial precursor to decision-making (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2004).

These dynamics are well reflected in our qualitative studies. For instance, the comment “Choosing Nexa allows a customer to take control of their driving experience due to its features and customization options. This [sense of] freedom fuels their desire [and] inspires them to own one” (Rajeev, M, 45, Manager) highlights autonomy—an intrinsic motivation—as a driver of desire for the brand. Likewise, Mahima (F, 40), an iPhone customer, stated that “Many of my colleagues own an iPhone. Owning one puts me on the same level,” which underscores the role of social recognition—an extrinsic motivation—in creating desire for a masstige brand.

The framework thus posits that both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations, fueled by corresponding motives, ignite the desire for masstige brands. This understanding of desire backed by aspirations is pivotal, as it underscores the interplay of societal influences and personal fulfillment, shaping the trajectory

of consumer choices and experiences. Accordingly, we propose the following:

**Proposition 1.** Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations will drive the desire for masstige consumption.

In psychology, inspiration is conceptualized as a state of heightened motivation, a kind of psychological arousal that is sparked by the perception of new possibilities, leading individuals to translate insight into action (Oleynick et al., 2014; Thrash et al., 2010; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In marketing, this concept is adapted to describe a consumer’s transient motivational state that prompts the progression from an idea’s reception to the intrinsic pursuit of a goal related to consumption (Böttger et al., 2017; Das et al., 2022d). This transition is facilitated by two core components: the activation component, being ‘*inspired by*,’ which encompasses the transcendent realization and evocation of new ideas, and the intention component, being ‘*inspired to*,’ which relates to the motivation to actualize these ideas through action (Khoi et al., 2021; Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

Within the context of masstige branding and marketing, the inspirational process is fueled by aspirations (desires) that act as precursors to inspiration (selections). As demonstrated in studies such as Das et al. (2022b), various dimensions of consumer aspiration trigger the activation component of inspiration, leading to the intention component which is reflective in the actual purchase of masstige products. This is further confirmed by our qualitative findings. For example, Anuradha (F, 28), an owner of Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses, remarked, “I was instantly drawn to the design of ‘wayfarer oval.’ These glasses are beautiful and feel true to who I am,” indicating that the aesthetics of the brand serve as an internal motive creating desire and a subsequent state of being “inspired by” the brand’s aesthetics to being “inspired to” own a pair of Ray-Ban Wayfarers.

Our framework thus posits that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations shape desires, which in turn catalyze inspiration for masstige brands. This inspiration can be seen as bifurcated into being ‘inspired by’—a recognition and appreciation of the masstige brand’s values (e.g., aesthetics)—and ‘inspired to’—the subsequent intention and

determination to engage with the brand. This transition from cognitive acknowledgment ('inspired by') to tangible behavior ('inspired to') is a critical pathway leading to positive consumption outcomes such as brand happiness. This initial satisfaction may deepen over time into brand love, characterized by an emotional connection and loyalty to the brand, and eventually manifest in brand engagement, where consumers not only repeatedly purchase the brand but also actively endorse and advocate for it. Through this lens, inspiration in the masstige context is not just a transient emotional state but a dynamic process that bridges the gap between internal motivations and external actions, resulting in a meaningful relationship with the brand. Understanding this process is crucial for masstige marketers seeking to create and maintain long-term engagement (Lim et al., 2022). We thus propose that:

**Proposition 2.** Consumers inspired by the desire for masstige brand consumption will be inspired to engage in actual consumption.

### Outcomes

The outcome of this process results in a series of manifestations, which are observable in the consumer's relationship with the masstige brand post-purchase. Initially, this may manifest as masstige brand happiness, where the consumer experiences a sense of joy and satisfaction from their purchase. Over time, this happiness can evolve into brand love, reflecting a deeper emotional connection and loyalty to the brand. The ultimate manifestation is brand engagement, wherein the consumer not only regularly purchases the brand but also actively participates in and advocates for various brand initiatives, becoming a true brand ambassador.

### Brand happiness

The consumption of masstige brands has been consistently linked to the experiential outcome of brand happiness. This concept pertains to the emotional gratification consumers derive across various brand touchpoints (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017). This is well reflected both in the literature and in the qualitative studies we employed. The literature suggests that the high perceived prestige

of a masstige brand can induce happiness by fulfilling consumers' motives related to status, self-fulfillment, and relational dynamics that reinforce their ideal self-concept (Hanslin & Rindell, 2014; Tu & Hsee, 2016). Purohit and Radia (2022) further highlight that the vanity value associated with masstige brands—whereby individuals use consumption to project personal accomplishments—can be a significant driver of brand happiness, as it allows consumers to impress and influence their social circles. Baalbaki and Guzmán (2016) support this view, indicating that the exclusivity and rarity associated with prestigious brands are intimately connected with the experience of happiness.

These insights are echoed in the qualitative findings from our study. For instance, Basant (M, 39) commented that “Ray-Ban Aviators instantly elevate my style and make me feel cool. It's a happy feeling,” highlighting how the perceived sense of style and being “cool” drives post-consumption happiness. Similarly, Sourin (M, 32) shared his experience as an iPhone owner: “Capturing memories with an iPhone and cherishing them when [I'm] alone is a happy feeling,” indicating how nostalgia and image quality contribute to consumption-driven happiness. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 3.** Consumption of masstige brand will be positively associated with brand happiness

### Brand love

Brand love extends beyond mere satisfaction and happiness to represent a deep, passionate emotional attachment that a consumer develops toward a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). This emotional bond is often likened to human interpersonal love but encompasses broader psychological dimensions such as brand emotions, passion, and valuation (Batra et al., 2012). Robertson et al. (2022) argue that while personalized interactions may be challenging for masstige brands due to their mass-market strategy, the happiness consumers experience post-consumption frequently blossoms into brand love, positively influencing brand equity. In addition, moments cherished by consumers in association with a masstige brand can deepen into brand love

(Mansoor & Paul, 2022). Indeed, Joshi and Garg (2021) evidenced that brand experiences, especially among Generation Z consumers, often transition from brand happiness to love. Comments obtained from customers further confirm the phenomenon of happiness converting into brand love. For example, Jishnu (M, 58), a user of Fabindia, shared: “Fabindia [represents] my love for traditional craftsmanship,” indicating how happiness derived from consuming Fabindia’s products evolved into love for the brand. Similarly, Ruparel (M, 48) expressed his sentiment for his Honda City car: “[Honda] City is just not just a car for me ... it’s an extension of what I love the most,” illustrating how the emotional attachment to his car epitomizes his broader sense of love and connection. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 4.** Brand happiness will be positively associated with brand love.

### **Brand engagement**

Brand engagement is defined as the positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity that a consumer participates during interactions with a brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2022; Vivek et al., 2012). Such interactions can be initiated by the brand itself, by the consumer, or even by other consumers (Vivek et al., 2014). In the context of masstige consumption, brand engagement captures consumer participation in brand interactions based on post-consumption experiences, which are reflected through consumers’ thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding the masstige brand (Das et al., 2022b).

Vivek et al. (2014) categorize engagement into three dimensions: conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection. Happiness stemming from the consumption of masstige brands acts as a catalyst for such engagement, often channeled through brand love (Rodrigues et al., 2024). For instance, Robertson et al. (2022) emphasize the critical roles of brand love and loyalty in fostering brand engagement, as they shape the consumer’s cognition and affect toward the brand. Likewise, Shahid et al. (2023) suggest that the perceived coolness associated with a masstige brand—a factor contributing to brand happiness (Moorlock et al., 2023)—is a significant

determinant in shaping consumers’ brand engagement through brand love.

These insights are further corroborated by comments from masstige brand owners, which reflect the dimensions of engagement such as conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection. For example, Reshmi (F, 20), a user of Calvin Klein, shared: “The more I use Calvin Klein, the more I get curious [about] how they blend the scent,” indicating her conscious attention toward the brand as a form of engagement. Similarly, Smiti (F, 22), an owner of a Dell laptop, stated: “[Working on] group projects [with] my [Dell] laptop always get me energized. Dell is reliable and easier to handle in collaborative work,” highlighting enthused participation, another form of engagement with the brand. Rajdeep (M, 41) mentioned: “Long drive or just cruising around in my Nexa with friends is always an experience to cherish,” demonstrating the social connection component of engagement, which extends beyond the product (Baleno) to the brand format (Nexa). Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 5.** Brand love will be positively associated with brand engagement.

In synthesizing these concepts, the framework posits that masstige brand consumption leads to a series of interconnected emotional states, starting with brand happiness, which can evolve into brand love and result in brand engagement. A masstige brand that successfully engenders love is likely to achieve higher levels of brand engagement, indicating a comprehensive and rewarding consumer-brand relationship. Each manifestation is not isolated but is part of a continuum of consumer experience that reflects the evolving relationship between consumers and masstige brands. Understanding these manifestations is crucial for marketers aiming to create enduring bonds with their customers, ensuring not just a transaction but a loyal, engaged, and loving customer base.

### **Variations**

Variations in consumer behavior toward masstige brands emerge from a complex interplay of external and internal factors, each significantly

influencing the consumer's engagement with the brand. These factors elicit a diverse range of responses among consumers, leading to distinctive consumption experiences that extend beyond the fundamental motivations of self-fulfillment and social status.

Externally, acculturation tendencies and the brand promise—which shapes the perceived prestige value of masstige brands—are critical. Acculturation affects how consumers, with differing levels of cultural integration, perceive and interact with masstige brands while the brand promise sets expectations that, when met, enhance the brand's perceived prestige and appeal (Das et al., 2022c; Mo & Wong, 2019; Purohit & Radia, 2022; Ramadan, 2019; Tsai et al., 2013).

Internally, psychological factors such as consumers' need for uniqueness and their susceptibility to interpersonal influence significantly shape their approach to masstige brands. The need for uniqueness drives consumers toward masstige brands that offer distinctive qualities within an accessible range while susceptibility to interpersonal influence determines how much consumers are swayed by the opinions and behaviors of others (Das et al., 2021; Iyer et al., 2022; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

These external and internal variations can modify the interconnections among the elements of the proposed masstige consumption framework, influencing the trajectory from initial motivations to ultimate brand-related outcomes. Recognizing and understanding these variations are paramount for masstige marketers aiming to develop strategic approaches that align with the needs and inclinations of their target consumers.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of masstige brand consumption, encompassing the process by which individuals' values, norms, and behaviors are influenced by exposure to a new culture (Ashaduzzaman et al., 2021; Berry, 2003). Hofstede (2011) describes culture as the “collective programming of the mind,” distinguishing members of one group from another, whereas acculturation refers to the modifications in an individual's cultural patterns as a result of

interacting with a different culture. Berry (1997) outlined four acculturation strategies: integration, where individuals incorporate elements from both their original and new cultures; assimilation, where the new culture is adopted at the expense of the original culture; separation, where individuals hold onto their original culture while resisting the new culture; and marginalization, where individuals show little interest in maintaining ties with either culture. These acculturation patterns influence how consumers perceive the prestige of masstige brands.

Studies have shown that individuals with different acculturation tendencies have distinct perceptions of prestige in the context of masstige brands (Das et al., 2022c; Mo & Wong, 2019). Tsai et al. (2013) found that Chinese consumers who adopted American individualistic cultural traits were more inclined toward snob luxuries, whereas those who identified with Chinese collectivist traits favored bandwagon luxuries. Paul (2018) observed that a brand's perceived prestige can vary significantly across different markets due to the acculturation patterns prevalent among the local population. More recently, Das et al. (2022c) demonstrated that the prestige perception of Ray-Ban as a masstige fashion accessory brand varied notably based on consumers' acculturation patterns. Specifically, while assimilation, integration, and marginalization acculturation patterns perceived Ray-Ban sunglasses as a masstige brand in India, consumers exhibiting separation as an acculturation pattern did not perceive Ray-Ban as a masstige brand.

Cultural factors, such as collectivism versus individualism and power distance, also shape consumption preferences for masstige brands by influencing cultural worldviews (Shahid et al., 2024). For instance, motives for masstige brand consumption in collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Japan) are often guided by social conformity and group belonging. In contrast, in individualistic cultures (e.g., the U.K., the U.S.), personal expression and uniqueness, aligned with the higher need for individuality, are the primary motives for owning a masstige brand. A relevant case is the success of the smartphone brand Xiaomi in China and India but not in the U.S. While Xiaomi's mass-prestige appeal—based on social

approval, conformity, and community belonging—positioned the brand as prestigious in these collectivist countries, this appeal did not resonate as strongly with American consumers, who gravitate toward brands like Apple and Samsung that offer more individualistic and status-driven appeals. Power distance also plays a significant role in masstige brand preferences (Pizzetti et al., 2023). For example, the success of masstige brands like Zara in high power distance cultures such as India contrasts with the success of brands like COS in low power distance cultures such as Scandinavia (Paul, 2018). Zara's success in India can be attributed to its communication as a symbol of upward mobility and social status—traits typical of high power distance societies. Meanwhile, the success of COS in Scandinavian countries is more relatable to low power distance traits such as equality and modesty.

In our framework, we thus posit that a consumer's acculturation will significantly determine the likelihood of converting the desire for a masstige brand into an actual purchase. Understanding acculturation can help masstige marketers tailor their strategies to resonate with consumers' cultural identities and preferences, effectively bridging the gap between aspiration and action in masstige brand consumption. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 6.** The relationship between motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic) and desire for masstige consumption will vary depending on consumers' acculturation tendencies.

### **Brand promise**

The brand promise is integral to establishing the perceived prestige value of masstige brands. It is a measure of a consumer's positive reactions to the unique aspects of a brand's marketing mix relative to similar offerings from other brands (Qiao et al., 2022). A high perceived brand value is indicative of (potential) profits and is a direct consequence of strong, favorable, and unique brand perceptions (Keller, 2020). The masstige literature suggests that a customer's aspiration to acquire a masstige brand is profoundly influenced by the perceived value of that brand (Gountas et al., 2012; Overby et al., 2005). Studies have

shown that this perceived brand value plays a crucial role in transforming consumer aspiration into a tangible desire to acquire the brand (Ramadan, 2019; Singh, 2024). To quantify the perceived prestige value of a masstige brand, Paul (2015) developed the masstige mean score scale (MMSS), a 10-item measure. According to this scale, brands scoring above 60 (out of 70) are considered "top of the mind" masstige brands, indicative of a strong market presence and high prestige. Scores between 50-60 suggest a recognized masstige brand within a specific market but not at the highest echelon, whereas scores between 40-50 indicate brands that have not yet solidified their masstige identity but show potential for future development. Brands scoring below 30 are not well recognized or have failed to establish mass prestige within the market. Utilizing the MMSS, several brands have been identified and confirmed as masstige brands across various markets, such as Louis Vuitton (LV) in Japan (Paul, 2015), Dell and HP as laptop brands in India (Kumar & Paul, 2018), Fabindia for women's fashion in India (Das et al., 2022a), and Apple as a smartphone brand in markets including India (Baber et al., 2020), Italy (Iaia et al., 2022), and Serbia (Kumar et al., 2021). In our framework, the brand promise and its influence on perceived prestige value are posited as crucial determinants of whether the consumer's aspiration (desire) for a masstige brand will lead to the 'inspired to' stage—ultimately resulting in the selection of the brand. This understanding is vital for masstige marketers, as it highlights the importance of delivering on the brand promise to cultivate and maintain the brand's perceived prestige, thereby ensuring sustained consumer interest and loyalty. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 7.** The relationship between motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic) and desire for masstige consumption will vary depending on consumers' perception of brand promise.

### **Consumer need for uniqueness**

The consumer need for uniqueness is defined as the drive to distinguish oneself from others through the acquisition, use, and disposition of consumer goods to develop and enhance personal

and social identity (Tian et al., 2001). This need is categorized into three distinct behaviors: creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity (Ruvio et al., 2008; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Creative choice counter-conformity involves adopting a unique style within the boundaries of social norms and traditions, whereas unpopular choice counter-conformity describes the pursuit of distinctive products that may deviate from social norms while avoidance of similarity is characterized by a deliberate aversion to products perceived as commonplace to maintain a sense of individuality (Abosag et al., 2020). The literature supports the notion that the pursuit of unique products contributes to crafting a distinctive social image and serves as an inspiration for consumers to use these products (Das et al., 2021; Jebarajakirthy & Das, 2021; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Ruvio, 2008). Therefore, the perceived uniqueness of a masstige brand can significantly influence the transition from a consumer's desire for the brand to the inspiration to engage with it (Shukla & Purani, 2012; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Studies within the masstige domain suggest that compared to the unpopular choice counter-conformity and avoidance of similarity, consumers demonstrating creative choice counter-conformity have a stronger preference for masstige brands as a means to express their uniqueness (Chan et al., 2012; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Kolańska-Stronka & Krasa, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024; Saavedra & Bautista, 2020). Therefore, in our framework, the need for uniqueness—especially as it pertains to creative choice counter-conformity—is posited to fortify the inspiration for masstige consumption. This suggests that consumers who value uniqueness and seek to express it in socially acceptable ways are more likely to desire and select masstige brands. Understanding this consumer segment is essential for masstige marketers, as it highlights the importance of offering distinctive yet socially resonant products to satisfy these consumers' quest for individuality. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 8.** The relationship between consumer desire for and selection of masstige brand will vary depending on consumers' need for uniqueness.

### *Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence*

The decision-making process of consumers is often contingent on the influence of significant others, attributable to a trait known as consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Bearden et al., 1989). This influence manifests in two primary forms: normative and informational (Das & Saha, 2017; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Normative influence arises from a consumer's inclination to comply with the expectations of others, prompting them to purchase products that are likely to receive approval within their reference group (Bearden et al., 1989; Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Consumers with high levels of normative influence are thus motivated to make choices that will garner positive recognition from their social circle (Kiani & Laroche, 2019; Sharma & Klein, 2020). Informational influence, on the other hand, pertains to the acquisition of information through direct communication or observation of others' behaviors, aiding consumers in making informed decisions (Jebarajakirthy & Das, 2020; Park & Lessig, 1977). Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence thus encapsulates the tendency of consumers to modify their preferences and behaviors in response to social influences, which significantly affects their product and brand choices, including those related to luxury and masstige brands, due to perceived social pressure (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Das et al., 2021a; Shukla, 2012). In this regard, the opinions and approvals of significant social contacts are expected to shape consumer choices of masstige brands. Notably, we argue that the link between consumers' desire for and actual selection of a masstige brand is likely to vary based on societal approval or disapproval of the brand as a masstige brand. Research in the field of masstige supports this, suggesting that consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence affects the purchase of status brands by shaping consumers' need for uniqueness in a way that aligns with social norms, such as creative choice (Das et al., 2021; Iyer et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2021). Moreover, the act of acquiring and utilizing masstige brands to project a certain social status and image among peers can lead to brand happiness due to the social relationships reinforced through consumption (Kumar et al., 2021; Nobre et al., 2023).

Thus, understanding this susceptibility is key for masstige marketers, as it highlights the importance of leveraging social proof and peer validation to enhance consumer satisfaction and deepen brand relationships. Accordingly, we propose that:

**Proposition 9.** The relationship between consumer desire for and selection of masstige brand will vary depending on consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

## Conclusion

### *Theoretical contribution*

The MDO framework for masstige consumption presented in this article distills the journey of middle-income consumers toward acquiring masstige brands. Integrating the role of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic), desire (aspiration, inspiration), and outcome (brand happiness, brand love, brand engagement), the framework provides a structured pathway from consumers' initial attraction to enduring engagement with masstige brands. Rather than depicting a simple linear progression from motivations to outcomes, the framework accommodates the complexities and fluidities inherent in consumer behavior, offering a comprehensive, multi-dimensional perspective on masstige consumption. This approach sheds light on the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the consumer-brand relationship within the masstige domain.

Advancing the masstige consumption literature, the framework significantly extends current understanding by emphasizing the simultaneous influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motives on masstige brand desire. While existing research highlights the dual appeal of masstige brands to personal and social motivations (Paul, 2015), the MDO framework underscores how intrinsic motives—such as aesthetic appreciation, autonomy (independence), competence, emotional enrichment, enjoyment, purpose, self-actualization, improvement, and satisfaction—operate in tandem with extrinsic motives—such as the communication of wealth, power, prestige, recognition, social approval, comparability, and image, and symbol of success—to cultivate brand desire. This dual-motivational pathway offers a counterpoint

to Vigneron and Johnson (1999) conceptualization of conspicuous consumption, which posited that luxury brands primarily appeal to extrinsic motivations. Therefore, by showing that masstige brands can effectively cater to both intrinsic and extrinsic motives, the framework differentiates masstige from traditional luxury.

Another key contribution lies in exploring the transition from brand happiness to brand love in the masstige context. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) posit that brand love emerges from consumer satisfaction and emotional attachment, especially in hedonic consumption categories where personal identity and emotional resonance are intertwined. However, findings in masstige research indicate that while brand happiness is critical, it does not always translate into brand love due to the lower exclusivity and accessibility of masstige brands (Truong et al., 2009). The MDO framework reconciles these perspectives by illustrating how post-consumption happiness, despite being more transactional and less intense compared to luxury brand experiences, can evolve into brand love when reinforced by meaningful brand interactions and personal values.

Additionally, the framework advances understanding of contextual variations in the masstige consumption journey. For instance, acculturation patterns significantly influence the intensity and nature of desire and emotional attachment to masstige brands. Highly acculturated individuals (e.g., those who have adopted the cultural norms of their host culture) may seek brands that reflect their assimilated identity, thereby channeling their love and engagement toward culturally congruent masstige brands (Soni, 2023). The framework also underscores the importance of brand promise in managing consumer expectations and nurturing long-term loyalty (Singh & Wagner, 2024). Also, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Bearden et al., 1989) and need for uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001) play critical roles in shaping consumer-brand relationships. Consumers with a strong need for uniqueness may prefer masstige brands that allow them to express their individuality within socially acceptable boundaries, adhering to masstige principles. Conversely, those driven by peer approval may exhibit varying levels of emotional attachment based on the influence of their social circles.

Alas, the MDO framework offers a robust foundation for understanding the diverse motivational pathways and outcomes in masstige consumption. The framework not only provides a structured view of how motivations lead to desire and eventual engagement but also highlights the socio-psychological and marketing-induced factors that modulate this journey. Accounting for these complexities, the framework contributes significantly to the theoretical discourse on masstige branding and lays the groundwork for future research on consumer behavior within this rapidly evolving segment.

### **Managerial implications**

Based on the MDO framework, we offer four key insights for masstige brand managers.

*First*, managers should craft balanced brand communications that emphasize both intrinsic and extrinsic motives driving brand desire. Intrinsically, brand communications can focus on aspects such as identity expression, emotional fulfillment, and personal satisfaction. Extrinsically, messaging should appeal to social status, recognition, and the symbolic value of the brand. This dual emphasis on luxury and mass-market appeal enhances the brand's attractiveness to a broader audience, ensuring that consumers feel both unique and part of a larger community. For instance, a masstige brand like Coach effectively communicates the craftsmanship and heritage of its products (intrinsic appeal) while also positioning them as symbols of success and social distinction (extrinsic appeal).

*Second*, masstige brands should enhance the consumer experience to facilitate the conversion of brand happiness into brand love (Batra et al., 2012). This can be achieved by creating memorable, emotionally resonant experiences that go beyond functional benefits. For example, implementing immersive storytelling across physical and digital retail platforms can deepen emotional connections with the brand. A brand might integrate augmented reality (AR) experiences or share behind-the-scenes narratives that highlight the brand's unique qualities, fostering feelings of happiness and attachment among consumers.

*Third*, leveraging brand love to drive brand engagement among consumers is crucial for

sustaining long-term loyalty. Managers should encourage participation in brand-related activities, such as user-generated content, brand community involvement, and sharing experiences on social media platforms (Bazi et al., 2023). Investment in platforms that facilitate interaction—whether through social media campaigns, branded events, or exclusive online forums—can lead to deeper brand engagement and advocacy among consumers. For instance, Nike's 'NikePlus' community and app enable users to share their fitness journeys, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.

*Finally*, masstige brands should tailor their strategies based on consumer traits and cultural contexts (Sung et al., 2023). Understanding individual differences and cultural variations is critical for developing effective brand strategies. In markets characterized by a high need for uniqueness (e.g., individualistic cultures), masstige brands can offer limited editions or customized products, as exemplified by Adidas' customizable sneakers, which cater to consumers' desire for personal expression. Brand managers should also consider acculturation patterns when entering culturally diverse markets. For example, when targeting diverse regions like India, masstige brands can adapt their product lines and messaging to align with local tastes and cultural values while maintaining an aspirational appeal that resonates across consumer segments.

To this end, masstige brands can effectively bridge the gap between luxury and mass-market appeal by implementing these strategic recommendations, driving both brand engagement and long-term loyalty. Understanding the diverse motivational pathways and outcomes of masstige consumption, as outlined in the MDO framework, will enable managers to create better informed strategies that resonate with consumers on both personal and social levels.

### **Future research directions**

As we shift toward a future research agenda, it is imperative to dive deeper into the facets of this framework. Based on the MDO framework, we propose six promising avenues to extend research on masstige:

1. The quiet vs. loud luxury conundrum in masstige branding addresses how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence consumer preferences for conspicuous (loud) versus inconspicuous (quiet) masstige brands, reflecting a critical but underexplored dynamic in masstige marketing.
2. The role of gifting in masstige markets explores how masstige brands cater to both interpersonal and self-directed gifting motivations, revealing their potential to fulfill both social and personal aspirations in a unique way that distinguishes them from traditional luxury brands.
3. Targeting strategies that leverage materialistic instincts versus brand love examines the differential impact of appealing to social status motives (materialistic instincts) versus fostering emotional connections (brand love) in driving engagement and loyalty, thereby offering insights into optimizing masstige brand positioning.
4. The implications of monetary discounts in masstige communication consider how promotional strategies, such as discounts, influence consumer perceptions of masstige brands' prestige and accessibility, navigating the delicate balance between short-term sales and long-term brand equity.
5. Consumer responses to expressions of social superiority investigate how masstige brands' communication strategies that evoke feelings of pride and envy shape consumer attitudes and engagement, providing a deeper understanding of how expressions of social superiority can be leveraged without alienating consumers.
6. The integration of sustainability within prestige consumption examines how sustainable practices can be incorporated into masstige branding to enhance appeal, especially among younger consumers who prioritize ethical considerations alongside prestige, aligning sustainability with the value proposition of masstige brands.

These future research directions were curated through a detailed analysis of existing literature, particularly focusing on how the field of masstige

consumption has evolved over time and the emerging gaps that need to be addressed. Each of the proposed research avenues is derived from identified patterns, thematic trends, and unresolved issues observed in prior studies. For instance, the “quiet vs. loud luxury conundrum” is rooted in our observation of how consumers' extrinsic and intrinsic motives align with different expressions of luxury in masstige branding, a dynamic that is not yet fully understood in the current literature. Similarly, our proposed direction on “gifting in masstige markets” was inspired by a lack of exploration into how masstige brands serve both interpersonal and self-directed gifting motivations—a dual function that distinguishes masstige from traditional luxury brands. Further, our emphasis on targeting strategies for “materialistic instincts versus brand love” stems from recognizing the strategic need for masstige brands to balance these approaches to enhance engagement and brand loyalty. Therefore, by reflecting on the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of these themes, we curated these research directions to provide a roadmap for advancing the study of masstige consumption. The detailed articulation of each research direction connects directly with the core arguments of our proposed framework, thereby ensuring coherence between the future research agenda and the foundational contributions of this article.

#### *Masstige brands following the quiet versus loud luxury conundrum*

Our framework delineates two distinct types of motivation—extrinsic and intrinsic—that fuel masstige aspirations. Extrinsic motives are driven by an individual's desire for status and prestige among peers, reflecting a social positioning strategy (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2018; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Truong et al., 2009). Conversely, intrinsic motives encapsulate the desire for self-fulfillment, exemplified by the pursuit of self-pleasing experiences and self-indulgence through masstige brand acquisition (Chen et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2023; Mansoor & Paul, 2022).

Social attitudes, encompassing both socially-adjustive and value-expressive elements (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Jiang et al., 2023), influence purchase

decisions. Socially-adjustive attitudes are characterized by the intention to project a positive self-image within one's social sphere, whereas value-expressive attitudes are aligned with the manifestation of an individual's true self, including personal taste and beliefs (Wilcox et al., 2009). In this vein, individuals guided by extrinsic aspirations are inclined to adopt a socially-adjustive attitude, gravitating toward conspicuous (loud) masstige brands that symbolize social status and facilitate self-image enhancement (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018; O'Casey & Frost, 2002; Truong, 2010). In contrast, those driven by intrinsic aspirations tend to be attracted to inconspicuous (quiet) masstige brands that resonate with personal taste and discrete luxury (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2017). The preferences for loud versus quiet masstige brands are anticipated to appeal to different consumer segments (Jiang et al., 2023), suggesting that firms can leverage insights from customer aspirations at various touchpoints to refine their masstige branding strategies. This approach underscores the importance of aligning brand communications with the desires of target consumers, facilitating brand differentiation and consumer connection in the crowded masstige marketplace.

#### ***Gifting as a prospect for masstige brands***

Exploring masstige brands as a gifting alternative presents a novel avenue for future research within the domain of masstige studies. Gifting transcends mere transactional exchanges to embody a ritual of significant cultural and social value (Mortimer et al., 2015). The act of gifting bifurcates into two primary categories: gifting to others and self-gifting (Ward & Tran, 2008). Gifting to others is often transactional, aimed at garnering social approval for the recipient while enabling the giver to forge and strengthen social bonds and enhance their social standing (Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Segev et al., 2012; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Conversely, self-gifting is perceived as a form of symbolic self-communication, a means of personal indulgence that serves to express self-care or self-pleasure (Chen et al., 2022).

Historical insights into gifting behaviors reveal that individuals engage in gifting to others as a mechanism to communicate social status or to express care while self-gifting is often motivated by a desire for self-satisfaction (Chen et al., 2022;

David Clarke & Mortimer, 2013; Givi et al., 2023). This dichotomy suggests that masstige brands, which straddle the line between luxury and mass-market offerings, could serve as desirable gifting options, catering to both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations. Noteworthy, masstige brands, by virtue of their perceived prestige and relative accessibility, are uniquely positioned to fulfill the dual gifting motives. For the giver, a masstige gift can signal discernment and generosity, enhancing their social image. For the recipient, such a gift can be a marker of status and a source of personal gratification. Similarly, self-gifting with masstige products can be an act of self-acknowledgment, marrying the pleasure of luxury with the satisfaction of prudent spending.

The potential of masstige brands as gifts, particularly in the context of their dual appeal to extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, opens up rich possibilities for research. Investigating how consumers perceive masstige products as gifts, the motivations behind choosing masstige brands for gifting, and the implications of such gifting practices for brand equity and consumer-brand relationships can provide deeper insights into the strategic positioning of masstige brands in the marketplace. This exploration could illuminate the ways in which masstige products fulfill the symbolic and functional roles of gifts, contributing to the discourse on consumer behavior and brand strategy in the masstige sector.

#### ***Targeting strategy for masstige brands***

The strategic marketing of masstige brands may pivot around two principal approaches: leveraging consumers' materialistic tendencies and fostering brand love. The materialistic approach emphasizes the exhibition and preservation of social status, catering to consumers' desires to signal their social standing through the possession of prestigious brands (Ahuvia et al., 2020). Nonetheless, materialistic motivations, while centered on the display of social prestige, do not inherently entail a genuine affection or loyalty toward the brand (Ahuvia et al., 2020). In contrast, the brand love strategy focuses on cultivating a profound, emotionally charged relationship between the consumer and the brand, transcending mere utilitarian or hedonistic values (Nawaz et al.,

2020). Notably, scholars have underscore the pivotal role of brand love in enhancing the consumer-brand relationship, highlighting how it satisfies intrinsic needs such as self-fulfillment and, in turn, engenders brand trust, loyalty, engagement, and positive advocacy (Batra et al., 2012; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Gumparathi & Patra, 2020; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Khamitov et al., 2019; Robertson et al., 2022). This delineation between materialistic appeal and brand love presents a spectrum of engagement strategies for masstige brands, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective.

Given this backdrop, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research to dissect the efficacy and applicability of materialistic and brand love strategies within the masstige branding context. Such investigations should aim to understand how these strategies resonate with diverse consumer segments, particularly considering the unique positioning of masstige brands at the intersection of accessibility and luxury. Exploring how masstige brands can navigate this dual strategy to appeal to both materialistic instincts and emotional connections could offer valuable insights into optimizing consumer engagement, loyalty, and advocacy in the competitive landscape of masstige marketing. This exploration is crucial for masstige brands seeking to carve out a distinctive niche in the market, ensuring they not only attract but also retain a loyal consumer base through meaningful and resonant brand experiences.

#### *Monetary discounts for masstige brands*

In the dynamic landscape of prestige branding, masstige brands face the challenge of balancing their luxury appeal with accessibility. The competitive pressure and the global economic climate have led some masstige brands to adopt seemingly contradictory promotional strategies, such as monetary discounts, to appeal to a larger market (Das et al., 2024; Singh, 2024). Prestigious brands like Alexandre Vauthier, Emporio Armani, Miu Miu, Ralph Lauren, and Ronald Mouret have implemented discounts as a tactic to penetrate the masstige market (Vogue Business, 2021).

While monetary discounts can boost short-term profits and market share for mass-market brands by encouraging brand switching and customer trials (Joseph et al., 2020), they can be

detrimental to luxury brands by compromising their image and reputation (Zoellner & Schaefer, 2015). The effect of monetary discounts on masstige brands, however, is complex and requires thorough exploration. The target demographic for masstige brands, particularly middle-class consumers in emerging markets, embodies a blend of aspirational values and cost-conscious behavior (Cavusgil et al., 2018). Consequently, discounts could either positively impact consumer behavior by enhancing affordability and aligning with cost-conscious tendencies or negatively by diminishing the perceived prestige and aspirational value of the brand. This dichotomy presents a significant paradox within the masstige domain. While some brands like Adidas, Alexander McQueen, Nike, and Saint Laurent have ceased offering discounts, others such as Emporio Armani, Ralph Lauren, and Roland Mouret continue to use them to attract customers (Vogue Business, 2021). This divergence in strategy underscores the need for in-depth research into consumer responses to monetary discounts in the masstige segment.

Investigating how monetary discounts influence consumer desire and inspiration toward masstige brands could yield valuable insights. Specifically, understanding the conditions under which discounts enhance the appeal of masstige brands without undermining their perceived prestige is crucial. This exploration could inform promotional strategies that effectively balance the dual aspirations of masstige consumers, ensuring that discounts serve as a catalyst for engagement rather than a deterrent to brand prestige.

#### *Social superiority expressions for masstige brands*

In the domain of masstige branding, much of the existing research has focused on the consumer's pursuit of prestige, with less attention given to how consumers react to the various marketing communications employed by these brands. Given the significant role of prestige in influencing consumer behavior (Truong et al., 2009), there is a compelling need to investigate masstige communication strategies, particularly those that leverage expressions of social superiority.

Luxury and masstige brands often utilize marketing narratives that evoke feelings of pride and

envy to instill a sense of social superiority and persuade potential buyers (Sung & Phau, 2019). These emotions can be complex, encompassing both positive aspects, such as authentic pride and benign envy, and negative aspects, like hubristic pride and malicious envy, wherein the interplay of these emotions has been shown to significantly impact luxury brand perceptions and attitudes (Sung & Phau, 2019).

Given this backdrop, the exploration of how masstige brand communications that express social superiority impact consumer responses is ripe for further research. This inquiry should examine how masstige brands can strategically employ narratives that tap into these emotions without alienating their target audience. The goal would be to understand how expressions of pride and envy in brand communications influence consumers' desires for masstige products, their perceptions of the brand's prestige, and their overall brand attitudes. Investigating these dynamics could provide valuable insights into the efficacy of leveraging social superiority in masstige marketing communications. It could also help marketers craft messages that resonate with consumers' aspirations and emotional triggers, effectively enhancing the appeal of masstige brands. Understanding consumer responses to these expressions of social superiority is crucial for masstige brands aiming to navigate the fine line between aspirational allure and relatability in their communications strategies.

### *Embracing sustainability in defining prestige*

The intersection of sustainability and prestige consumption, particularly in the context of masstige brands, represents a fertile ground for future research, especially given the growing importance of sustainable values among new generation consumers (e.g., Gen Z). Previous studies and reports have underscored Gen Z's commitment to sustainability (Fortune, 2023; Parzonko et al., 2021; Petro, 2020; Vogue Business, 2024), yet the nexus between sustainability and the consumption of prestige or masstige products remains relatively underexplored (Athwal et al., 2019).

The prevailing notion has often posited sustainability and prestige consumption as somewhat conflicting concepts, with the former emphasizing

environmental and ethical considerations and the latter often associated with exclusivity and luxury (Tynan et al., 2017). However, current trends and consumer behaviors suggest a shift, indicating a growing alignment between sustainable practices and the perceived value of prestige in products, including those within the masstige segment. Sustainable fashion, for instance, has demonstrated that eco-friendly practices and materials can command a premium, much like masstige products, due to positive consumer perceptions shaped by values related to self-identity, self-expression, and self-esteem (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Stancu & Lähteenmäki, 2022). This alignment suggests that sustainability could become a pivotal component of the masstige value proposition, particularly for younger consumers who prioritize ethical considerations alongside brand prestige.

Incorporating sustainability into the masstige branding strategy could thus open new avenues for research, particularly in understanding how sustainable practices influence consumer perceptions of prestige, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions among new generations. Investigating how masstige brands can effectively communicate their commitment to sustainability, and how this communication impacts brand perception and consumer behavior, is essential. This exploration is particularly pertinent as brands seek to navigate the evolving consumer landscape, where sustainability is increasingly becoming a determinant of brand prestige and desirability among the next generation of consumers.

To this end, the MDO framework serves as both a comprehensive reflection of the current understanding of masstige consumption and a strategic foundation for future research. Examining these critical areas allows researchers to uncover deeper insights into the motivations and behaviors driving masstige consumption while practitioners can leverage these findings to develop more targeted strategies that resonate with the evolving and multifaceted preferences of consumers. Ultimately, the MDO framework not only advances theoretical discourse but also provides actionable guidance for brands to strengthen their positioning and engagement in this rapidly growing segment.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Data availability statement

Data can be made available upon reasonable request.

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