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**MASSTIGE MARKETING: TEN ESSAYS**

**Thesis**

by

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Summary of Published Journal Papers submitted to

University of Brighton

as per the guidelines for the award of Ph. D Degree by publication

(6000 to 10,000 words- University of Brighton guidelines).

## **CONTRIBUTION OF THE WORKS TO THE GENERAL ADVANCEMENT OF THE FIELD.**

Contribution to Knowledge and General advancement of the field can be assessed based on 150+ articles in UK-CABS listed journals out of which 65+ are in UK-CABS 3- or 4-star journals and 18,600+ citations on Google Scholar. Here's the link for Google Scholar, Scopus and ORCID.

Google Scholar (Candidate has earned 18,800 citations)

<https://scholar.google.com/pr/citations?user=QONdoqoAAAAJ&hl=en>

Scopus (Over 10,000 citations on Scopus)

<https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=36997235800>

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0001-5062-8371>

The number of citations received for each article - Impact of Masstige Marketing studies published- are given below the title of each article -.

## **ABSTRACT**

Masstige marketing has become a popular research area during the last two decades. The purpose of this write-up is to synthesize the summary of my published articles, in the area of Masstige Marketing for the award of Ph.D by Publication during the period 2015 to 2022. Masstige model, theory and the masstige scale (Paul, 2015; 2018; 2019) are outlined in this appraisal based on the formula given below.  $\text{Premium Price} = f(\text{Masstige})$  &  $\text{Masstige} = f(\text{Product, Promotion \& Place})$ . Therefore,  $\text{Premium Price} = f(\text{Product, Promotion \& Place strategies})$ . This paper outlines the Masstige Scale (Paul, 2015; 2019) and the scale items and the propositions derived to establish the link between mass prestige value and the success of a brand based on the empirical evidence found using the data from different country and industry contexts grounded in Masstige Theory (Paul, 2015). Masstige scale, model and theory have been widely accepted as base for hundreds of studies by other researchers across the countries, which are evident from the hundreds of citations received for these papers within 3-4 years.

## **Detailed Appraisal of Articles on the topic of Ph. D by publication – Masstige Marketing.**

Masstige marketing is a process through which brand managers create prestige for their brands in the minds of majority of the consumers (Paul, 2018; 2019). Masstige stands for mass prestige (Paul, 2015; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Masstige Marketing phenomenon is like a coin with two sides and two dimensions. i) It's a phenomenon in which managers can formulate marketing strategies focusing on product, place and promotion strategies to transform today's ordinary brands as tomorrow's prestigious brands ii) Masstige marketing can be viewed as a phenomenon in which premium/luxury brands target almost all the segments of consumers and try to create mass prestige for their brand, which work as a factor for consumers to buy those brands regardless of the price and income level of consumers. In other words, managers target not only 'Fit In', but also, 'Show-off' consumers.

The research questions addressed in different papers I've published around masstige marketing are

- i) RQ 1: To develop the concept 'masstige marketing' from the idea 'mass prestige'
- ii) RQ 2: To introduce a scale to measure the 'mass prestige' value of a brand
- iii) RQ 3: To develop a model for masstige marketing and develop the constructs of 'masstige theory'



- iv) RQ 4: To demonstrate how to use ‘masstige scale’ to measure the ‘masstige’ value of a brand in different markets and to compare the success or failure of competing brands in a specific market

Prior studies have examined masstige marketing phenomenon from different angles. For instance, some researchers explain masstige as an affordable or light luxury that further transformed into luxury-literature (Greenberg et al., 2020; Wang & Qiao, 2020). Others examine the masstige brands from a consumer preference point of view (Das et al., 2021a). Some of the prior studies investigated the masstige brands from dimensions like Masstige Marketing (Paul, 2015), Mass Luxury (Shahid & Paul, 2021; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), Mass Prestige, and Prestigious Brands (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Kumar et al., 2021a; Paul, 2019).

Masstige marketing has become a popular research area during the last two decades since Silverstein and Friske (2003) published their seminal article in Harvard Business Review. Their article has over 850 citations. Over 400 articles have got published exclusively on Masstige marketing and approximately 450 articles have got published on related topics such as building premium brands and bandwagon effect of luxury brands etc. in Scopus listed journals.

My contribution in this area of Masstige Marketing can be seen in the form of **the below-mentioned articles** that were written and published during the period 2015 to 2022. I developed Masstige (Mass Prestige) Theory (Paul, 2018) for marketing, masstige model for brand management (Paul, 2019) based on the formula I developed as given below.

Premium Price = f (Masstige) & Masstige = f (Product, Promotion & Place)

Therefore, Premium Price = f (Product, Promotion & Place strategies).

The first article that conceptualized the idea of a new masstige scale and pyramid model which helped developing the theoretical foundation for Masstige marketing was published in 2015. In addition, I introduced and validated masstige mean score scale (a Likert scale out of 7) and masstige mean index (out of 70) to estimate the mass prestige value of a brand in single authored articles published in 2015, 2018 and 2019. These works helped the general advancement of the concept - Masstige Marketing, Masstige theory and the field of Brand Equity and Brand prestige. It is worth noting that Masstige marketing process help brand managers to build mass prestigious brands.

**Rationale:** There were no other empirical studies around Masstige Marketing before 2015. The concept was not properly developed even though the term ‘masstige’ was coined by Silverstein and Fiske in their Harvard Business Review article. This research gap and my desire to develop a new scale, index, model and theory which will serve as lens/basis for future research and help the managers motivated me to develop this concept / phenomenon called – Masstige Marketing by introducing Masstige Means score scale (2015, Masstige Theory (2018) & Masstige Model and Masstige Scale (2019) and demonstrated empirically that this scale is usable in different contexts, different sectors and different countries by managers and researchers.

#### **-Masstige Marketing and Introducing the Scale, Model and Theory:**

I demonstrated that a brand can be classified and called as masstige brand if it gets a score of minimum 50 out of 70 on the Masstige Mean Index. Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS, Paul, 2015), later renamed as Mastige scale (Paul, 2019) has become a popular measure among the researchers and practitioners in the field of marketing and brand management. For example,

single authored article titled Masstige Model and measure for brand management (Paul, 2019) published in European Management Journal (journal of University of Glasgow and ESCP) has received 169 citations within 3 years. In my papers, I have shown how to use masstige scale (Paul, 2015; 2018; 2019) scale in two different ways, with two objectives. i) to estimate the mass prestige value of a single brand in different markets (ex, different states or different countries) (Paul, 2015; 2019) ii) to compare the brand prestige value (masstige value) of competing brands in different markets. For example, single brand's masstige value in different markets was estimated using the data from consumers of French Luxury brand Luis Vuitton (LV) in their key overseas market Japan and home market- France and found that LV achieved higher masstige value in Japan (a foreign market), in comparison to home market, France (Paul, 2015). Similarly, a single brand's masstige value in 3 countries was estimated and compared based on data from 3 countries- United States, India, and France in the subsequent study (Paul, 2019).

In order to address the second objective mentioned in the previous paragraph, studies were conducted to compare masstige value of competing Japanese (Toyota and Honda) and American car brands (Ford and GM) were compared, and the results showed that Japanese car brands have higher mass prestige than that of American brands among the American consumers in the United States (Paul, 2018). In another paper, Asian versus American laptop brands were estimated using data from India and the results showed that American brands enjoyed higher mass prestige in India, an emerging market (Kumar & Paul, 2018; International Business review). Paul (2019), in another multi-country study, showed that masstige value of LV in different markets including France, United States (US) and India were estimated, and the results showed that LV did not have mass prestige in the emerging market -India while it had achieved the status of a masstige brand in the US and France (2019). Masstige Mean score scale was used in all these studies and

the studies were grounded in Masstige Theory. In the study by Kumar, **Paul** and Starcevic (2021), we demonstrate not only how the Masstige scale (Paul, 2015, 2018, 2019) can be used to estimate masstige value of competing brands using smart phone brands, but also examine whether the consumption of masstige brands leads to brand happiness or not.

In a systematic literature review article, published in Journal of Business Research, Kumar, **Paul** & Unnithan (2020), reviewed all the studies around masstige marketing, identified research gaps, introduced masstige tree framework and provided directions for future research.

Kumar, **Paul** and Starcevic (2021) answered the fundamental question- Do brands make consumers happy? And explored the theory of consumer happiness grounded in the tenets of mass prestige (Masstige), self-consciousness and social ideal self by linking it with brand-induced happiness. This is a work grounded in masstige theory perspective based on the data from smart phone consumers in Europe. Users of I-Phone (USA), Samsung (South Korean) and Huawei (Chinese) participated in the survey of this study.

Grounded on the Masstige theory, Mansoor and **Paul** (2022) in the article published in Journal of Business Research, examined the direct and indirect impact of Mass Prestige of a Brand (MPB), Brand Perception (BP), and Propensity to Pay the Premium (PPP) on Brand Evangelism (BE) via Brand Happiness (BH) as a mediator. Moreover, the moderating role of Self-pleasing Experience (SPE) between Masstige and BH and the interactive effect of Product Beliefs (PB) with BH to check its impact on BE was assessed. Two independent studies using cross-sectional and time-lagged approaches were conducted among cosmetics and clothing brand consumers. Results supported all the hypothesized paths reflecting MBP, BP, and PPP as important predictors of BE through the underlying mechanism of BH.

The articles that I wish to put forward for the purpose of highlighting my contribution to Masstige theory are provided below.

**1. Paul, J.** (2015). Masstige marketing redefined and mapped: Introducing a pyramid model and MMS measure. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*. 130 citations, Impact Factor 4.34, A in ABDC Australia, UK-CABS listed.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-02-2014-0028>

**2. Paul, J.** (2018). Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy for marketing. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(5-6), 722-745. (109 citations), Impact Factor 2.29.

**3. Paul, J.** (2019). Masstige model and measure for brand management. *European Management Journal*, 37(3), 299-312. (169 citations). Impact Factor 7.5 +.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.003>

**4. Kumar, A., & Paul, J.** (2018). Mass prestige value and competition between American versus Asian laptop brands in an emerging market—Theory and evidence. *International Business Review*, 27(5), 969-981. Impact Factor 8.06 (111 citations).  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.02.007>

My contribution: Idea generation, Conceptualization, Literature Review, Writing the article, Writing and re-writing different sections, Deciding Hypotheses based on discussion with me, Interpretation of Results, Discussion and Conclusion, 3 Rounds of Revision of the article based on comments of Reviewers. We use my Masstige scale (Paul, 2015) in this paper.

**5. Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Unnithan, A. B.** (2020). 'Masstige' marketing: A review, synthesis and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 113, 384-398. Impact Factor 10.97, UK-CABS 3, A in ABDC Australia, 269 Citations  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.030>

My contribution: Idea, Selection of Methodology, Conceptualization, Synthesis of articles reviewed, Writing the article, Directions for Future Research/ Future Research Agenda, Journal selection and cover letter, Two Rounds of Revision of the Article based on comments of reviewers

**6. Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Starčević, S.** (2021). Do brands make consumers happy? -A masstige theory perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102318. Impact Factor 10.97, A in ABDC Australia, UK-CABS 2., 68 citations.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102318>

My contribution: Conceptualization, Selection of Smartphone segment for the study, Idea for selecting competing brands including Apple I-Phone, Literature Review, Writing and Re-writing different sections, Responding and revising the paper based on comments from the reviewers, Working in our team and inspiring co-author/s to complete the work on time.

We used my masstige theory (Paul, 2018; 2019) in this paper.

7. Shahid, S., & **Paul, J.** (2021). Intrinsic motivation of luxury consumers in an emerging market. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102531. 59 citations

My contribution: Conceptualization of the paper. Strengthening and updating the literature review and writing and strengthening different sections of the paper. And working and revising towards acceptance of a difficult revision based on the comments of the reviewers.

8. Mansoor, M., & **Paul, J.** (2022). Mass prestige, brand happiness and brand evangelism among consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, 484-496. Impact Factor 7.6, 10.97, 30 citations

My contribution: Ideas and Discussion for finalizing the topic, model, and hypotheses; co-writing different sections of the paper; literature review; revising the paper 3 times based on the comments of the reviewers; Journal selection; refining different paragraphs of the paper working with me patiently with dedication towards acceptance of the paper.

9. Alagarsamy, S., Mehroliya, S., & **Paul, J.** (2022). Masstige scale: An alternative to measure brand equity. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. IF 7.1, A rank in ABDC, 2\* in UK <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12873>, 5 citations

My contribution: idea generation and conducting an extensive literature review. He also contributed significantly to rewriting, updating, and refining different sections of the manuscript, particularly presenting the Masstige scale as an alternative to the CBBE Scale. In addition, he collaborated closely with me to revise the paper based on the feedback received from the reviewers appointed by the Guest Editor of the Special Issue.

10. Nobre, H., Kumar, A., Kastanakis, M. N., & **Paul, J.** (2022). Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness. *European Management Review*. UK-CABS 3\*, 6 citations <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12538>

My contribution

Discussion with co-authors to conceptualize the Paper, Inviting Minas Kastankis to join the project as a co-author., Literature review and writing the paper, Working, and revising towards acceptance of an initial Risky Revision based on the comments of the reviewers. Decision to submit to the "European Management Review".

Out of these 10 journal articles on Masstige Marketing, I've published, 3 are single authored and I'm the second author in other 5 articles. I'm a third co-author in 9<sup>th</sup> article and 4<sup>th</sup> co-author in 10<sup>th</sup> article.

### **Original Contribution to Knowledge Made through the above-mentioned articles are explained below.**

In the subsequent sections, I highlight how each of the ten articles contributed towards developing the theory of Masstige marketing.

**Journal Paper 1: Paul, J. (2015). Masstige marketing redefined and mapped: Introducing a pyramid model and MMS measure. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-02-2014-0028> Impact Factor 4.34, A Rank in Australian ABDC**

**Impact/ Contribution Made can be seen in terms of the Impact - 130 citations within 7 years.**

**Weighted average number of citations: Approximately 20 citations per year.**

“Masstige marketing” is considered as a market penetration strategy for medium and large enterprises, particularly in foreign markets. The author defines “masstige marketing” in this paper and map the concept as a new pyramid model for brand building. Second, the author examines the effectiveness of “masstige marketing” strategy with reference to marketing mix theory (Four Ps/4product, price, place, and promotion). The purpose of this paper is to introduce a theoretical model and scale to help the companies to implement “masstige marketing” strategy and assess their success in creating mass prestige in a market. A scale, called “Masstige Mean Score Scale” was introduced to measure the mass prestige value of brands. Both secondary and primary data used in this study. I collected data from 590 young women consumers living in Japan and France to measure the “masstige” value using the new scale developed. The marketing strategy of European luxury sector multinational brand LV has also been discussed. Masstige

value is the best indicator of long-term brand value. In other words, higher the masstige value (MMS) of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed. The author also found that a brand can create mass prestige with “masstige marketing” strategy by appropriately mixing the four Ps in marketing – Product, Price, Promotion and Place in a distinct and culturally different market. The author estimated the masstige value of Louis Vuitton (LV) in Japan and France in this article and found that LV has relatively high masstige value in Japan, its key overseas market.

In this paper, I introduced a pyramid model and measurement scale called “masstige mean score scale (MMSS)” to stimulate further research and as a tool for practitioners for better decision making. Besides, the author posits that higher the Masstige Mean Score (MMS) of a brand, higher the likelihood that potential customers recall that as a “top of mind” brand. Lower MMS implies that the firm must go long way in their efforts to build the brand. MMSS can be used as a scale to estimate compare the mass prestige value of a brand in different states/ markets/ countries/ districts or it can also be used to compute and compared the masstige value of competing brands from the same industry such as Smart phones, Watches, Laptops, Cars, Luxury fashion brands etc. The author posits the following theoretical propositions (P1, P2, P3, P4), which could help stimulating future research and improve managerial practice:

P1. The higher the Masstige value of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed in a distinct market.

P2. The higher the brand’s market orientation targeting the customers, in the middle and bottom of the pyramid segments, the higher the likelihood of sustaining the success in long run.

P3. The better the marketing mix (product, price, promotion and place), the higher the likelihood to increase sales and thereby the MMS.

P4. The higher the MMS, the higher the average life of a brand in that market.



In the second paper, published in 2018, I developed masstige theory and expanded the scope of the masstige marketing phenomenon and brought in greater clarity around this concept.

**Paper 2: Paul, J. (2018). Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy for marketing. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(5-6), 722-745.**  
<https://doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2018.094466> (Impact/ Contribution made can be assessed in terms of 109 citations within 4 years), Impact Factor 2.29.

**Weighted average number of citations : 23 citations per year.**

The main purpose of this paper was **to contribute towards the development of the masstige theory to explain the brand management phenomenon** of high value/premium brands with a new theoretical model - focused on product, promotion, and place strategies, keeping prices constant.

The theory was tested using the data from different car brands in American context.

This study was based on the survey data of owners of Japanese and American car brands. Owners of car brands (Toyota, Honda, Ford and GM) from different states in United States of America participated in the survey. Reliability and Validity of Masstige scale (Paul, 2015) was conducted in this study. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis's test were carried out in this paper to test whether females give more importance for mass prestige at the time of buying a car.

In this study I assessed and contrasted the effectiveness of masstige marketing strategy of foreign and domestic car brands in the USA using Masstige Mean Index (MMI) developed by Paul (2015). It was found that brands can create higher mass prestige value in a foreign country if they follow masstige marketing strategy. Japanese car brands Toyota and Honda were found to have higher masstige value than American brands Ford and GM in this study. These findings

corroborate with the real market share of car brands in American market. The study shows how MMI may facilitate masstige score estimates, allowing comparisons and aiding brands in devising strategies. This was the first paper where we developed the formulae for Masstige marketing. Masstige theory developed in this paper is based on the formula that a brand can charge premium price if they succeed in creating mass prestige. i.e.,

Premium Price = f (Masstige) & Masstige = f (Product, Place and Promotion strategies).

**In the third paper in this series, I revised and extended the use of the masstige mean score scale.**

**Paper 3. Paul, J. (2019). Masstige model and measure for brand management. *European Management Journal*, 37(3), 299-312. (Impact/Contribution can be assessed in terms of 169 citations within 2.4 years). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.003> Weighted average number of citations: 40 citations per year within 4 years.**

**Journal from University of Glasgow & ESCP- London, Impact Factor 7.5**

The purpose of this article is to reconceptualize the term “masstige” (Mass Prestige) marketing, develop a masstige model for brand management, and extend the use of the Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS). The Masstige mean score scale (MMSS) was revised and named as masstige scale in this paper based on three components- Brand Knowledge and prestige, perceived quality, brand excitement and status. The scale items were classified and grouped as shown below in this paper.

#### Brand Knowledge and Prestige

1. I like this brand because of brand knowledge.
2. I would buy this brand because of its mass prestige.
3. I would pay a higher price for this brand for status quo.
4. I consider this brand a top-of-mind brand in my country, state, or district.
5. I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives.

### Perceived Quality

6. I believe this brand is known for its high quality.
7. I believe this brand meets international standards.

### Excitement and Status

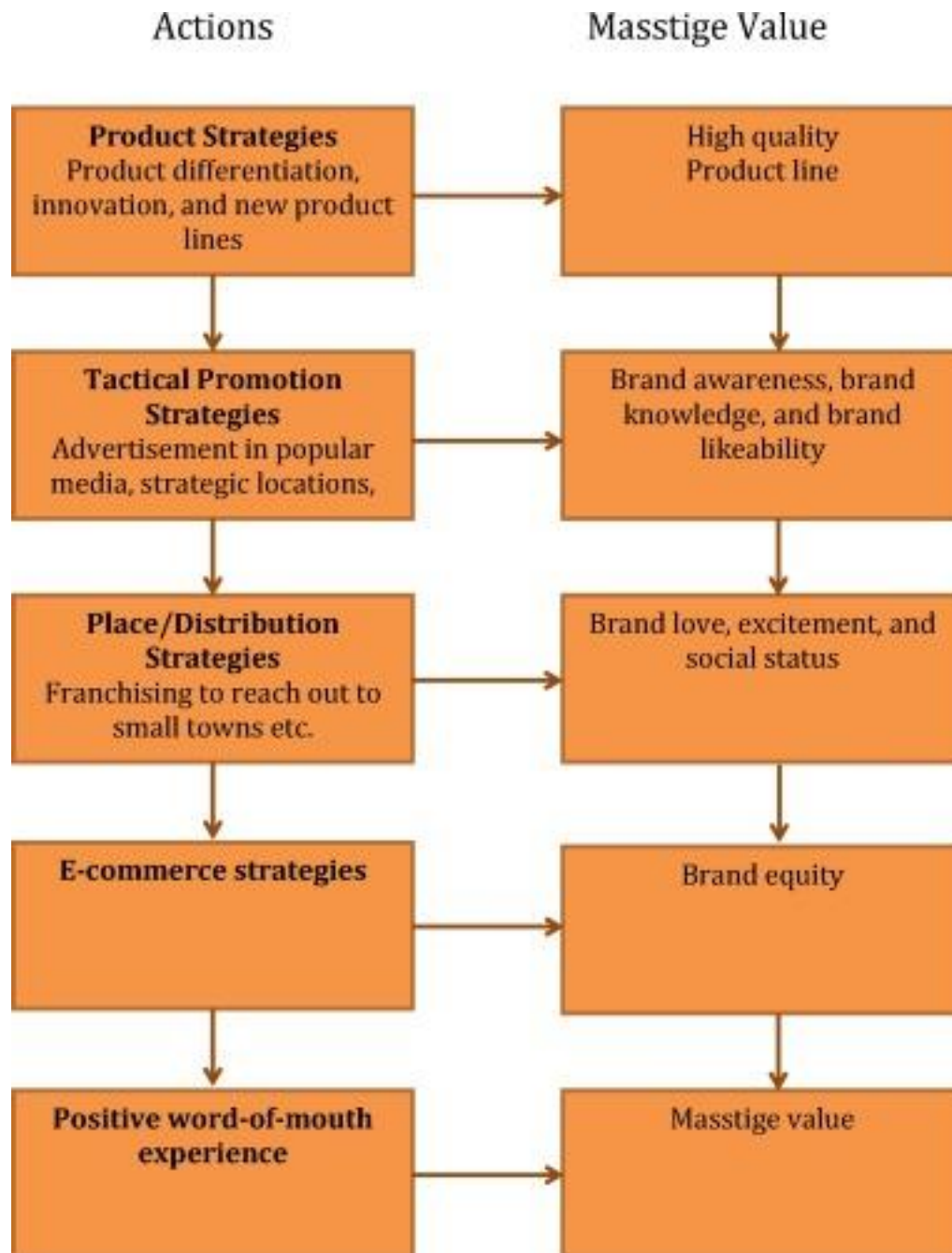
8. I love to buy this brand regardless of price.
9. Nothing is more exciting than this brand.
10. I believe that individuals in my country, state, or district perceive this brand as prestigious.

The study was conducted based on the data from 600 individuals living in the United States, France, and India using the masstige mean score scale- MMSS (Paul, 2015; 2018) consisting of structured questionnaire consisting of different factors/sources of a brand's mass prestige, such as brand equity, brand knowledge, and perceived quality. MMSS is a scale with values ranging from 0 to 70. The author sets the threshold as follows for interpretation of the results, after estimating the masstige value, using the scale. ie, The Masstige Mean Score (MMS) over 60 implies that the firm created "top of the mind" brand based on mass prestige. The MMS between 50 and 60 – implies that the firm has succeeded in building brand in that specific market based on "masstige" marketing, but not the "top of mind" brand. The MMS between 40 and 50 – implies that firm has not yet succeed in brand building based on "masstige" marketing, however, it is possible to do that in long run. The MMS 30-40 –implies that the brand is not yet accepted well in that market/country. The MMS between 10 and 30 – indicates that the firm has failed to create mass prestige in that market.

Findings indicate that the greater the brand's Masstige Mean Index (MMI) value ("MMIV"), the higher the potential customers' top-of-mind brand awareness. Low MMIVs imply that firms have

a long way to go to build their brands. MMI is an index with a maximum value 70 and author propounds that a brand with a score above 50 in a specific market indicates that the brand has achieved the status of minimum threshold to be classified as ‘masstige’ brand based on its popularity. I showed that that MMI may allow firms to measure brand equity in different regions, within a country or in foreign countries, to derive insights into the popularity of their brands. The Author posits three theoretical propositions and develop two original theoretical models (i) a hexagon model and (ii) a three-stage model for masstige marketing to define, reconceptualize, and explain the phenomenon. A model for masstige marketing developed and presented in this paper is reproduced below.

Figure 1: Masstige Marketing Process



**Paper 4: Kumar, A., & Paul, J. (2018). Mass prestige value and competition between American versus Asian laptop brands in an emerging market—Theory and evidence. *International Business Review*, 27(5), 969-981.**

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.02.007>

**Impact Factor 8.06 (Impact/ Contribution can be seen in terms of 111 citations within 3 years).**

In recent years, competition between brands have been linked to mass prestige associated with the brands. Mass Prestige (Masstige) is very important to study, and yet it is a relatively less investigated construct in the literature. This study is an attempt to contribute to the literature grounded in masstige theoretical approach by examining the prestige associated with the four best-selling laptop brands: i) two American brands (HP, Dell); and (ii) two Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer). The competition and success/failure of American versus Asian laptop brands was analyzed based on the masstige value based on the primary data from the second fastest growing emerging market, India.

To measure masstige value, the Masstige Mean scale (Paul, 2015) was used. Owners/users of laptop brands such as HP, Dell, Lenovo and Acer from India, an emerging market participated in the survey. Structural equation modeling and mediation-moderation analysis were used as techniques of analysis in this paper.

The results show that American brands have the potential to be seen as prestige brands while Asian brands are trailing behind in masstige value and competition. Finally, but not less

important, this paper discusses the potential reasons for different masstige value of four laptop brands. Results show that a) None of the laptop brands succeeded in creating mass prestige in the Indian market b) American laptop brands have the potential to be seen as prestige brands compared to Asian brands in India. This study contributes towards the development of the theory of masstige based on product, promotion, and place.

**Paper 5: Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Unnithan, A. B. (2020). 'Masstige' marketing: A review, synthesis and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 113, 384-398.**

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.030>

**Impact Factor 11.0**

**(Contribution can be assessed in terms of 269 Citations).**

A subject advance when studies are documented logically based on the findings of prior studies. In this context, this article reviews the literature on Mass Prestige (Masstige) based marketing and analyzes the evolution of the 'masstige strategy' with a focus on how this phenomenon evolved from conventional way of marketing premium brands.

Search for sourcing relevant articles were carried out on online databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. After downloading the relevant articles, we followed inclusion/exclusion criteria based on subjectivity and objectivity analysis. Then, we went through the relevant reference lists to ensure that we include all important articles published in web of science and Scopus listed journals in this list, to identify all the articles published in the field of Masstige Marketing during the last two decades. This search strategy of using multiple sources helped to ensure that all notable studies are included in the review. To locate the most relevant studies in

this area, we used keywords such as Mass Prestige, Masstige, Masstige Marketing, Populace, Democratization of Luxury, Bandwagon luxury, Mass Affluence, Massification and Accessible Luxury, Prestige Brands in this review paper.

The findings of prior studies were synthesized and analyzed different dimensions, identify research gaps, call for using existing measures like Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) and develop new measures which would facilitate further research in this niche area as well as help the practitioners in developing marketing strategies for luxury/premium brands. It was found that masstige research hitherto has focused on product-based brands and not considered the brands from service sector. This review aims to critically examine the previous studies on masstige marketing and identify potential research opportunities.

Mass-Luxury continuum model was developed and presented in this review paper to place product or service brands in terms of mass prestige. Moreover, directions for future researchers based on the identified research gaps were provided in detail in this review paper based on theories, methods, constructs, and contexts. This review gives many ideas and suggestions for future researchers on what theories can be used, what methods would be appropriate, what constructs and variables would be robust, and what industry / country contexts studies can be conducted.

#### **Paper 6:**

**Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Starčević, S. (2021). Do brands make consumers happy? -A masstige theory perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102318.**

**Impact Factor 10.0+, UK ABS 2\*, A in ABDC Australia.**

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102318>

58 citations



Happiness has been topic of research since ancient times. This study explores the theory of consumer happiness grounded in the tenets of mass prestige (Masstige), self-consciousness and social ideal self by linking it with brand-induced happiness (Brand Happiness). The relationship is explored considering self-consciousness and social ideal self by taking them as moderators.

Primary data collected from Europe was used using a standard questionnaire measuring brand happiness, masstige, self-consciousness and social ideal self from 346 respondents for three mobile phone brands from America, South Korea and China-iPhone, Samsung, and Huawei. Exploratory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling, and Moderation Analysis revealed that the consumption of masstige brands lead to brand happiness. Original Contribution: The relationship between mass prestige (Masstige), self-consciousness and social ideal self was established by linking with brand-induced happiness (Brand Happiness). This relationship is moderated by self-consciousness, whereas social ideal self is not moderating the relationship. In addition, this study revealed that only iPhone is a masstige brand in Serbia, while comparing iPhone, with that of Samsung and Huawei. Implications of the findings and managerial applications along with theoretical contributions are discussed.

**Paper 7:**

**Shahid, S., & Paul, J. (2021). Intrinsic motivation of luxury consumers in an emerging market. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102531. 59 citations**  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102531>

As previous studies have primarily linked luxury with consumers' extrinsic motivation, there are not many studies exploring intrinsic motivational factors. Based on this gap, this study attempts to investigate the intrinsic factors that influence consumers' experiences with luxury brands.

Grounded in self-determination theory, this paper aims to assess the personal ‘self’ factors of luxury consumers' enriching experiences. An offline questionnaire from 316 luxury consumers was used to collect data for the study. AMOS SEM version 22 was used in this study to analyze the data. Our findings indicate that luxury consumers have shifted to luxury for ‘self,’ and are driven by intrinsic factors. As luxury relates to consumers' self-fulfillment, it creates an intrinsic and substantive experience for customers that assists them in their search for self-growth.

The study contributes to the literature on personal self and enriching experiences through luxury consumption and creates an opportunity to examine the impact of consumers’ happiness, which was discovered to be a critical indicator of enriched luxury experience and word of mouth.

## **Paper 8**

**Mansoor, M., & Paul, J. (2022). Mass prestige, brand happiness and brand evangelism among consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, 484-496.**  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.015> **Impact Factor 7.6. 30 citations within 6 months.**

Grounded on the Masstige theory (Paul, 2018; 2019), this study examines the direct and indirect impact of Mass Prestige of a Brand (MPB), Brand Perception (BP), and Propensity to Pay the Premium (PPP) on Brand Evangelism (BE) via Brand Happiness (BH) as a mediator. In addition, the moderating role of Self-pleasing Experience (SPE) between Masstige and BH and the interactive effect of Product Beliefs (PB) with BH to check its impact on BE was assessed.

Two independent studies using cross-sectional and time-lagged approaches were conducted among cosmetics and clothing brand consumers. Consumers from Pakistan participated in this

survey and responded to the questionnaire developed by the authors based on masstige mean score scale (Paul, 2015; 2018; 2019). Structural equation modeling was used as a methodology to analyze the data.

Results supported all the hypothesized paths with minor differences in impact size for both studies reflecting MBP, BP, and PPP as important predictors of BE through the underlying mechanism of BH. Likewise, results reveal that SPE acts as a catalyst to enhance BH in consumers, and this happiness further interacts with PB to motivate consumers to evangelize others to buy/use prestigious brands.

This study is an original pioneering work in Mass Prestige, Brand Happiness, and Brand Evangelism.

**Paper 9:**

**Alagarsamy, S., Mehroliya, S., & Paul, J. (2022). Masstige scale: An alternative to measure brand equity. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. IF 7.1, A rank in ABDC, 2\* in UK. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12873>. 5 citations within 8 months.**

Masstige Value can be defined as the maximum possible prestige value a brand enjoys. It's beyond brand equity. Brands try to develop brand awareness, likability, affection, and attachment. Customer based brand equity scale (CBBE) (Yoo and Donthu, 2001) and Masstige Mean Score Scale (Paul, 2015; 2018; 2019) are the two available scales to measure brand equity and brand prestige. Masstige scale may allow firms to measure brand equity to derive insights into the popularity of their brands. However, there is no empirical evidence available to test whether these scales are related measures of brand equity and, at the same time, independent measures, respectively.

A total of 493 participants evaluated four different athletic shoe brands. The multi-trait, multimethod and confirmatory factor analyses suggested that the masstige scale may be a viable

alternative to consumer-based brand equity scale and masstige value is found to be a robust measure to understand the real prestige of a brand in the minds of its consumers / potential consumers.

This study investigated whether the masstige scale and multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale measure the same constructs. A total of 493 participants evaluated four different athletic shoe brands. The multi-trait, multimethod and confirmatory factor analyses suggested that the masstige scale may be a viable alternative to consumer-based brand equity and masstige value. We discuss the implications and provide directions for future research.

This study investigates whether the masstige scale and multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale measure the same constructs or not. This is an original contribution.

**Paper 10. Nobre, H., Kumar, A., Kastanakis, M. N., & Paul, J. (2022). Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness. *European Management Review*. UK-CABS 3\* <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12538>**

This study investigates how the consumers establish relationship with the prestigious brands and how it can lead to brand happiness.

A study of 545 responses from European consumers covering 19 global brands assessed consumers' perceptions of their relationship with prestigious brands—in both functional and symbolic categories—and an analysis of brand happiness was carried out. The method used are structural equation modeling and moderation analysis. All the authors contributed equally for this study.

Results show that consumers' attitudes toward luxury brands moderate the masstige–brand happiness relationship. In addition, brand classification (functional vs. symbolic) is an important moderator, with consumers perceiving symbolic brands as more intimate and, thus, as exhibiting more prestige and contributing more to brand happiness than functional brands.

A general theoretical proposition is derived based on this study. ie, the more passionate consumers' relationship with a masstige brand, the happier they are with the brand.

## **Conclusion**

Masstige Scale (Paul, 2015; 2018; 2019) has become a popular measure to estimate a brand's mass prestige. The weighted average number of citations received for the three studies mentioned below can be considered as evidence for its impact. Masstige Model (Paul, 2019) and Masstige Theory (Paul, 2018) have also been used as lens for several research studies and Ph.D theses in different countries. These works have attracted the attention of many brand managers during the last seven years. Together, the above-mentioned papers have helped advancing the field and the phenomenon- masstige marketing – which has become a buzzword – in the brand management- literature.

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## Marketing Intelligence & Planning

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# Masstige marketing redefined and mapped

Pyramid  
model and  
MMS measure

## Introducing a pyramid model and MMS measure

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – “Masstige marketing” is considered as a market penetration strategy for medium and large enterprises, particularly in foreign markets. The author redefine “masstige marketing” strategy in this paper and map the concept as a new model for brand building. Second, the author examine the effectiveness of “masstige marketing” strategy with reference to marketing mix theory (Four Ps = product, price, place and promotion). The purpose of this paper is to introduce a theoretical model to help the companies to implement “masstige marketing” strategy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The author introduce a scale, called “Masstige Mean Score Scale” to measure the mass prestige value of brands. Both secondary and primary data used in this study. The author collected data from 590 young women consumers living in Japan and France to measure the “masstige” value using the new scale developed. The marketing strategy of European luxury sector multinational brand LV, has also been discussed as a method.

**Findings** – Masstige value is the best indicator of long-term brand value. In other words, higher the masstige value (MMS) of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed. The author also found that a brand can create mass prestige with “masstige marketing” strategy by appropriately mixing the four Ps in marketing – Product, Price, Promotion and Place in a distinct and culturally different market.

**Originality/value** – The author develop a pyramid model and measurement scale for “masstige marketing” as a theoretical framework to stimulate further research and as a tool for practitioners for better decision making. Besides, the author posit that higher the Masstige Mean Score (MMS) of a brand, higher the likelihood that potential customers recall that as a “top of mind” brand. Lower MMS implies that the firm has to go long way in their efforts to build the brand.

**Keywords** Brand management, Marketing mix, Brand valuation, Masstige marketing, Mass prestige, Pyramid model, Masstige Mean Score

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Masstige marketing

“Masstige marketing” is considered as a market penetration strategy for medium and large enterprises. The term masstige, short for mass prestige, was defined by Silverstein *et al.* (2008) in their book *Trading up* and in their *Harvard Business Review* article “Luxury for the Masses” (2003). Masstige products were defined as “premium but attainable” and there are two key factors in classifying items as having these characteristics: they are considered luxury or premium products and they are priced

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between the middle class and the super premium. With the growing number of middle-class consumers, those who are trading up to higher levels of quality and taste, luxury goods are not only for ultra-affluent consumers but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003).

Though the concept “masstige marketing” sounds like a buzzword, there is not yet a theory or a measure or a model developed to generalize the idea and to stimulate further research in this area. Therefore, we attempt to put forward a theoretical model and introduce a measure called Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) in this paper to fill the gap in the literature and to help the managers to examine the effectiveness of their marketing strategies in different countries as well as in different regions/states within the same country. In other words, the scope of this paper include contributing to the academic as well as managerial theory by developing a new scale and index with two goals: (a) to measure the success/failure of a brand, in terms of mass prestige value, in comparison to other brands within the same industry in the same region; (b) to measure the success/failure of a brand in terms of mass prestige value in two different regions/countries and understand the market where it has succeeded. This would help the brand managers to rethink on their branding strategies if they have not succeeded in a market, and prepare future marketing plan and actions accordingly. Though data collected for this paper specifically addresses only the point (b) mentioned above, the MMSS and the index introduced could be widely used in all industries and countries.

This paper is divided into seven sections. As discussed above, a brief overview of “masstige marketing” and marketing mix Ps is presented to underline their significance as an important research domain. In the next section, the research objectives (RO) and methods have been elaborated. Thereafter, Section 3 is devoted to discuss the “masstige marketing” strategy implemented by premium and popular fashion goods brands in Japan. In Section 4, we analyse the marketing and growth strategy of Louis Vuitton (LV), the leading European luxury sector multinational firm, to support the purpose of this paper and to draw a theoretical framework, blending “masstige marketing” and marketing mix Ps. We examine not only how a foreign firm established its business model in Japan, but also how it sustained growth for over 30 years. A pyramid model for “masstige marketing” of products is proposed in Section 5 and an instrument with the title – MMSS has been introduced in Section 6 as a measure to assess and compare the masstige value of different brands, on a generalized scientific scale. The paper ends with the conclusion with propositions in Section 7.

### *1.2 Marketing mix four Ps and masstige marketing*

Marketing mix originated from the single P (price) of microeconomic theory (Chong, 2003). McCarthy (1964) offered the marketing mix, often referred to as the “four Ps”, as a means of translating marketing planning into practice (Bennett, 1997). Marketing mix is not a scientific theory, but merely a conceptual framework that identifies the principal decision-making managers make in configuring their offerings to suit consumers’ needs. The tools could be used to develop both long-term strategies and short-term tactical programme (Palmer, 2004).

Many researchers proposed a new “P” into the marketing mix since 1980s onward. Judd (1987) proposed a fifth P (people). Booms and Bitner (1980) added three Ps (participants, physical evidence and process) to the original four Ps to apply the marketing mix concept to service. Kotler (1986) added political power and public opinion formation to the Ps concept. MaGrath (1986) suggested the addition of three



Ps (personnel, physical facilities and process management). Vignali *et al.* (1994) recommended the addition of S (service) to the marketing mix. Goldsmith (1999) posited that there should be eight Ps (product, price, place, promotion, participants, physical evidence, process and personalization).

Pyramid  
model and  
MMS measure

Business executives do not really view the four Ps as being equally important, but consider the price and product components to be the most important (Kellerman *et al.*, 1995). Boone and Kurtz (2013) ranked the four Ps to be of most importance in the following order: price, product, place (distribution) and promotion. Development of marketing mix has received considerable academic and industry attention. The most concerted criticism has come from the services marketing area (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). The concept of four Ps has been criticized as being a production-oriented definition of marketing, and not a customer oriented (Popovic, 2006). Constantinides (2006) assessed the standing of the four Ps marketing mix framework as the dominant marketing management paradigm and as theoretical concept and identified two limitations, namely, the model's internal orientation and lack of personalization.

Despite number of criticisms four Ps, product, price, promotion and place have been extremely influential in informing the development of both marketing theory and practice. In spite of its deficiencies, the four Ps remain a staple of the marketing mix (Kent and Brown, 2006). Hence it is important for companies to appropriately mix as part of implementation of "masstige marketing strategy". In other words, it makes sense to posit that the success of "masstige marketing" to a great extent is based upon how to formulate strategies with reference to product, price, promotion and place. Paul and Ferroul (2013) analysed the case of LV in Japan and found that the brand had long-term success in Japan mainly because of appropriate marketing strategies. However, they did not talk about the term "masstige".

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## 2. RO, data and methods

This paper aims at developing a "masstige marketing" score scale, to measure the mass prestige value of brands and compared the value to derive insights on the popularity of the brands.

An attempt has been done to introduce a pyramid model for "masstige marketing" to show how a luxury brand can target middle-income consumers. Mass prestige-based business model, introduced in this paper, adapts to a new cultural environment, recommending a course of action for further strategic moves. Effort has also been taken to conceptualize the strategic marketing functions of a multinational luxury brand LV (We choose LV because of its highest brand value, see Table I) in Japan, with reference to four Ps – product, price, place and promotion to support this objective. As a first step, RO are specified, based on the review of literature, following the recent studies, taking into account the gap in the literature with the intention of redefining "masstige marketing" strategy, mapping the concept with a pyramid model and introducing a measure for analysing the effectiveness of masstige marketing strategy. Second, we seek to provide insights on strategic decisions to succeed and sustain in foreign markets. Therefore, the RO are set as:

- to illustrate how to build a "top of mind" brand in a key overseas market by implementing "masstige marketing" strategy;
- to develop a theoretical model for "masstige marketing" strategy, taking into account people belonging into high-income group, middle-income group and low-income group;



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**Table I.**  
The leading luxury  
brands in the world

Rank	Brand	Brand value in USD (m)	Brand value in Euros (m)	Country of origin
1.	Louis Vuitton	21,602	16,718	France
2.	Gucci	8,254	6,388	Italy
3.	Chanel	6,355	4,918	France
4.	Rolex	4,956	3,836	Switzerland
5.	Hermès	4,575	3,541	France
6.	Cartier	4,236	3,278	France
7.	Tiffany & Co.	4,208	3,257	USA
8.	Prada	3,585	2,775	Italy
9.	Ferrari	3,527	2,730	Italy
10.	Bulgari	3,330	2,577	Italy
11.	Burberry	3,285	2,542	UK
12.	Dior	2,038	1,578	France
13.	Patek Philippe	1,105	855	Switzerland
14.	Zegna	818	633	Italy
15.	Ferragamo	722	559	Italy

**Source:** "Leading Luxury Brands", Interbrand, available at: [www.interbrand.com](http://www.interbrand.com) (accessed 5 July 2012)

- to illustrate the complexities relating to managing global operations and the challenges and opportunities in a foreign market and to determine how to use marketing mix four Ps effectively to attain "sustained success"; and
- to develop a Score Scale to measure the effectiveness of "masstige marketing" for different brands.

The secondary data were collected from public sources, including annual reports of the company, magazines and research papers, a number of books and web sites. We visited the stores of LV, and their competitors such as Gucci, Chanel, Hermes, etc., in Japan to get a real-life feel for the prices and products. We collected the primary data from existing and potential customers of LV brand. Interviews were conducted with 295 women from Japan and France (total 590) to collect data. They participated in survey using the newly developed MMSS. We decided to interview only women because of the widespread belief that women constitute the major chunk of consumers of luxury brands such as LV. Based on this, it was decided to introduce a measure to estimate "Masstige Value" which has been termed as MMSS. Besides, we employed "Content Analysis" and "Case Study" methods as research methods to discuss the data and posit a conceptual framework.

### 3. "Masstige" strategy

The concept of luxury is attractive and fashionable. There are luxury columns in all magazines and journals. There are TV shows on the business of luxury, and on luxury products and services. New words have been recently invented and promoted that add to the complexity: masstige, opuluxe, premium, ultra premium, trading up, hyper luxury, real or true luxury and so on (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). New luxury brand positioning strategies often combine a high-perceived prestige with reasonable price premiums in order to attract middle-class consumers. These strategies are radically different from those implemented by traditional luxury brand owners, who maintain a strict consistency between perceived prestige and price premiums so as to preserve their brand's exclusivity. Although some authors have suggested

the existence of masstige strategies, few empirical studies have been conducted to support this claim (Truong *et al.*, 2009).

Hong *et al.* (2010) analysed how the relationship marketing implement factors of masstige fashion brands influence the trust, satisfaction and repurchase intention of consumers. Their results show that the relationship marketing implement factors of masstige fashion brands were customer orientation, salesperson expertise, communication, brand expertise and inducement. They also found that the trust and satisfaction of consumers influence the repurchase intention in the masstige fashion brands. Masstige brand positioning is critical to success of lifestyle brand extension, which may have synergy effect on achieving strong brand value in both core brand and its extension (Kim and Ko, 2010). Consumers attribute lower value, hold less positive attitudes and express lower purchase intention towards the downscale extensions originating from a luxury car brand than from a luxury fashion brand. At the brand level, the size of the discount does not make much difference in the overall evaluation of the extension. Prestige brands are more sensitive to dilution effects resulting from the vertical extension than luxury brands. However, the larger discount increases the distance between the prestige brands and the extension, reducing the negative impact on brand image (Riley *et al.*, 2013).

According to luxury analysts, the luxury brands succeeded in making Japan as the world's largest market for luxury brands, accounting for anywhere between 12 and 40 per cent of global sales, depending on the market definition (Japan External Trade Organization, 2008; Smith, 2009; Paul and Ferroul, 2010). Successful brands such as Prada, LV or Channel had made the Japanese luxury market the mass market through "masstige" strategy. They created bandwagon effect in Japan for luxury goods applying the theory of "masstige". Masstige marketing based on the cultural and social homogeneity among Japanese society helped the luxury brands from western countries, particularly European brands to capitalize the capabilities that they had created. Oh and Kim (2011) critically analysed the purchasing behaviour of consumers from three selected Asian countries (Japan, South Korea and China) that purchase luxury items and the marketing strategy of LV to support the objectives. They have identified three critical factors that determined the success of LV, i.e. deployment of innovation and tradition at the same time; use of "masstige marketing"; and advertising. Similarly, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) examined the impact of a number of psychological factors on consumers' propensity to engage in the "bandwagon" type of luxury consumption. They developed a conceptual model of bandwagon consumption of luxury products. In general, their results show that a consumer's interdependent self-concept underlies bandwagon luxury consumption.

#### 4. Case of LV: from France to Japan

The LV was established in France in 1854 and has grown as one of the oldest French multinational luxury brand over the years, with substantial market share in Japan and North America. LV had focused mainly on building a Japanese clientele in 1970s and 1980s. Japan was one of LV's first overseas markets and has been over the years its main source of revenue. LV Japan has led an aggressive marketing strategy, targeting the high- and middle-income groups. The firm has focused on product development and brand management, while trying to understand and adapt to the Japanese market. To do so, the firm has strongly invested in creativity and innovation, quality control and distribution control. LV introduced newer product categories in the Japanese market, such as jewellery, watches and eyewear. The markets for these products have

grown rapidly, exceeding expectations. LV has redesigned bags exclusively for the Japanese market with a local flavour. The care given to establish the stores at the best possible locations in cities is another factor that has attracted high-income customers LV products. LV has been able to improve its positioning in the market due to constant pro-activity and wise expansion in the tertiary markets. For instance, after land prices decreased in the 1990s and with the global recession during 2007-2010, there were some changes in people’s shopping habits and lifestyles. LV reviewed them carefully and reconsidered its line-up of merchandise.

4.1 LV’s entry into Japan

The first entry of LV into the Japanese market was through department stores like Mitsukoshi with displays of LV’s imported products at specific areas within the stores. The LVMH group offered an interior design that made the purchasing experience special. Once they got entry to Japan’s strong departmental store network, the LV management started working seriously on business expansion. In 1977, LV opened its first exclusive retail store in Japan in Ginza, Tokyo and Osaka (Philippe, 2007). By 2007, the LV had over 50 exclusive stores in Japan, however, the LVMH group as a whole controlled over 250 stores in Japan. The parent firm exercised tight control on prices, products and items exported from France to Japan. LV still continues to export its products from Europe to Japan to sell to customers in the country. It does not have a production unit in Japan or neighbouring countries. Even though the cost of transportation is high, this business model still works because the firm charges premium prices for the brand (Paul and Ferroul, 2013). LVMH group generated substantial portion of their worldwide revenue from Japan, i.e., 26, 23 and 20 per cent each in 2007, 2009 and 2011, respectively (see Table II).

4.2 Masstige marketing through “four Ps”

The “masstige marketing” strategy of LV in Japan can be broadly classified into three categories. The first one has been the long attachment of LV to the country and its society, traditions, history, art and many other aspects. The Japanese consumers are mostly loyal clients. LV’s strategy has been able to move such shoppers up from the classic tan-and-brown monogrammed bags to newer lines. The firm has always been trying to establish a true relationship with Japanese consumers.

Second, LV formulated a wise masstige strategy in Japan. It came up with the idea of special limited editions for the market. The collaboration between western artist

Table II.

Louis Vuitton  
Moët-Hennessy  
(LVMH Group),  
fashion and leather  
goods division  
financial statements

	2011	2009	2007
Revenue (EUR millions)	6,010	5,628	5,222
Revenue by geographic region of delivery (%)			
France	8	9	9
Europe (excluding France)	21	20	19
USA	19	20	21
Japan	20	22	26
Asia (excluding Japan)	25	23	20
Other markets	7	6	5
Total	100	100	100

Source: Compiled from Official Financial Reports, LVMH Group, Paris

Marc Jacobs and Japanese designer Takashi Murakami was the starting point of LV's success in Japan. They created a colourful pop version of LV's monogram for the 2003 spring/summer collection. The collection showed the company's attachment to and recognition of the art and traditions of Japan. Following the massive success of the line, LV renewed its collaboration with the Japanese artist, aiming for further success. Third, LV has kept true to the principles of four Ps and believed in the maintenance of high quality while offering new products with local flavour to adapt to changing times and cultures. This process can be discussed as follows.

*4.2.1 Product.* LV focused on constant improvement of quality and offered lifetime repair guarantees for its customers. The brand had been striving to increase both fidelity and endless desire in its consumers. It was obvious that the more the product range and the higher the quality, the more the customers would come back.

In general, marketers seek "adequate quality", "faintness of use", etc., and too much of quality can be undesirable because it increases the cost. However, LV handbags represented "products of distinctive qualities" and "attention to details". In general the concept of "relative quality" is challenged by the "absolute quality" which has forced customers to a LV or nothing attitude. To back their products, LV has taken action against counterfeiting item by "Enlightenment Champagne, involvement of French trademark authorities", etc., make their product defensible. Partnership with local artist and "limited edition" products has demonstrated that "product line" up and innovation are very strong parts of LV business model in Japan. Newer product categories such as jewellery, watches and eyewear have grown rapidly. Ready-to-wear represents another category to grow. LV's internet business and a foray into children's wear have been among the growth vectors for the brand.

*4.2.2 Price.* Market demands "Low Price". This can be achieved by reducing costs and off-shoring production to relatively low-cost countries. LV products, on the other hand, are priced high because they are made in western Europe, primarily France and exported to Japan. In essence, the LV's strategy is value creation, not price – this being absolute value, not relative value. LV based its strategy on the loyalty of its consumers and strove to attract more consumers to buy bags ranging from classic tan-and-brown monogrammed bags to newer lines such as the Murakami line, which was priced at \$1,000, and Suhali, a line of goatskin bags priced in more than \$2,000 (based on information collected from LV store in Japan).

With the Yen getting strong, against Euro, LV reduced the prices substantially during 2007-2010 (for instance, in response to the sluggish economy and appreciation of the Japanese yen, foreign luxury brands were lowering their prices. LV and Christian Dior had lowered their prices the week before Christmas in 2008. LV had made a 7 per cent price reduction on leather goods, accessories, ready-to-wear, shoes, watches and jewellery). The decrease in prices was justified by a policy of offering its products at appropriate prices (Socha, 2008). This pricing strategy somehow helped them to survive through the recession phase and earned the trust of the customers.

*4.2.3 Promotion.* One of the secrets of success of LV, according to Haig (2004), is that the company deploys a mass marketing strategy to achieve mass prestige, which makes luxury items available and appealing to everyone, not just to the wealthy and elite class. For example, the company uses marketing techniques such as celebrity endorsements and sports sponsorships. The strategy is enabled by another secret of success: the ability to control. LV has managed to balance its prestige image with populism, maintaining the connotations of a luxury brand with a mass marketing

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mentality (Haig, 2004). By implementing this strategy, LV was able to keep its core luxury consumers, which means still keeping the product's exclusive feeling while making the product available to a mass market.

It is not common to see LV commercial on TV even at primetime. This is not because LV is tight with its advertising budget, but due to the fact that their philosophy is to give in depth details to the customers directly. The most common used advertising medium used by LV is print mass media like fashion magazines, etc. Its brand management and positioning strategy in Japan have also helped it to achieve business volume in Japan. As LV had been going global, the brand was able to develop a successful advertising strategy in line with its global expansion strategy. The advertising strategy of the company remained based on the idea that productivity would not sustain growth. Rather than cutting its ad budget like most luxury groups, the company increased advertisement spending by 20 per cent in 2003. This figure might have seemed very high but in fact it only represented 5 per cent of revenues, half the industry's average (Matlack, 2004).

LV frequently used print advertisements in magazines and billboards in large cosmopolitan cities. The campaigns often involved famous stars like Gisele Bündchen, Eva Herzigova, Sean Connery and Francis and Sofia Ford Coppola. Lot of customers got attracted to the mind-boggling 90-second commercial advertisement in television with a catchy question, "Where will life take you?" translated into 13 different languages, it helped LV to build brand. The media (communication) department was strategic in choosing the newspapers and magazines to reach out to the higher and middle-income group (Paul, 2011).

**4.2.4 Place.** In general, the more the number of distribution channels, the higher the sales potential for companies selling normal goods. However, theory could be different in the case of luxury goods. The multinational brand LV had established a global but rigidly controlled distribution network from its headquarters, with exports from Europe to other countries including Japan. In the case of LV – they were selling only through few exclusive stores located at prime locations. LV has always opened up its stores in the prime areas in each city where high- and middle-income groups visit frequently. This seems to have helped the firm to attract the target segments. The location of stores is an important factor for luxury sector brands like LV. A few years ago, LV started online (via web) business in Japan after the new CEO took over the leadership. An expansion of LV's internet business for ready-to-wear could be the next possible approach.

However, they are not distributing LV branded products through other stores. The reason being, it is easy to control one or two distribution channels than many. Control is the key in the business plan of LV, being a luxury brand. Also, LV paid attention to provide the comfort of convenience while offering "joyful" shopping experience at well-decorated showrooms. Since there was demand for opening more franchisees, the management also ventured into opening stores through franchisee mode, with local business people investing capital for franchisees during the last decade.

## 5. Masstige marketing strategy: the pyramid model

Carefully examining brand luxury and the dimensions and relationships underlying the luxury fashion brand, Miller and Mills (2012) developed a conceptual model called the Brand Luxury Model, by clarifying the confusion evident in earlier brand luxury research, however, their model is not based on the concept masstige. Similarly, Shukla and Purani (2012) compared the importance of luxury value perceptions in

cross-national context. Despite those notable studies, we found that this research area is still in the infancy stage and no measure/index is developed till now. Following Kastanakis and Balabasnis (2012), we felt the need for a theoretical model blending the tradition of mass-market dynamics with the mapping mechanism. Therefore, we introduce a pyramid model for marketing masstige products in this section.

How does a brand that is synonymous with luxury and exclusivity grow while retaining its cachet? The answer is “masstige marketing” strategy. Though LV brand is known as a “class” product, their marketing strategy in Japan was unique. The management tried to position the brand with the appropriate marketing mix principles, i.e., implementing four Ps scientifically and aggressively to position the brand with a focus on the concept mass prestige.

There are two stages in luxury culture – the “show off” stage and the “fit in” stage – and Japan has already passed through the two stages. LV products were sold very well during the “show off” stage in Japan in 1980s. For example, more than three quarters of women in Tokyo of about 20 years of age possessed an item of the brand. This phenomenon was considered normal as luxury goods symbolized membership of the “acceptable” group of society. In the sulphurous book *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Lustre*, Thomas (2007) reported that 40 per cent of all Japanese owned a LV-monogrammed item. She compared LV’s growth over the past decade to that of McDonald’s, suggesting that the LV logo had become almost as ubiquitous as the Golden Arches. In addition, the repetition of limited editions over the past years had marked a new era for LV – an era characterized by disposable “it” bags with shelf lives of two fashion seasons at most.

After Marc Jacobs (LV’s star artist) had seen an exhibition by Japanese artist Takashi Murakami at the *Foundation Cartier pour l’artcontemporain* in Paris, LV decided to collaborate with the Japanese artist for its 2003 spring/summer collection. Murakami, who was known as the “Japanese Andy Warhol”, re-created a colourful pop version of LV’s monogram in 33 colours on a black and white background. In stores, LV’s handbags with smiling blossom designs turned out to be best sellers in Japan. The strategy appeared to be huge success for the leading luxury conglomerate LVMH, as the Murakami line increased LV’s profits by 10 per cent. The success was not only in the Japanese market but also in the European and American markets, which showed true admiration for Japanese culture (Paul and Ferroul, 2013).

Following the massive success of the line, in 2003 and 2005 collaborations between Murakami and Jacobs resulted in the Monogram Cherry Blossom line, featuring a trendy motif inspired by the fruit of the cherry blossom – Japanese art wedded to LV’s perfection – and the Monogram Cerise line, with a new pattern that gave freshness and cheerfulness to the monogram, i.e., the collaboration between Jacobs and Murakami opened new avenues for LV not only in Japan, but also in the USA. Their collaboration has produced a lot of work, and has been a huge influence and inspiration to many. It has been and continues to be a monumental marriage of art and commerce: the ultimate crossover (Williams and Sharf, 2008). It was indeed “commerce” and strategy, as Takashi Murakami had been instrumental for LV’s success in Japan.

Japan has been LV’s most profitable market, representing almost 30 per cent of its profits, for more than three decades, i.e., “LV” may be French, but Japan has become a land full of “LV” lovers (Paul and Ferroul, 2013). The fact that 40 per cent Japanese adults owned a LV monogram implies that the luxury brand was successful in implementing “masstige marketing” strategy, by targeting middle-income group and upper part of low-income group. LV has certainly succeeded in the middle-income group segment in Japan and has taken efforts to attract the customers, those who belong to the upper part of the

low-income group segment. This can be generalized by introducing a pyramid model for “masstige marketing” (see Figure 1(a)-(d)). The top of the pyramid represent the high-income segment of customers (class market) while the middle-income group can be considered as synonym for the middle of the pyramid. Similarly, it is shown that the low-income group belongs to the bottom of pyramid (mass market). Pyramid 1 (Figure 1(a)) shows three segments of customers. In real life, the firms selling normal goods target all three segments of customers, which are shown in Pyramid 2 (Figure 1(b)) – pyramid for normal goods. Pyramid 3 (Figure 1(c)) – pyramid for luxury goods’ firms is drawn to show the usual target segment (top of the pyramid) of firms in the luxury goods sector. We posit that the firms will succeed tremendously if they follow the “masstige marketing” strategy, by targeting customers as shown in the proposed pyramid model for masstige marketing (PMM) in pyramid 4 (Figure 1(d)) – in nutshell, this model calls for firms, particularly luxury goods’ firms to target not only the top of the pyramid segment, but also every customer in the middle of the pyramid. Firms could sustain the sales growth for long time, if they go one more step forward, by targeting the customers belonging to the upper part of the “bottom of the pyramid”.

## 6. Introducing MMSS as a measure

As there is no measure available in the literature to estimate and compare the effectiveness of “masstige marketing” strategy in different countries/states/districts/cities, an effort has been taken to develop a scientific scale-based instrument containing ten questions that measure the impact of “masstige marketing” (see the Appendix). An individual’s score range is between 10 and 70 (maximum sum 70) on this instrument. Using this instrument, one can interpret that the higher the score, the more the masstige value. In order to test the masstige value, one has to collect data from a sample of customers or potential customers, calculate the mean score of the responses to each question, compute the sum total of the mean scores to examine the effectiveness of marketing strategy and compare the score in different/countries/regions/states/districts. This measure and comparison help firms to understand the effectiveness of their marketing strategy with reference to “masstige value” for the same brand in different countries. On the other hand, this instrument could be also employed as a tool to estimate the masstige score for different brands in the same industry in different states or districts in the same country. Following the rationale discussed above, the criteria that we posit here can be defined as follows.

The Masstige Mean Score (MMS) over 60 implies that the firm created “top of the mind” brand based on mass prestige.

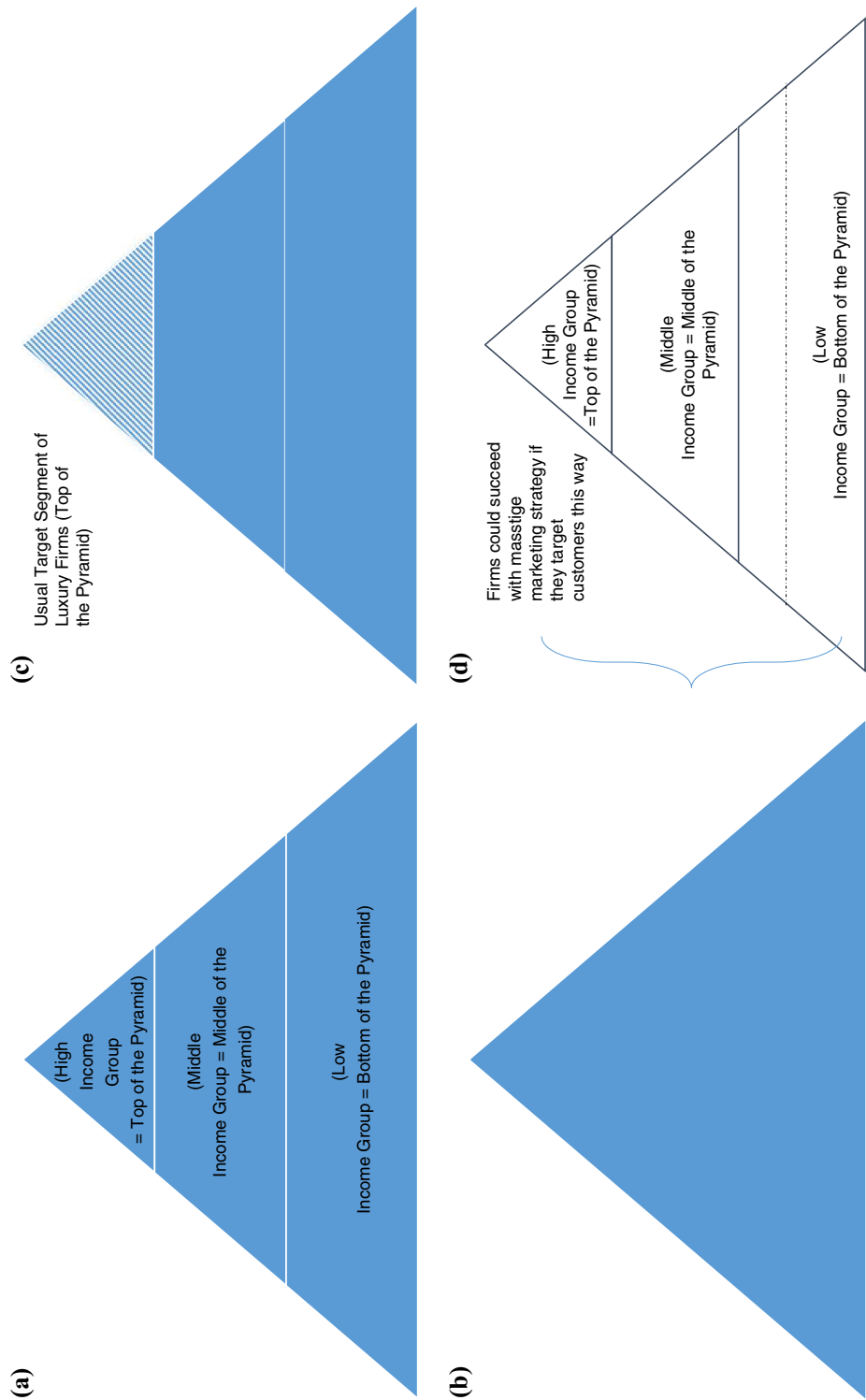
The MMS between 50 and 60 – implies that the firm has succeeded in building brand in that specific market based on “masstige” marketing, but not the “top of mind” brand.

The MMS between 40 and 50 – implies that firm has not yet succeed in brand building based on “masstige” marketing, however, it is possible to do that in long run.

The MMS 30-40 – implies that the brand is not yet accepted well in that market/country.

The MMS between 10 and 30 – indicates that the firm has failed to create mass prestige in that market.

Our sample consists of 590 young women in the age group of 18-33 (295 per country) from Japan and France (as the ladies are the primary customers of brands such as LV) for this study. The questionnaire was administered to those potential customers/customers in, Japan and France in order to determine the “masstige value” score for LV brand in their key market as well as France. We selected Japan as the brand generates maximum revenue from that country, to compare their “masstige value” score in the home country,



**Notes:** (a) Pyramid 1: basic pyramid; (b) pyramid 2: pyramid for normal goods (normal firms target customers in all three segments); (c) pyramid 3: pyramid for luxury goods' firms; (d) pyramid 4: proposed pyramid for firms to follow "masstige marketing" strategy

**Figure 1.**  
Pyramid model for masstige marketing



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France. The author's stint in those countries facilitated data collection. The results show that MMS for LV is 60.2 and 56.4 in Japan and France, respectively, which implies that LV created a "top of mind" brand based on mass prestige in Japan, whereas the firm has succeeded in building brand in France, their home country based on "masstige" marketing, but not the "top of mind" brand (Table III).

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## 7. Conclusions

Based on the MMS analysis, survey results, the case study of LV and pyramid model, it is worth noting that blending masstige marketing strategy with the principles of four Ps can result into greater market share and rousing gain even in a culturally different foreign market. The conceptual model posited in this paper shows how a firm could create mass prestige with the appropriate targeting strategies time to time.

Other findings from this study can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The MMS-based instrument introduced in this paper as a measure of "Masstige Marketing Strategy" can be used as a criteria to examine the effectiveness and popularity of brands regardless of the industry and region/country/state. For example, MMS measure could serve as a benchmark measure for comparing the effectiveness of not only the premium brands, but also the normal brands. laptop brands such as Dell, HP, Apple, Acer, etc., and automobile brands such as Toyota, GM, Ford, Honda, etc., would very well fit into the MMS analysis. Similarly, this instrument could serve as a basic measure for market research in different regions/markets for all firms, regardless of their industry and size.
- (2) It is also important to note that the luxury firms cashed in on the opportunities in Japan in with "masstige marketing" strategy. This strategy helped them to capitalize the capabilities created, leveraging opportunities.
- (3) The pyramid model for "masstige marketing" proposed in this paper could add value for business executives, entrepreneurs and researchers looking for thoughtful insights on the strategy and development of a business model for product marketing, particularly in the case of high-value branded products.

Sl. no.	Factor	LV in Japan	LV in France
1.	I like this brand because of mass prestige	6.6	6.3
2.	I feel like to buy this brand of mass prestige	6.5	6.1
3.	I tend to pay high price for this brand for status quo	5.7	5.5
4.	I consider this as a "top of mind" brand in my country/state/district	6.5	6.6
5.	Would like to recommend this brand to friends and relatives	6.6	6.2
6.	Nothing is more exciting than this brand	5.5	5.4
7.	I believe this brand is known for high quality	6.4	6.0
8.	I believe this brand is of international standard	6.2	5.9
9.	I love to buy this brand regardless of the price	4.9	4.4
10.	I believe that people in my country/state/district consider this brand as a synonym for prestige	6.3	5.0
	Sum	60.2	56.4

**Table III.**  
Masstige Mean Score (MMS) for LV in key foreign market and at home

- (4) Since people have to pay premium prices to buy luxury items, many consumers tend to abstain from buying them during recession. One possible solution to overcome this challenge is to open more directly owned stores or franchisees for sales to reach out to a maximum of people. Franchisees can be assigned to local business people that have credentials, subject to quality assurance and collaboration with the parent firm.

Based on the above discussion, elaboration and conceptualization, we posit the following theoretical propositions (*P1, P2, P3, P4*), which could help stimulating future research and improve managerial practice:

- P1.* The higher the Masstige value of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed in a distinct market.
- P2.* The higher the brand's market orientation targeting the customers, in the middle and bottom of the pyramid segments, the higher the likelihood of sustaining the success in long run.
- P3.* The better the marketing mix (product, price, promotion and place), the higher the likelihood to increase sales and thereby the MMS.
- P4.* The higher the MMS, the higher the average life of a brand in that market.

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### Appendix. Questionnaire to Measure "Masstige" Value (Masstige Score Scale Instrument)

Name (Optional):

Name Your State & Country

What Income group you belong to (in your country)?

A. Low Income Group b. Middle Income Group c. High Income group

Age Group: a. 18 to 25 b. 26 to 33 c. 33 to 40 d. 40 to 47 e. 47 to 54 f. Over 54

Work Experience: Gender: M) F)

Rate the following factors on a scale of 1-7 where 1 is least applicable to you and 7 is highly applicable

MIP  
33,5**706**

Sl. no.	Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	I like this brand because of mass prestige associated with it							
2.	I feel like to buy this brand because of mass prestige							
3.	I tend to pay high price for this brand for status quo							
4.	I consider this as a "top of mind" brand in my country/state/district							
5.	I would like to recommend this brand to friends and relatives							
6.	Nothing is more exciting than this brand							
7.	I believe this brand is known for high quality							
8.	I believe this brand is of international standard							
9.	I love to buy this brand regardless of the price							
10.	I believe that people in my country/state/district consider this brand as a synonym for prestige							

**About the author**

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## Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy for marketing

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**Abstract:** The term 'Masstige' stands for mass prestige. Masstige marketing is a strategic phenomenon with the goal of market penetration and brand management in the era of globalisation. The main purpose of this paper is to contribute towards the development of the masstige marketing theory to explain the brand management phenomenon of high value/premium/moderately highly priced (but attainable) brands with a new theoretical model – focused on product, promotion and place strategies, keeping prices constant. Besides, we assess and contrast the effectiveness of marketing strategy of foreign and domestic car brands in the USA using Masstige Mean Index (MMI) developed by Paul (2015). This study is based on the survey data of owners of Japanese and American car brands. It was found that brands can create higher mass prestige value in a foreign country if they follow masstige marketing strategy. The study shows how MMI may facilitate masstige score estimates, allowing comparisons and aiding brands in devising strategies.

**Keywords:** brand perception; foreign brand; brand equity; mass prestige; masstige mean index.

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Paul, J. (2018) 'Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy for marketing', *European J. International Management*, Vol. 12, Nos. 5/6, pp.722–745.

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### 1 Introduction

The basic question in the business world is how firms gain market share and succeed (Paul, 2015a; Alon et al., 2016). This question is confronted in this study on 'Mass prestige'-based strategic marketing approach grounded in brand positioning, which endeavours to analyse the factors that determine the mass prestige of a brand in a

society/region/state/country. Mass Prestige is commonly referred to as “masstige,” which is a marketing term akin to better brand perception and brand equity. A portmanteau of mass and prestige, the term has been described in layman’s terms as ‘prestige for the masses’ (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Truong et al., 2009; Paul, 2015b; Kumar and Paul, 2018). The development of masstige strategy and theory flows from a recognition that marketing theory is replete with recycled and repeat analyses of different marketing mix elements, but has not grounded well on how and why certain firms build brand equity and achieve international success in this competitive era of globalisation compared to others.

Regarding price and prestige, masstige brands are just a step below traditional luxury brands and a step above mid-priced brands (Truong et al., 2009). Accordingly, Masstige marketing can be defined as a phenomenon in which regular products with moderately high prices are marketed to the maximum number of consumers by creating mass prestige without lowering prices or without offering discounts. Starbucks, Apple, Body works or Toyota Lexus etc. are good examples for this approach. Masstige strategy implies brand positioning, aiming at creating mass prestige value for the brand. Therefore, mid-priced brand managers could also use masstige strategy as it aims at maximising sales neither by lowering prices nor by offering discount. Product and promotion strategies play a critical role as part of Masstige marketing. Although “masstige marketing” sounds like a catchy buzzword, this topic has been scarcely researched (Truong et al., 2009; Shukla and Purani, 2012; Paul, 2015b; Kumar and Paul, 2018), because “masstige” as a term has been coined just a decade ago and adopted by the academics in the recent past. Thus, there are gaps in the literature, both in the areas of measurement of masstige value, theory development and positioning and linking it within the broad spectrum of brand management. Therefore, we contribute to developing ‘masstige’ theory and strategy for brand management in this era of globalisation.

In tandem with the globalisation of consumer culture, brands have become a focal notion for both corporations and consumers (Schroeder, 2009). Branding has emerged as a top management priority due to the growing realisation that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that firms have (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). The globalisation of brands is an evolutionary process that is determined by macro-environmental and firm-level factors, in the firm’s global brand architecture (Townsend et al., 2010). For instance, all leading automotive multinational corporations (MNCs) have engaged in foreign direct investment (FDI) by establishing subsidiaries in foreign countries. For example, Japan’s Toyota Motor Corp. (“Toyota”) manufactures cars in Kentucky, USA, due to the firm’s strategy to build a global brand and because of the location’s sizeable market. From Toyota’s point of view, there is a need to reach global consumers faster and reduce production and transportation costs.

In a competitive marketplace, the effectiveness of the marketing mix is determined not only by its absolute value but also by its relative value on the competition (Sudhir, 2001). The masstige marketing strategy and measure help explaining the extent of marketing success and failure grounded in the approach of building brand prestige, brand love and brand equity. The concepts of brand prestige and brand love have garnered great attention in branding and consumer behavior research lately (Nguyen et al., 2013; Schaefer and Kuehlwein, 2015; Paul, 2015b). Despite extensive research and significant advances in our understanding of brand equity conceptualisation and measurement (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2005), over the last three decades, important questions on brand

equity and likeability remain unanswered (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2013). Filling this gap, the present paper examines and compares the effectiveness of marketing strategy (taking all marketing mix elements together) of foreign brands, Toyota and Honda Motor Co., Ltd. (“Honda”) from Japan (“Foreign brands”), and domestic automotive brands, General Motors Co. (“GM”) and Ford Motor Co. (“Ford”) in the USA (GM and Ford collectively referred to as “Domestic brands,” and together with Foreign brands referred to as our “Study brands”), by calculating and juxtaposing their Masstige Mean Index – MMI (Paul, 2015b). We use MMI as an alternate method to measure the effectiveness of international marketing strategies that creates better brand equity in this study. Besides, we seek to extend the use of MMI (previously used only in the case of ultra-luxury brands such as Luis Vuitton) in the context of popular brands with high value/moderately high prices, which are targeted not only for the high-income group but also middle-income group. Drawing upon Sudhir’s (2001) structural analysis of automobile sector in the USA, an effort has been taken in this study to estimate the mass prestige value of corporate brands in American car industry using the Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) and Masstige Mean Index (MMI) developed by Paul (2015b). We present MMI as a tool to examine the effectiveness of marketing strategy, and as a measure to estimate the relative ‘masstige’ value of Japanese and American car brands in the USA, in this study. Thus, the true purpose of this study is to familiarise the academia with the masstige strategy and its effectiveness linking with the tenets of strategic management. Accordingly, the scope of this study is both building a better theory of marketing performance grounded in the mass prestige approach as well as explaining these practical insights for managers.

Insights into why consumers differ in their attitudes towards global brands are scant (Riefler, 2012; Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010; Alden et al., 2006b). Besides researchers (Roth et al., 2008; Pappu et al., 2006; Pappu et al., 2007; Pappu and Quester, 2010) show that country brand equity has a significant effect on consumer’s brand perception and preferences. However, few or no studies have empirically explored masstige positioning strategies influence on consumer behaviour (Truong et al., 2009). First, little research has been carried out exploring the masstige strategy so far. Second, not much is known about the relationship between masstige value and the success of a brand. Third, there are no efforts till now to examine the factors affecting the mass prestige and customer-based brand equity and their relationship. Fourth, the link between the country of origin and mass prestige of a brand is also under-researched. By addressing these important research gaps, we make a number of contributions to the literature. First, an effort has been taken to conceptualise the theory of masstige marketing. Second, we extend prior research on masstige marketing, contributing towards building a new theory i.e., a theory of masstige marketing based on the approaches developed by other experts. Third, we shed light on the relationship between the mass prestige value, perceived brand equity and country origin. Finally, a benchmark parity between a top of mind brand, brand prestige and masstige value is established with empirical evidence.

To fill these gaps in the literature, we extend prior research (Kirmani et al., 1999; Sudhir, 2001; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Roth et al., 2008; Zhou et al., 2010; Pappu and Quester, 2010; Paul, 2015b; Kumar and Paul, 2018), with the specific research objectives as follows:



- 1 Measure and compare the perceived Mass Prestige value of Foreign versus Domestic Car Brands in the USA using Masstige Mean Index (MMI).
- 2 Assess masstige marketing strategy effectiveness and determine which brands are successful, based on their MMI.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section is designed towards developing a theory of masstige marketing grounded in the extant masstige marketing literature. The research hypotheses are described in Section 3. The methodology is given in Section 4. Sections 5 and 6 describe the study firms' brief profile and marketing strategies with reference to product, promotion, and place. Furthermore, Section 7 discusses findings, Section 8 discusses limitations and directions for future research, and Section 9 provides concluding remarks.

## 2 Toward a 'masstige' theory and strategy

In this section, an attempt has been made to develop a Masstige theoretical framework, grounded in the extant theoretical models and measures in these areas of research.

### 2.1 Mass prestige and brand management

The topic of masstige marketing is very important because of the common usage by industry practitioners, who often employ brand positioning and marketing strategies to increase market share and profits, particularly in the case of prestige brands as well as premium brands. Masstige marketing helps in the efforts to create high level of mass prestige for the brand in the long run. The examples used by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) in their Harvard Business Review article to coin the term 'Masstige' include brands such as Bath & Body, Victoria's Secret, Starbucks, and Whirlpool. All of which offer a range of prices in their offerings and their customers span various income groups. Hence, it is possible that masstige strategic approach can be employed in wide variety of brands that carry some prestige such as luxury fashion goods, cars, smartphones, laptops, desktop computers and star hotels.

Chabowski et al. (2013) provide a bibliometric analysis of global branding literature incorporating five areas with suggestions for the future development of the area. The areas conceptualised are international branding strategy, brand positioning, brand/country origin, brand concept-image, and brand performance. Baek et al. (2010) explored how brand prestige and brand credibility affected the purchase intention and proposed a model of six latent constructs. They tested the model with structural equation modelling analysis and found that both brand credibility and brand prestige positively influence purchase intention through perceived quality, information costs saved, and perceived risk under different product categories that represent the high and low self-expressive nature.

The goal of brand positioning and extension is normally to develop a firm's brand equity, rather than to develop a new product itself (Ambler and Styles, 1997). The mass prestige-based brand equity comprises brand symbolism, which is made up, in part, by the brand's prestige in the eye of the consumer (Bhat and Reddy, 1998). The brand's prestige increases the likelihood of a purchase (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Baek et al.,

2010). The leveraging of this prestige and brand equity significantly reduces the costs for the incumbent firm. This enables the firm to save on costs associated with marketing its new brand.

Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) show that consumer perception includes the feelings that the brand evokes (affect) and how similar it is to the parent brand. Following a broader perspective in exploring customer perceptions and motives for purchasing brands, it is not sufficient to explain the whole picture of consumption regarding socially oriented consumer motives and the desire to impress others (Wiedmann et al., 2009). The knowledge and image consumers have of the existing parent brand are the most critical for the success of marketing (Lane and Jacobson, 1995; Pitta and Prevel Katsanis, 1995). The prestige attributed to the brand is an influencer on re-purchase behaviour (Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008). Additionally, increasing the consumer's exposure to the extended brand can increase the perceived fit with the parent brand (Klink and Smith, 2001).

Swaminathan et al. (2001) researched the reciprocal effect that a successful or failed brand extension could have on a parent brand. If consumers view the extended brand positively, it is likely to impact the brand image of the parent brand positively; however, this works vice-versa, as well. Consumers, who already own the parent brand, are also affected by the extension. Kirmani et al. (1999) demonstrate that these current owners react favourably if the extensions increase the prestige of the brand. They argue that brand extension facilitates mass marketing, which is a critical step in creating mass prestige (masstige) value.

As aforementioned, "masstige" is a marketing term implying brand positioning in terms of mass prestige and downward brand extension. A combination of "mass" and "prestige," the term is an acronym for 'mass prestige'. To position this as an article in a manner that displays similarities and differences with existing theoretical approaches, we briefly review the prior theoretical research around masstige marketing and management. Based on the review, the different dimensions and tenets of masstige approach are developed in this article to build a new theoretical model for strategic brand management and contribute towards building a new theory – the theory of masstige marketing. Keeping the aforesaid objective in mind, we identify and critically examine the following prior research in this context for comparison.

- 1 *Masstige-based market penetration model (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003)*: Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term 'masstige' in their article titled "Luxury for the masses" and discussed it in detail in the book "Trading up: Why consumers want new luxury goods and how companies create them" (Silverstein et al., 2008). "Masstige" marketing strategy is a market penetration approach for medium and large firms. With the booming middle class, more consumers are trading up to higher quality products. Therefore, these products are no longer just for the affluent, but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). The term "Masstige" was derived based on recent consumer behaviour in the USA (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). As opposed to traditional luxury brands, masstige brands sell at a relatively competitive price and boast mass-artisanal production, providing certain exclusivity to consumers (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003).

- 2 *Masstige-based brand positioning model (Truong et al., 2009)*: Truong et al. (2009) developed a brand positioning model grounded in the tenets of masstige marketing. Masstige marketing allows consumers to buy high-quality items at a reasonable price, thereby leaving the consumers a feeling of fulfilment upon acquiring these status symbols (Truong et al., 2009). By comparing positioning of masstige brands and traditional luxury brands, they determined that in terms of price and prestige, masstige brands are just a step below traditional luxury brands and a step above mid-priced brands. As for perceived prestige, masstige brands are substantially closer to traditional luxury brands.
- 3 *Bandwagon luxury consumption model (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012)*: Some researchers have investigated the non-product-related brand associations (O'Cass and Frost, 2002), motivations (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), and psychological factors (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012; O'Cass and McEwen, 2004) that influence consumers' propensity for masstige-led consumption. For instance, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) studied psychological factors' impact on consumers' propensity to engage in "bandwagon" luxury consumption. This type of market penetration and brand position strategies aiming at creating mass prestige, in particular, among middle-class consumers is called "bandwagon luxury consumption" (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012).
- 4 *Global market penetration model (Kapferer, 2012)*: Kapferer (2012) explained how luxury brands could penetrate mass global markets, particularly the emerging Asian markets without compromising their exclusive appeal, by shifting from rarity tactics to "virtual rarity" tactics, creating elitism through art and adopting a specific business model. In order to capture more market share, the premium brands need to create demand, not only from extra ordinary people, but also from ordinary individuals. The brand, its products, and prices must be known by many people, even though only a few can buy them (Kapferer, 2012).
- 5 *Populence paradigm (Granot et al., 2013)*: Granot et al. (2013) show that the meaning of luxury has changed in the contemporary USA based on an integrative review of research. They offer theoretical extensions and propose a new luxury paradigm that they refer to as 'populence.' They argue that the prestige goods can be targeted and popularised towards a wide audience. The theory of masstige marketing is grounded in the populence paradigm.
- 6 *Masstige mean index and pyramid model (Paul, 2015b)*: There were no measures to generalise masstige marketing and stimulate further research. Nevertheless, Paul (2015b) redefined masstige marketing with a Masstige Mean Score Sales (MMSS) and MMI (MMSS as a scale-based instrument containing 10 questions that measure (see Table 3) the impact of masstige marketing, in terms of mass prestige value with the Masstige Mean Index (MMI), with scores ranging from 10 to 70 (on MMSS). Based on this scale, the masstige value of competing brands in a state/region/country can be measured. The higher the score on this instrument, the higher the masstige value, and vice versa. To determine masstige value, one must collect data from a sample of customers or potential customers, calculate mean scores of responses to each question and sum all mean scores to arrive at MMIs. Besides, Paul (2015b) introduced a pyramid model to show how managers can reach out to middle income and higher-low income groups, when they sell premium products.

- 7 *Brand dilution debate:* Masstige positioning strategies are perceived as innovative and effective because they merge successful prestige positioning with mass appeal, boosting revenues with minimal or no brand dilution (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). Not all researchers agree that masstige positioning strategies cause minimal or no brand dilution. Some suggest that these strategies may dilute brands' image (Truong et al., 2009; Riley et al., 2004; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). This is particularly the case with prestige brands compared to traditional luxury brands, depending on the product category (Riley et al., 2013).
- 8 *Other studies with theoretical implications:* Some other researchers refer to these strategies as "democratisation of luxury" (Shukla and Purani, 2012). Masstige strategies often rely on logo-stamped, relatively affordable status products or accessories (e.g., Premium car models or brands such as Hermès, Louis Vuitton and Tiffany), "junior" mass products sold as fashion items (e.g., Christian Lacroix's Bazar line, Marc by Marc Jacobs, and Must by Cartier) or downscale extensions (Catry, 2003; Nueno and Quelch, 1998). On the other hand, Zhang et al. (2014) investigated the link between customer equity drivers – value, brand equity, and loyalty intention based on a sample of 1553 Chinese and 1085 Dutch consumers in the banking and supermarket industries and found that all three drivers exert greater impact in Western than in Eastern cultures. However, they demonstrated that Eastern consumers have higher brand loyalty intention than Western consumers. The authors did not refer to the term "masstige."
- 9 *A new step-by-step theoretical model:* Grounded in brand positioning and penetration approach, the above-mentioned models offer marketers a comprehensive set of frameworks to help them devise branding strategies and tactics to build long-term brand equity. Based on the limited extant literature, we posit that masstige marketing's success depends on how strategies are formulated with respect to product, promotion and distribution, not price. However, product and promotion (for instance, brand positioning) strategies are more critical in masstige approach. Grounded in these tenets, we develop a new step-by-step model for masstige value creation focusing on product, promotion and place, as shown in Figure 1 with the examples, such as Toyota's innovative brands such as Lexus, RAV 4 and Prius.

The model drawn in Figure 1 shows the relationship between explanatory variables and masstige value. This discussion leads towards the need for brand managers to align their masstige marketing strategy based on consumer psychology and culture of a society. The real key to a brand's success lies in its ability to create a higher mass prestige value that is truly distinctive. The masstige theory envisaged in this study requires exploitation of existing and potential brand-specific capabilities to achieve congruence with the changing business environment. Thus, masstige marketing approach seeks to provide a coherent model and measure which can both integrate existing theoretical and empirical knowledge and facilitate prescription. In doing so, it builds upon the theoretical foundations, frameworks and measures provided by prior research (Keller, 1993; Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Pappu et al., 2005; Paul, 2015b; Keller, 2016; Kumar and Paul, 2018).

**Figure 1** A step by step model for masstige value creation

<b>PRODUCT</b>	Product launch	Product innovation and product differentiation. Example Hybrid car Prius from Toyota	Offering sub brands and new product lines  Example: Toyota RAV4  Innovation arbitrage
<b>PROMOTION</b>	Eyes-Catching Advertisement through channels, that have high income group audience	Advertisements at location and a city centres & airport lobby where both middle and high class consumers likely to go	Strategic brand management and endorsement by celebrities
<b>PLACE</b>	Controlled distribution to maintain exclusivity	Distribution through franchising as well as direct channels	Outline at sale begins to attract new gen-consumers
<b>PRICE</b>	Constant	Constant	Constant

To facilitate theory development and intellectual dialogue, some acceptable propositions are desirable. Considering the factors included in the masstige questionnaire and scale (Paul 2015b), and based on the assumptions and findings of prior researchers (Keller, 1993; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Truong et al., 2009; Schroeder, 2009; Granot et al., 2013; Paul, 2015b; Kumar and Paul, 2018), the tenets of the theory of masstige marketing can be specified in the following propositions. They are grounded in brand knowledge, brand love, brand prestige, perceived quality, excitement and status.

*Proposition 1: Consumers buy a specific brand because of brand knowledge.*

*Proposition 2: Consumers believe that there is high correlation between the mass prestige value and brand perception of the people around.*

*Proposition 3: Consumers like a brand because of mass prestige.*

Grounded in masstige marketing theory, the step-by-step model and the theoretical approach shown in Figure 1, research objectives and methodology are specified in the following section.

### 3 Research hypotheses

Brand equity and masstige value can be considered as outcomes of the marketing strategies of the firm. Brand origin also has a moderating effect on the strategic value of perceived brand foreignness (Zhou et al., 2010). Brand equity is also influenced by perceptions of the brand's country of origin and country brand equity positively impacts product preferences (Roth et al., 2008; Pappu and Quester, 2010). Hennart et al. (2002) examined whether the problems such as liability of foreignness create issues for foreign firms, based on the sample of Japanese firms exiting from the US Market. On the other

hand, Laforet and Chen (2010) examined Chinese and British consumers' evaluations of Chinese and international brands, and factors affecting their brand choice. Their findings show that country of origin does not affect brand choice of Chinese consumers but has a great effect on British choice. In addition, brand value, and brand familiarity influence Chinese choice whereas brand reputation, and brand trust determine British choice. Martín and Cerviño (2011) contributed to the brand Country of Origin (CO) awareness literature by integrating consumer and brand characteristics in a theoretical model and found that brand equity explains the country of origin brand recognition. Similarly, experience with brands and the integration between the consumer and the CO of a foreign brand are positively related with brand CO recognition (Martín and Cerviño, 2011).

Moreover, the nation-wide car brand perception survey 2014 conducted in the USA ranked Japanese car brand Toyota on top of domestic brands such as Ford and General Motors. Thus, we would expect that the marketing strategies of leading Japanese brands like Toyota are more effective than the domestic brands in the USA. Besides, blending the tenets of the theory of masstige marketing and following the theoretical link between brand origin, country brand equity, brand preferences and perceived brand value established by researchers (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Roth et al., 2008; Zhou et al., 2010; Pappu and Quester, 2010; Paul, 2015b), we hypothesise as follows.

*Hypothesis 1: Foreign (Japanese) automobile brands have high mass prestige value in the US market, in comparison to domestic brands.*

Different customer-level marketing tactics drive marketing strategy (Kumar and Petersen, 2005). Similarly, it is important to note that consumers recall a brand mainly because of the prestige associated with it through the lens of the society they are living in (Shukla and Purani, 2012). Besides, Paul (2015b) posits that MMI's between 50 and 60 signifies that firms have built strong brand equity, but not top-of-mind brand awareness (a MMI score ranging from 60 to 70 (MMI being an index with 70 as maximum score) is required to be classified as top-of-mind brand as well as strong brand equity). Based on this, we formulate:

*Hypothesis 2: The domestic car brands have built strong masstige value in the USA, but not top-of-mind perceived brand equity.*

Prior research has revealed the role and influence of gender (in particular, female consumers) on the consumer brand choice and the brand consumption patterns, especially taking their preferences into consideration (Granot et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013; Baek et al., 2010). Higher perceived symbolic and social value of prestige brands have traditionally been more important for women than men (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013). We thus propose the following hypotheses.

*H3a: Gender (female consumers) influences the mass prestige of a car brand significantly.*

*H3b: Gender (female consumers) does influence brand perception due to mass prestige.*

*H3c: Gender (female consumers) does influence the tendency to pay a premium for a car brand as a status symbol.*

The consumption of prestige brands (whose price is high by normal standards) is viewed as a signal of status and wealth (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013; Baek et al., 2010). This implies that the low-income consumers would find it difficult to purchase prestigious brands. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

*H4a: Income level of the consumer significantly influences purchase of prestigious brands.*

*H4b: Income level of the consumer significantly influences brand choice due to mass prestige.*

*H4c: Income level of the consumer significantly influences tendency to pay a premium for a brand as a status symbol.*

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Data and analytical framework

MMI is a measure of masstige marketing strategies' effectiveness and popularity regardless of industry and region, country or state. In this article, we use MMI to measure Study Firms' masstige marketing strategy effectiveness by deriving their masstige mean score.

The automotive industry in the USA consists of domestic brands, as well as foreign brands from Japan and Europe, and more recently from South Korea (e.g., Hyundai and Kia). We assume that brands with relatively high value or moderately high price can fall in the category of masstige brands. A masstige brand need not be a luxury brand (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003; Paul, 2015b). Four car brands (Toyota, Honda, Ford and General Motors) because they hold the top four positions in the US Consumer Reports' 2014 Car-Brand Perception Survey. This survey scores show how consumers perceive each automotive brand in seven categories: quality, safety, performance, value, fuel economy, design/style, and technology/innovation. Those survey scores reflect brands' image, equity, quality etc. We aim to combine these factors to generate a comprehensive Index score – to measure brand equity, in terms of MMI.

This study is both exploratory and descriptive. Primary data was collected using the Masstige Questionnaire (see Table 1) designed by Paul (2015b) with additional customer feedback. We administered the survey in two southern states and a territory of the USA (Florida, Georgia and Puerto Rico) with a sample of 300 car owner respondents. Respondents were asked to rate all four car brands on the masstige scale. Our criteria were to select those respondents who own one of the car brands included for this study (Toyota, Honda, Ford and GM). The questionnaire was also distributed through the online channel surveymonkey.com. Study Firms' dealerships were visited to experience first-hand products and prices, and conducted face-to-face, open-ended interviews with customers and potential customers to collect additional information. Responses were elicited from over 400 car owners, but only 300 filled the questionnaire, amounting to approximately 75% response rate. Secondary data were collected from public sources, including magazines, research papers, books, websites and annual reports.

For statistical analysis, we employed Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. The Kruskal-Wallis test, also referred to as 'one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) by ranks', is a rank-based nonparametric test used to determine whether any statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable or a continuous or ordinal dependent variable exist. An example of ordinal variables is Likert scales (e.g., a seven-point scale from 'strongly agree' through 'strongly disagree'). Typically, a Kruskal-Wallis test is used where three or more categorical, independent groups are considered, but it also works well for just two groups. A requirement, however, is observation independence, meaning that no relationship between observations in each group or between the groups exists.

The Mann-Whitney test, on the other hand, compares differences between two independent variable groups, when the dependent variable is either ordinal or continuous, without normal distribution. For instance, this test could be used to determine whether attitudes towards pay discrimination (dependent variable), differ as to gender (independent variable), where attitudes are measured on an ordinal scale. It could also be used to assess whether salaries (dependent variable), measured on a continuous scale, vary with educational level (independent variable). The Mann-Whitney test is often considered the nonparametric alternative to the independent t-test.

This study is anchored on a Likert seven-point scale and therefore data is ordinal. Since normality tests with ordinal data are not possible, we employed nonparametric tests. For our discrete data, both Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were employed, as they are equally effective and minimally affected by outliers.

## 5 Validity and reliability tests of instrument

Validity, on the other hand, refers to whether measurements are actually capturing the desired construct. Reliability refers to measures' ability to capture subjects' true score to accurately distinguish among them. Reliability measurement of qualitative data is important to determine the stability and quality of the data obtained (Rust and Cooil, 1994; Netemeyer et al., 2004).

### 5.1 Instrument's validity test

To test the validity of the scale used for collecting data from the factors extracted, we took the factor loadings, squared and divided them by the total number of statements. If this value is greater than 0.5, the research instrument (Masstige Mean Score Scale) has construct validity (see Table 1).

In our case, we have taken squares of above figures, summed  $[(0.948)^2 + (0.938)^2 \dots + (0.850)^2]$ , and divided by the total number of statements, which is 10, obtaining a validity statistic of 0.832. Since this statistic exceeds 0.5, we determined that our instrument has construct validity.



**Table 1** Component matrix

	<i>Component</i>
	<i>1</i>
I would buy this brand because of its masstige.	.948
I believe that individuals in my country, state or district perceive this brand as prestigious.	.938
I consider this brand a top-of-mind brand in my country, state or district.	.935
I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives.	.927
I like this brand because of its prestige.	.918
I believe this brand meets international standards.	.913
I believe this brand is known for high quality.	.909
I love to buy this brand regardless of price.	.896
Nothing is more exciting than this brand.	.884
I tend to pay a premium for this brand as a status symbol.	.850

### 5.2 Instrument's reliability test

In this sub-section, following Rust and Cooil (1994), we report the results of the reliability test of the instrument (Masstige Mean Score Scale. see Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2** Reliability statistics

<i>Cronbach's alpha based on standardised items</i>	<i>No. of items</i>	<i>No. of items</i>
.977	.977	10

**Table 3** Item-total statistics

	<i>Scale mean if item deleted</i>	<i>Scale variance if item deleted</i>	<i>Corrected item-total correlation</i>	<i>Squared multiple correlation</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha if item deleted</i>
I like this brand because of its mass prestige.	43.6102	188.227	.896	.877	.974
I would buy this brand because of its mass prestige.	43.7062	186.707	.935	.921	.973
I tend to a pay a premium for this brand as a status symbol.	44.0989	189.562	.819	.728	.977
I consider this brand a top-of-mind brand in my country, state or district.	43.6921	187.851	.918	.867	.974
I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives.	43.5621	188.462	.906	.887	.974
Nothing is more exciting than this brand.	44.0847	187.794	.860	.847	.976

**Table 3** Item-total statistics (continued)

	<i>Scale mean if item deleted</i>	<i>Scale variance if item deleted</i>	<i>Corrected item-total correlation</i>	<i>Squared multiple correlation</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha if item deleted</i>
I believe this brand is known for high quality.	43.4802	189.412	.884	.880	.975
I believe this brand meets international standards.	43.5706	189.889	.889	.894	.975
I love to buy this brand regardless of price.	44.0734	185.932	.873	.830	.975
I believe that individuals in my country state or district perceive this brand as prestigious.	43.7147	187.632	.922	.877	.974

As reported in Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha for the instrument is 0.977. Since this figure exceeds 0.7, we determined that our Masstige Questionnaire's reliability is quite high. Furthermore, we did not delete any items as all have Cronbach's Alpha scores above 0.7. Hence, our Masstige Questionnaire used for constructing MMSS is reliable.

## 6 Car brands and marketing strategies

We discuss the profile of car brands studied (GM, Ford, Toyota and Honda) and their marketing strategies in this section.

### *General Motors (GM)*

Founded on 16 September 1908, GM is an American firm headquartered in Detroit, Michigan that designs, manufactures, markets and distributes vehicles, parts and accessories.<sup>1</sup> GM has brands for different segments, such as Cadillac, the luxury brand. GM focuses on its core brands and differentiates itself by offering high technology products (Townsend et al., 2010). GM's promotional programs include auto shows, magazines and news. The company deploys a mass marketing and customisation strategy to reach out to consumers in different segments (Alford et al., 2000). Maximising revenues by focusing on brand strategy, GM delivers higher residual value vehicles, at a reasonable price (Colombo and Morrison, 1989; Townsend et al., 2010). GM distributes cars in six regions in the world: North America, Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Townsend et al., 2010). In North America, GM manufactures and markets under four brands: Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet and GMC, whereas outside North America, it does the same under these brands: Holden, Opel, Vauxhall, Wuling, Baojun, Jie Fang, and Daewoo (Kay, 2006). GM holds equity ownership, in many entities through various regional subsidiaries. These subsidiaries design, manufacture and market vehicles under Alpheon, Baojun, Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Daewoo, Jiefang and Wuling brands (Alden et al., 2006a; Olivares and Cachon, 2009).

*Ford*

Incorporated on 1903, Ford was the first giant American automobile multi-national corporation that sells passenger automobiles worldwide (Pietrykowski, 1995). The conglomerate encompasses many global brands, including luxury brands, Lincoln and Mercury sold in the US market. Based on their comparative study of Ford and Mercedes-Benz, Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday (2008) found that consumers' development of relationships via brand identification results in word of mouth about the brand with intentions to repurchase the brand. This is one of the main tenets of the theory of masstige marketing.

Ford's business strategy is embodied in its four-point business plan for global success, which consists of: (1) restructuring to profitably operate at the current demand and changing model mix, (2) accelerating product development, (3) financing to improve balance sheet, and (4) working as a unified team (Ginn and Zairi, 2005). Ford's product portfolio includes passenger, commercial and transport vehicles encompassing a diversified line of high-quality products (Clark, 1991). According to respondents in our survey, Ford seeks customer loyalty by delivering cars and trucks that are price-competitive to a large extent. Ford adapt to local market differences, to exploit economies of global scale, to exploit economies of global scope, to tap optimal locations for activities and resources, and to maximise knowledge transfer across locations (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2001).

*Toyota*

Toyota is a Japanese automotive manufacturer established in 1937. Toyota brand has a large market share in the USA (Magee, 2007). In the USA, the conglomerate sells under the Toyota brand, as well as its economic brand Scion and its luxury brand Lexus. Its management strategies are principled on long-term thinking, problem-solving, employee development and continuous learning (Adler et al., 1999; Black, 2007). Toyota's marketing strategies, are, to a large extent, grounded in the theory of masstige marketing.

Toyota's production system is based on lean manufacturing and just-in-time production. Companies around the world, in all sectors of the economy, now embrace these approaches to improve quality, minimise cost and increase productivity (Piercy and Rich, 2009). According to the respondents participated, Toyota cars are ergonomically designed with features, constant upgrades and warranties that help the company to foster customer loyalty. This is nothing but brand awareness and knowledge (first factor in the masstige marketing approach/scale) of Toyota among the respondents. Based on the answers to the open-ended part of questionnaire, we found that Toyota promotes its brand via e-commerce marketing, billboards, celebrity endorsements and TV advertisements. Most of the respondents were satisfied with the price they pay for Toyota brands. As part of placement strategy, Toyota distributes via retailers, agents and dealership networks. It showcases vehicles at auto shows, mall exhibitions and other special events.

*Honda*

Honda was established in 1948, and in 1959, they branched out to the international market by opening its first overseas store in Los Angeles, California (Pascale, 1984). Honda sought a unique way to reach out to potential consumers, influencers, and making consumers the instruments of advocacy (Dobele et al., 2005). Honda was the first

Japanese automaker to establish a production facility in the USA (Pascale, 1984). Its contributions to the design and manufacturing process, and the success of their brands such as Acura (luxury) or CRV (innovative brand) have helped the company to create mass prestige, according to our respondents. Respondents believe that Honda conceives exceptional designs among its competitors and perceive that Honda's focus is on quality and innovation. This is an important tenet of masstige marketing approach. Our results show that Honda created masstige by providing better customer services (primarily a promotion strategy). Honda's advertising exalts the company's technologically innovative and ecofriendly image. Honda's promotional channels include magazines, newspapers and Television advertising.<sup>2</sup>

Our results show that Honda has been successful in the USA, offering high efficiency and quality vehicles at affordable prices that highly satisfy customers. Honda's success is linked not only to its core competence, but also to its global strategy.

## 7 Results and discussion

In this section, we discuss the results of statistical analysis (Descriptive statistics, Masstige mean index values, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test).

### 7.1 Descriptive statistics

The Masstige Questionnaire was administered to 300 respondents in the Study Market and collected primary data. Table 4 provides sample's demographic statistics.

**Table 4** Demographic statistics

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative percentage</i>
<i>Age</i>			
18–25	90	30	30.
26–33	73	24	54
33–40	71	23.6	77.6
40–47	22	7.3	84.9
47–54	24	8	92.9
54+	20	7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	
<i>Income</i>			
Low Income Group	103	34.3	34.3
Middle Income Group	151	50.3	84.7
High Income Group	46	15.4	100.0
Total	300	100.0	
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	182	60.5	60.5
Male	118	39.5	100.0
Total	300	100.0	

The demographic statistics indicate that 60% of respondents were females and 40% were males. 30% of respondents were between the ages of 18 to 25, 27% were between 33 and 40, and 22% were between 26 and 33. Remaining respondents were in the age group of above 40. 54% of respondents self-categorised themselves in the middle-income group, 34% in the high-income group and 12% in the low-income group.

### 7.2 Masstige mean index (MMI)

Masstige Index scores of study's firms – Toyota, Honda, GM and Ford are given in Table 5. Hypothesis 1 predicted that leading Japanese automobile firms have created high mass prestige value in the US market, in terms of Mass Prestige value, in comparison to domestic brands. As reported in Table 5, the estimated MMI for Japanese firms, Toyota and Honda, is 54.45 and 52.11, respectively, which implies that they have succeeded in the US market in terms of brand value creation, consistent with the hypothesis 1. Similarly, hypothesis 2 stated that domestic car brands have not succeeded in creating top-of-mind brand in the USA. We find strong support for hypothesis 2 in the results of the MMI analysis. For instance, domestic firms Ford and GM have an MMI of 39.31 and 31.97, respectively, implying that these firms have not yet succeeded in brand building, in terms of mass prestige in the Study Market. We also found that Toyota and Honda have succeeded in building their strong brands but not in instituting top-of-mind brand awareness.

**Table 5** Study brands' masstige mean index in the USA

<i>Brand</i>	<i>MMSS</i>
Toyota	54.45
Honda	52.11
GM	31.97
Ford	39.31

### 7.3 Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test

In this study, the grouping variable for the Mann-Whitney Test is "gender" (Table 6) whereas the grouping variables for the Kruskal-Wallis Test are "income" (Table 7). Tables 6 and 7 describe inferential statistics. As shown in Table 6, the results of the Mann-Whitney test show that with Ford, the males' median rank is higher than the females', which implies that males give more weight to mass prestige of Ford than females. Therefore, hypothesis 3a is rejected for Toyota, Honda and GM, but we find support for accepting it in the case of Ford. Similarly, we find evidence to accept the hypothesis H3b: Gender significantly influences brand perception due to mass prestige, in the case of Toyota and Ford, but reject it in the case of Honda and GM. The reason is, as regards to Toyota and Ford, males' median rank is higher than females', indicating that males give more weight to mass prestige in developing brand perception. Next, it is worth reporting that we find evidence for accepting hypothesis H3c: Gender significantly influences the tendency to pay a premium as a status symbol in the case of Ford, but did not find supporting evidence to accept this hypothesis in the case of Toyota, Honda and GM. The evidence indicates that males perceive the same way in the case of Ford's mass prestige, while female consumers show the same type of brand preference due to mass prestige and tend to pay a premium for brands such as Toyota, Honda and GM.

**Table 6** Gender (Mann-Whitney test)

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Assigned Significant Values</i>				<i>Results</i>	<i>Inferences</i>
		<i>Toyota</i>	<i>Honda</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>Ford</i>		
1	H3a: Gender does significantly influence mass prestige of a brand	.088	.610	.276	.001	Rejected for Toyota, Honda and GM. Accepted for Ford.	As to Ford, males' median rank is higher than females, meaning that males give more weight to masstige than females.
2	H3b: Gender does significantly influence brand perception due to mass prestige	.010	.333	.157	.001	Rejected for Honda and GM. Accepted for Toyota and Ford.	Concerning Toyota and Ford, males' median rank is higher than females', indicating that males give more weight to masstige.
3	H3c: Gender does significantly influence tendency to pay a premium as a status symbol	.126	.732	.151	.007	Rejected for Toyota, Honda and GM. Accepted for Ford.	Regarding Ford, males' median rank is higher than females', meaning that males give more weight to masstige.

**Table 7** Income (Kruskal-Wallis test)

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Assigned Significant Values</i>				<i>Results</i>	<i>Inferences</i>
		<i>Toyota</i>	<i>Honda</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>Ford</i>		
1	Income level does significantly influence purchase of prestige goods.	.945	.081	.001	.671	Rejected for Toyota, Honda and Ford. Accepted for GM.	In GM's case, the high income group's median rank is higher than all other income groups', thus they give more weight to masstige than other groups.
2	Income level does significantly influence brand perception due to masstige.	.979	.258	.001	.413	Rejected for Toyota, Ford and Honda. Accepted for GM.	As to GM, the high income groups' median rank is higher than all other groups', indicating that they give more weight to masstige.
3	Income level does significantly influence tendency to pay a premium as a status symbol.	.143	.753	.000	.185	Rejected for Toyota, Ford and Honda. Accepted for GM.	Concerning GM, the high income group's median rank is higher than all other groups', meaning that the high income group gives more weight to masstige to show their societal status.

The results of Kriskal-Wallis test (see Table 7) using income as a grouping variable lead us to derive an insightful generalisation based on this study. Based on the test results, we find supporting evidence to accept H4a: Income level of the consumer significantly influences the purchase of prestigious goods, but only in the case of GM brand; therefore, rejecting this hypothesis for Toyota, Honda and Ford. Income level does not significantly influence the consumption pattern of Toyota, Honda and Ford. The evidence from the same tests can also be considered as supporting information to accept hypothesis 4b and 4c only in the case of GM and to reject it in the case of Toyota, Honda and Ford. Income level does not significantly influence tendency to pay a premium for those three brands as a status symbol. This can be interpreted in a such a way that consumers need not belong to high income group to pay a premium price for Toyota, Honda and Ford as those consumers perceive them as prestige brands.

#### 7.4 Findings

Our results show that Japanese firms Toyota and Honda have succeeded in creating mass prestige in the US market, attaining a 54.45 and 52.11 MMI, respectively. On the other hand, GM and Ford obtained a 31.97 and 39.31 MMI, respectively, implying that these American firms either do not enjoy strong brand equity or have not created top-of-the-mind brand awareness in the states in which we conducted our study (based on benchmark MMI score defined by Paul (2015b)), but may be possible to do so in the long run. Following is a firm-specific discussion of our findings.

We find that the Toyota brand has the maximum masstige value in terms of MMI. Per questions three and six of Masstige Questionnaire, pertaining to price and quality respectively, respondents deem that Toyota offers high quality vehicles at a relatively low price, viewing Toyota as the sensible choice. With respect to quality both Honda and Toyota excelled, as evinced by total points obtained in question seven, in masstige questionnaire. Toyota's strategy has been centred on high quality rather than luxury and technology. Honda has the second highest masstige value in the USA in terms of MMI. Just like Toyota, respondents consider Honda a high quality and technology brand but are not willing to pay a premium for its vehicles. In terms of masstige, Ford ranks third among the four brands that we studied. Respondents believe that Ford meets international standards and are willing to recommend it to friends and relatives. However, just like in Honda's case, respondents are not willing to pay a premium for this brand. GM ranked last in terms of MMI. Respondents perceive GM brand meeting international standards but are not willing to pay a premium for it.

### 8 Limitations and directions for future research

This study is not without limitations. Our survey was conducted among car owners from three states/territories of USA. The results might be different if we conduct a nation-wide survey. Therefore, the scope for generalisation for the US market based on our finding is limited to some extent. Another limitation in our study is that one of the hypothesis measures impact of gender – females (hypothesis 3), however, the sample distribution is slightly skewed in favour of females with males accounting for only 40% of sample. Since the main goal of this paper is to build/contribute toward the development of the theory of masstige marketing with the help of figures, drawn grounded in the prior

literature and extant models/measures, this is not a major problem, however, researchers can overcome this kind of problem, if they have equal numbers of females and males in the sample, if they like to test the effect of gender.

Another point worth mentioning here is regarding the choice of the product category for this study, we selected cars assuming that cars are relatively expensive items to buy, thousands of dollars, and there is scope for focusing on masstige constructs such as product, promotion and place, without lowering the prices. On the other hand, the methodological specifications and the scope of MMI as an alternative measure of brand equity readily point to important avenues for future research. Along this line, we invite researchers to examine whether our findings can be replicated with a larger and nationwide sample of consumers in the USA or in the context of other countries. The sample can also be collected from other regions, countries and people with different ethnic or religious background. Besides, cross-sectional and cross-country studies can also be conducted selecting brands from a specific industry such as smartphones or personal computers, estimating the MMI of those brands and comparing and contrasting the index value of those brands with that of competitors. MMI can also be estimated for different local brands in the same market. A comparative study of a single brand's MMI in a neighbouring/far-away state/country can also be carried out. MMI can also be used as a tool for analysis and measurement of mass prestige in distinct markets in terms of cultural, administrative, geographic and economic distance.

The potential for future research in this area is immense because the efforts taken in this study might help researchers to extend several theoretical frameworks and measures in the area of brand management: (i) Keller's (1993) conceptualisation of brand equity to country brands, (ii) Yoo and Donthu's (2001) scale to measure brand equity, (iii) Pappu and Quester's (2010) conceptualisation of country equity, (iv) Silverstein and Fiske's (2003) masstige-based market penetration model. (v) Paul's (2015b) masstige mean score scale. Besides, it would be theoretically and practically worthwhile to examine the effects of income, gender and age by segmenting consumers based on those variables. Moreover, researchers might want to look at how demographics affect perceptions of masstige across different products and industries. Likewise, it would be prudent to observe whether certain factors like country of origin and considerations would play an influential role in consumers' minds, which will indirectly contribute towards creating higher mass prestige value. In addition, there are opportunities for researching how masstige perceptions affect (or are related to) attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the products, brand credibility and likeability, purchase intentions and loyalty. Understanding the relationships between these constructs would help researchers to develop a strong theoretical foundation for masstige marketing phenomenon within the already developed literature surrounding brand perceptions. Moreover, there is scope for creating an MMI database for leading brands in different sectors in a country (can be done in all the countries) on a yearly basis, like the yearly nation-wide car brand perception survey being conducted in the USA. This will work as a benchmark criterion for many brands with low MMI to revisit and redraft their marketing plans, which is important for their survival and success.

The scope of masstige marketing research is much greater in emerging countries as there are more products that are generally considered 'expensive' but attainable from the point of view of 'middle class' and upper low-income group consumers, as defined by Silverstein and Friske (2003). Those products include cars, diamonds, laptops, smartphones, cosmetics, perfumes and television, etc. Therefore, researchers can carry



out studies estimating masstige values of such brands in any of those industries with data from a developing country. There are many opportunities for undertaking cross-country studies as well. It is also suggested that researchers can extend the scope of masstige marketing model as well as the measure, replacing some items included in the masstige questionnaire with new ideas.

## 9 Conclusion

Based on our MMI analysis, we find that foreign firms (Japanese brands) have outperformed domestic firms (American brands) in establishing mass prestige, suggesting that those brands have created a niche and higher brand equity in the US automobile market. Attaining a higher MMI will induce consumers to pay a premium for these brands' luxury, as well as mid-level models. Conversely, domestic brands must devise strategies to survive and compete with the foreign brands in the USA. Our findings corroborate the results of a nationwide automotive brand perception survey conducted by the National Research Center in the USA in 2014. Therefore, we call for future research in this area by using MMI as an alternative measurement tool, to estimate brand equity in terms of mass prestige. Besides, this study will help the car brands to evaluate and fine-tune their marketing strategies in terms of mass prestige value to remain competitive. Most importantly, the scope of the study is not limited to automobile sector. Researchers and practitioners can extend the scope of the study to measure the mass prestige value of brands in industries such as laptops (Apple-Mac, Dell, Lenovo, Acer, HP) or Television (Sony, Samsung etc.) in different countries, particularly in emerging countries. Studies linking the relationship between country of origin and mass prestige value such as Japanese versus Korean brands in different segments in the electronics sector would also be interesting. Last, but not least, we hope that this study will serve as a benchmark work for different brand managers to evaluate and examine the effectiveness of their masstige marketing strategies.

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## Notes

- 1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automotive\\_industry\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automotive_industry_in_the_United_States)
- 2 <http://corporate.honda.com/america/history.aspx>



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## Masstige model and measure for brand management

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to reconceptualize the term “masstige” (Mass Prestige) marketing, develop a masstige model for brand management, and extend the use of the Masstige Mean Scale (MMS). The study was conducted based on the data from 600 individuals living in the United States, France, and India using a structured questionnaire consisting of different factors/sources of brand equity, such as mass prestige, brand knowledge, and perceived quality. On the basis of the findings, we establish that the greater the brand's Masstige Mean Index (MMI) value (“MMIV”), the higher the potential customers' top-of-mind brand awareness. Low MMIVs imply that firms have a long way to go to build their brands. We argue that MMI may allow firms to measure brand equity in different regions, within a country or in foreign countries, to derive insights into the popularity of their brands. We posit three theoretical propositions and develop two theoretical models (i) a hexagon model and (ii) a three-stage model for masstige marketing to define, reconceptualize, and explain the phenomenon.

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## 1. Introduction

Despite the structures of common difference among consumers based on identity, center–periphery, and consumption style, there are commonalities in diverse manifestations of youth culture (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Brands harness the consumer psychology and the communicative capacity of cultural actors (Carah, 2014). Cultural values and ideology in a society influence materialistic aspirations and interest in luxury products (Sun, D'Alessandro and Johnson, 2014). The mystique of luxury has always been alluring, fashionable, and complex. Luxury has always fascinated people regardless of their social strata. Luxury is now known by many new terms including opuluxe, premium, ultra-premium, trading up, masstige (mass prestige), hyper-luxury, and real or true luxury, among many others (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Paul, 2015). Consumers distinguish luxury products using six major characteristics: price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness, and symbolic meaning (Heine & Phan, 2011).

Many organizations are now drifting away from the traditional

methods of attracting consumers and are willing to experiment and figure out novel methods to tap into the potential market. It has been observed that brand-positioning strategies combine prestige with reasonable price premiums to attract middle class consumers. These strategies vastly differ from traditional luxury strategies, which maintain prestige and high price premiums to preserve exclusivity and uniqueness of brands. Therefore, the products are available in the market but just out of the reach of the ordinary consumer. Although some authors have acknowledged the existence of masstige strategies, few empirical studies have been conducted in this area (Paul, 2015; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009).

Over the years, brand equity has emerged as one of the most critical areas for marketing management (Cobb-Walgreen, Rubie & Donthu, 1995). Brands are semiotic marketing systems that generate value for direct and indirect participants, society, and the broader environment (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2014). Little systematic research has been done to develop a robust scale to measure consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The concepts of brand love and brand attachment have garnered great attention in branding and consumer behavior research lately (Nguyen, Melewar, & Chen, 2013). Despite extensive research and significant advances in our understanding of brand equity conceptualization and measurement (e.g., Keller, 1993a,b; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000; Na & Marshall, 2005; Na, Marshall, & Lane Keller, 1999; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), over the last three decades,

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important questions on brand equity still remain unanswered (Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2010).

“Masstige” (Mass Prestige) marketing is a strategic term for market penetration for premium, but attainable, brands based on brand equity, thus aiming to create brand knowledge, likability, love, and attachment grounded in prestige. The term can be defined as a phenomenon in which premium/high-value products are marketed to maximum number of customers by creating mass prestige while keeping the prices constant. Brand positioning based on masstige approach can be considered as critical for building brand equity and thereby marketing success in the long run (Troung et al., 2009). Silverstein and Fiske (2003), in the article “Luxury for the Masses” published in Harvard Business Review, coined the term “masstige” a portmanteau of the terms mass and prestige. In short, many luxury items that were unattainable for the middle class (medium-income class) could not only be within their reach, but the pricing and product placement are such that the brands do not lose their niche space that they have carved for themselves in the market.

Many research studies focus on the field of brand management. However, most of them are in the context of a single country. Therefore, research gaps remain around international marketing. Similarly, at present, “masstige marketing” is the unique buzzword in the industry. The concept of masstige marketing is attracting many curious eyes (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Paul, 2018). However, research in this area is limited and still in a premature stage. The research areas on brand equity measurement (Pappu et al., 2005; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010), global branding (Chabowski, Samiee, & Hult, 2013), and masstige marketing (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2015; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Troung et al., 2009) are in desperate need for further theory and measure advancement. In addition, not many studies have been conducted to advance the masstige approach for strategic marketing and brand management. We seek to fill this gap through this study crossing the path in all those three areas. Therefore, we introduce two models (i) a masstige-based hexagon model for strategic marketing and (ii) a stage-by-stage operationalization model for masstige marketing, and value creation is developed in this article. In addition, we reconceptualize the masstige approach for brand management, demonstrate the generalizability of the Masstige Mean Index (“MMI”) across multiple samples drawn from different countries, and validate the Masstige Mean Scale (MMS) as a tool for strategic brand management, thus filling the existing gap in the literature and helping managers examine the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. The scope of the study is limited not only to develop the masstige-based model but also to reconceptualize the masstige scale as an alternative tool for brand equity measurement and management based on critical examination of other established measures of brand equity. We argue that the masstige approach would aid businesses in crafting their marketing plans, and the masstige scale would serve as a tool to analyze the effectiveness of “mass prestige” (masstige) marketing strategy by determining and comparing their MMI values (“MMIV”) in different regions/countries or in the same market.

This paper is divided into nine sections. Section two is dedicated for literature review. The research objectives (ROs) and hypotheses are specified in section three. The methodology is presented in section four, and section five is devoted to critically examine the theoretical frameworks and measures of brand equity management. Section six is designed to develop a mass prestige-based hexagon model for strategic marketing and to demonstrate the globally known French brand Louis Vuitton (LV) internationalization phenomenon and masstige marketing strategy, within the context of newly developed Hexagon model to elaborate the relevance of this research. Section seven presents reliability and

validity test results (Cronbach’s alpha, Principal Component Analysis, etc.) for the scale. An attempt has been made to reconceptualize MMI as a measure and to validate MMS to assess and compare brand equity in terms of masstige on a generalized scale. The results are interpreted within the context of MMI in section eight. The limitations of the present study and the directions for future research with testable propositions are outlined in section nine. The summary of the findings is reported as conclusion in section 10.

## 2. Literature review

In this section, we synthesize the findings of various studies conducted in the past on brand equity, brand positioning, and masstige marketing that are relevant to our study.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multidimensional CBBE scale based on Aaker’s (1996) and Keller’s conceptualization of brand equity (1993). Christodoulides and Chernatony (2010) critically examine the CBBE literature and provide directions for future research. Chabowski et al. (2013) examined 120 articles used in the global branding literature (GBL) and evaluated the knowledge structure of this area of research to date. They employed multidimensional scaling leveraged resource- and capability-based paradigms using the five underpinning knowledge groups (international branding strategy, brand positioning, brand/country origin, brand concept image, and brand performance) to propose an agenda for future research. They found that there is potential for research that advances and enriches the GBL. In another study, Hong, Lee, and Yun (2010) analyzed how masstige brands implement relationship marketing that influences consumer trust, satisfaction, and repurchase intention and showed that masstige marketing is rooted in consumer education, sales, brand expertise, communication, and inducement. They found that consumer trust and satisfaction influence repurchase intention in masstige fashion brands. Masstige brand positioning is critical to lifestyle brand extension success, which may have a synergetic effect on achieving strong brand value in both core and extension brands (Kim & Ko, 2010).

At the brand level, price discount makes a slight difference in the overall perception of the extension. The greater the discount, the farther the distance between prestige brands and their extensions, thus reducing the negative impact on brand image (Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2013). Following prior research (Chabowski et al., 2013; Hong et al., 2010; Keller, 1993a,b; Lau & Phau, 2010; Quintal & Phau, 2013; Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015; Tsai, 2014; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), Paul (2015) extended this area of research by developing a pyramid model and introducing measures – MMS and MMI.

According to luxury analysts, certain brands succeeded in making the United States and Japan the world’s largest luxury markets, together accounting for more than 50% of global sales, depending on the market definition (Japan External Trade Organization, 2008; Smith, 2009, p. 19). Oh and Kim (2011) critically analyzed purchasing behavior in Japan, South Korea, and China and focused on the marketing strategy of LV to support their research. The authors identified three critical factors that determined the success of the brand in those foreign markets: (i) simultaneous innovation and tradition deployment, (ii) masstige marketing employment, and (iii) advertising. Lee, M. Edwards, Youn, and Yun (2014) examined the impact of cultural differences on young consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions toward luxury brands with the use of survey data consisting of 331 South Koreans and 409 Americans. The perceived social value was found to influence attitude change favorably among Korean consumers. The young American consumers tended to change their attitudes and purchase intentions toward luxury brands if they perceived



superior product quality (Lee et al., 2014).

In a related study, based on a field survey of 248 consumers in three Chinese cities, Siu, Kwan, and Zeng (2016) found that brand equity predicts Chinese consumers' attitudes and their willingness to pay a premium price for a luxury brand. Their findings indicate that the consumers who highly value face-saving are more willing to pay a premium price, although they hold a less positive attitude toward the brand. In another study, Zhang, Van Doorn, and Leeflang (2014) investigated the link between customer equity drivers – value, brand relationship equity, and loyalty intention. With a sample of 1553 Chinese and 1085 Dutch consumers in the banking and supermarket industries, their study revealed that all those customer equity drivers exert a greater impact in Western than in Eastern cultures. However, their study demonstrated that Eastern consumers have higher brand loyalty intention than Western consumers. The authors, however, did not refer to the term “masstige.”

Lu and Pras (2011) classified luxury consumers as luxury lovers, luxury followers, luxury intellectuals, and luxury laggards. Arora, McIntyre, Wu, and Arora (2015) examined three interrelated experiments to discover the differences in consumer response to high-tier luxury parent brands (e.g., Prada) versus their low-tier diffusion brands (e.g., Miu Miu). They found that differential impact of luxury diffusion versus parent brands is stronger for hedonic products than for utilitarian products. Similarly, DeSarbo, Grewal, and Scott (2008) proposed a general two-way cluster-wise bilinear spatial model that simultaneously estimates market segments, their composition, a brand space, and preference/utility vectors per market segment. Authors discussed the technical details of the model and developed an efficient alternating least squares procedure that estimates conditional globally optimum estimates of the model parameters, within each iteration, through analysis. The concepts of market segmentation and brand space, which are discussed in their paper, are related to masstige marketing. This makes it possible to extend their study in the context of masstige strategy.

Baek, Kim, and Yu (2010) proposed and tested a model of six latent constructs with structural equation modeling analysis: brand credibility, brand prestige, perceived quality, information costs saved, perceived risk, and brand purchase intention. The results suggest that both brand credibility and brand prestige positively influence brand purchase intention through perceived quality, information costs saved, and perceived risk under different product categories representing the high- and low self-expressive nature. Similarly, Brandt, de Mortanges, Bluemelhuber, and van Riel (2011) examined the brand association using picture analysis and metaphor-based elicitation techniques. For instance, Lipton's Ice Tea brand associations were extracted and utilized as an input for the creation of 160 individual associative networks. These networks were first aggregated to measure the brand reputation and subsequently clustered into six segments. The argument presented by the researchers for using associative networks as the preferred method to capture the complete brand image was that brand association may differ depending on the cultural background and/or the experience with the brand. Similarly, Roper, Caruana, Medway, and Murphy (2013) used in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis to examine how consumers construct their luxury brand consumption amidst countervailing cultural discourses in the market. They found that respondents construct an ostensibly distinct and stable version of luxury with perceived association of its subjective, experiential, moral, and artistic constructs, which can also be considered as the tenets of masstige marketing.

Nwankwo, Hamelin, and Khaled (2014) sampled 400 respondents from Morocco, an Islamic society, where sometimes the concept of luxury and religious values may not be on the same page. They

applied logistic regression models to find correlations between the intention to buy luxury goods, motivation, and personal values. Women were found to be more positively disposed to impulse purchasing of luxury goods than men. In addition, they found that education was directly related to purchase habit. The higher the levels of formal education of the consumer, the less were the chances of impulse buying. Similarly, Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges (1999) examined how ownership status moderates the effects of stretch direction (up or down), brand image (prestige or non-prestige), and branding strategy (sub-brand name or direct) on consumer responses to price-based line stretches. Authors proposed an “ownership effect,” whereby owners had more favorable responses than nonowners to extensions of the brand. They found that the ownership effect occurs for upward and downward stretches of nonprestige brands and for upward stretches of prestige brands. For downward stretches of prestige brands, however, the ownership effect does not occur because of owners' desire to maintain brand exclusivity. In this situation, a sub-branding strategy protects owners' parent brand attitudes from dilution (Kirmani et al., 1999).

Masstige marketing is a process based on brand positioning and extension. In this context, Klink and Smith (2001) identified and analyzed (1) limited brand extension information, (2) failure to account for consumers' new product adoption tendencies (i.e., earlier versus later), and (3) single exposure to proposed brand extensions to help explain the discrepancy between prior research and marketplace observation about consumer information processing and product adoption. The authors found that the effects of fit disappear when attribute-related information is added to brand extension stimuli. They also found that perceived fit increases with greater exposure to an extension.

Similarly, prior research show that country of origin significantly influences brand equity (Mohd-Yasin et al., 2007; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007; Roth, Diamantopoulos, & Montesinos, 2008) and contributes to prestige (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). In addition, Vohra and Gupta (2017) show that Indian consumers have predisposition toward foreign brands.

Notable studies in the context of premium product marketing and masstige marketing are summarized and highlighted in Table 1:

There are several contributions to measure and examine different dimensions of brand, including brand health, customer equity, brand value, brand loyalty, premium price, and repurchase intention (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2010; Loureiro & de Araujo, 2014; Mirzae et al., 2015; Mirzaei, Baumann, Johnson, & Gray, 2016). On the basis of the review of literature, we find that there is a significant gap in the extant literature in the areas of masstige marketing and global branding. Following the potential for further research identified in prior research studies (Chabowski et al., 2013; Kapferer, 2012; Park, 2014; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), we seek to fill this gap in the branding literature, particularly, in global branding by reconceptualizing the concept of masstige marketing with three new models (i) hexagon model, (ii) a three-stage model for masstige marketing (see Fig. 4), and (iii) a step-by-step approach for masstige value creation in this study.

### 3. Objectives and hypotheses

This study reconceptualizes the masstige approach; develops new theoretical models to comprehend, operationalize, and create masstige value; and extends and validates the MMS – a measure for estimating the effectiveness of strategic marketing and brand management, which was introduced as a tool by Paul (2015). In addition, we test reliability of the scale and recommend strategies to improve performance of the brands based on MMI. To that end, the ROs are as follows:



**Table 1**

Some notable studies on brand positioning and mass prestige-based approach.

Author and Year	Purpose	Method/Data	Findings
Arora et al. (2015)	Examine the consumer response to high-tier luxury parent brands (e.g., Prada) versus their low-tier diffusion brands (e.g., Miu Miu).	Three interrelated experiments.	Differential impact of luxury diffusion versus parent brands is stronger for hedonic products than for utilitarian products.
Nwankwo et al. (2014)	Investigate how consumer values and motivation influence purchase intentions toward luxury goods in Islamic societies.	Sample of 400 respondents drawn from Morocco and applying logistic regression models.	Correlations between the intention to buy luxury goods, motivation, and personal values. Women are more disposed to impulse purchasing of luxury goods than men.
Yang and Mattila (2014)	Examine the joint effects of product type (hospitality services vs. goods) and consumers' need for status (low/patricians vs. high/parvenus) on consumers' attitude change toward favorite luxury brands.	265 luxury consumers with annual household income of more than \$100,000 and experiences of luxury consumption. A 2 (product type) × 2 (need for status) factorial design was used to test the hypotheses.	When faced with mimicking behaviors by less affluent consumers, parvenus exhibit more negative attitude toward their favorite luxury goods brands than luxury hospitality brands. Conversely, patricians exhibit similar levels of attitude change across the luxury brands.
Visentin, Colucci, & Luca Marzocchi (2013)	To analyze the attributes affecting similar brand positioning.	Compare Aaker brand personality scale with an empirical scale based on individuals' relevant attributes.	A more holistic view of the brand, forces the two cognitive structures toward a common perceptual representation.
Chabowski et al. (2013)	Study examines the citations used in the global branding literature (GBL), and evaluates the knowledge structure of this area of research to date.	Bibliometric analysis involving 120 global branding articles.	Authors propose an agenda for future research that fills existing gaps and offers the potential to advance and enrich the GBL.
Roper et al. (2013)	To propose a new way of thinking about brands as a socially constructed concept and to examine how consumers construct their luxury brand consumption.	In-depth and semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis.	Luxury brand management necessitates a deeper appreciation of the mechanics of consumers' luxury discourses.
Pileliene (2012)	Insights into the field of the application areas of neuromarketing.	Qualitative content analysis of scientific literature.	Structured neuro in-sights for luxury marketing are provided.
Amatulli & Guido (2012)	To conceptualize dichotomy of luxury goods consumption.	Literary framework.	Implications for retail managers of luxury companies are discussed, considering the main aspects of retailing strategies and tools together.
Brandt et al. (2011)	Expand the domain of brand image perception measurement by providing a method for eliciting brand associative networks and comparing it with traditional brand image measurement methods.	Clustering consumers with similar perceptions into distinct segments to target differently.	Discuss implications of perceptual segmentation for image management, brand positioning, perceptual competition analysis, and brand communication.
Adams (2011)	To investigate differences between US and Chinese consumers based on their hedonic and utilitarian ratings of luxury goods and the relationship that these ratings have with individual and cultural traits.	Sample of more than 600 Chinese and US respondents based on the ratings of three prestige goods.	China is becoming a more individualistic nation and the expected utilitarian use of prestige goods is confirmed through multiple statistical techniques.
Hung, Chen, Peng, Hackley, Tiwaskul, & Chou, (2011)	To examine the role of social context, individual perception, and vanity and to set these relationships within a broader theoretical context on possession and consumer identity.	Large-scale survey conducted among Chinese luxury brand consumers in Taiwan. The data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression.	The experiential and functional aspects of luxury brand purchase were positively correlated with purchase intention, but symbolic value was not. Physical and achievement vanity had a positive impact on purchase intention.
Baek et al. (2010)	To explore how brand credibility and brand prestige affect brand purchase intention. Several implications for advertising and brand positioning strategies are discussed.	Proposed model of six latent constructs is tested with structural equation modeling analysis: brand credibility, brand prestige, perceived quality, information costs saved, perceived risk, and purchase intention.	Brand credibility and brand prestige positively influence brand purchase intention through perceived quality, information costs saved, and perceived risk.
Gofman, Bevolo, & Moskowitz (2009)	To understand the driving forces behind the perception of high-end products by consumers.	Qualitative interviews, data analysis, and a quantitative survey conducted in the US, UK, Italy, and China with approximately 1800 qualified middle- to upper-class respondents.	Authors address the question: "How can global brands migrate from being cost-driven commodities to higher margins and profits?" The answer is in the high end.
Truong et al. (2009)	To discuss the implications of masstige strategies for researchers and practitioners.	Empirical study investigates the positioning strategies of two popular luxury fashion brands, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren.	Both brands have adopted a masstige positioning strategy.
De Sarbo, Grewal, & Scott (2008)	To propose a general cluster-wise bilinear spatial model that simultaneously estimates market segments, their composition, a brand space, and preference/utility vectors per market segment.	Review of methodological research in the marketing, psychometrics, and classification of literature streams.	Develop an efficient alternating least squares procedure that estimates conditional globally optimum estimates of the model parameters within each iteration through analytic closed-form expressions.
Štrach, & Everett (2006)	To explore practical implications of brand management decisions, particularly those involving the combination of luxury and mass-market brands within the same organization through merger or acquisition.	Integrated case studies of Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, and Saab illustrate the effects of brand extension and dilution through the lenses of brand development, luxury brands, and administrative heritage theories.	Consequences of complex interactions are demonstrated by juxtapositioning of luxury brands, administrative heritage, and global strategic management through mergers/acquisitions.
Minhi, Won, Hyunmo, & Yong (2006)	Propose a general scheme for classifying various changes in consumer preference and choice responses when a new alternative is added to a choice set.	Newly defined share-ratio measures (SRM) and share-change measures (SCM).	Created context maps and preference-substitutability maps that visualize the nature of context effects and positions of competing brands.

Table 1 (continued)

Author and Year	Purpose	Method/Data	Findings
Kumcu & McClure (2003) Klink & Smith (2001)	To offer alternative explanation of prestige pricing that does not require them to assert that the demand for prestige goods is backward bending. To identify traits that explain discrepancy between prior research and marketplace observation: (1) limited extension information, (2) failure to account for consumers' new product adoption tendencies, and (3) single exposure to proposed extensions.	Incorporating (1) product promotion and (2) the market power of the firms marketing prestige goods to supply side considerations. Findings of prior research and theories of consumer information processing and product adoption.	Explanation shows how promotion, demand, output costs, and business profitability are intertwined within a firm's marketing mix. Effects of fit disappear when attribute information is added to extension stimuli and are applicable only for later product adopters.
Kirmani et al. (1999)	How ownership status moderates the effects of stretch direction (up or down), brand image (prestige or nonprestige), and branding strategy (sub-brand name or direct) on consumer responses to price-based line stretches.	Authors proposed an "ownership effect" whereby owners have more favorable responses than nonowners to the brand's extensions. A field study and two lab studies.	The ownership effect occurs for upward and downward stretches of nonprestige brands and for downward stretches of prestige brands. For downward stretches of prestige brands, the ownership effect does not occur.
Lane & Jacobson (1995)	To assess whether and how the stock market returns—a measure of the change in expected future cash flows—associated with a brand extension announcement.	Event study methods and empirical analysis.	Stock market participants' responses to brand extension announcements depend on brand attitude and familiarity.
Rovedder et al.	A large quantity of CBBE models do not offer financial estimation information; this same scenario is possible within CBBE models that do offer profitable remarks but do not consider consumers perception.	Combined Model based on approaches: CBBE and FBBE. (crosschecking outcomes regarding the corresponding variables finances and consumer's perception).	The Model can determine the impact of each driver in brand equity and also able to relocate marketing resources effectively.
Lu et al. (2015)	Examination of the relationships between consumers' authenticity perception and four brand equity dimensions.	Surveys, sampling, and data analysis based on a brand equity model.	Results reveal the consumers' authenticity perception is a critical element of brand equity performance and also has an impact on the consumer's intentions.
Londono et al. (2016)	Review and synthesize the literature regarding brand, retailer, and channel equity measures.	Surveys and structural equation modeling.	Conceptualizing and measuring consumer-based brand-retailer-channel equity is created by CBBRCE awareness, quality, and loyalty.
Lin (2015)	Examine the relationships between innovative brand experience, equity, and satisfaction in airlines.	Multiple regression analysis among research variables.	The study confirms benefits obtained from innovative brand experience, brand progress, and customer management.

- RO<sub>1</sub>: Develop masstige-based theoretical models for strategic marketing and brand management.
- RO<sub>2</sub>: Reconceptualize the masstige mean score scale (MMSS) and test the validity of a scale as a measure of marketing effectiveness of brands.
- RO<sub>3</sub>: Illustrate how to build top-of-mind brand awareness in overseas markets by implementing masstige marketing strategies and compare masstige value in foreign markets with that in the home country.

Brand equity is significantly associated with the images of country of origin of a brand (Laroche et al., 2005; Pappu et al., 2007; Roth, Diamantopoulos, Montesinos, 2008; Kumar & Paul, 2008). Based on this proposition and the above-mentioned objectives, we formulate the first hypothesis:

**H1.** Certain brands create a higher masstige value and thereby better brand equity and popularity in foreign markets than in home markets.

To test this hypothesis, we conceptualized strategic marketing function of LV and measured the masstige value of the brand in the United States, France, and India (the "Study Markets"). To analyze masstige marketing effectiveness across French, Indian, and American cultures, the study compares the percentage of revenue generated from all three Study Markets (See Table 2) Reliability Test results for the aggregate sample is reported in Table 3 (See Table 3).

Prestige objects are powerful, sought-after in most consumer-based societies (Ross, 2014). Brands with a higher masstige value tend to be best-selling brands in a market (Paul, 2015). Following this proposition, we further investigate this phenomenon. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

**H2.** Higher mass prestige value of a brand facilitates the brand to

be a best-selling one in that market.

We tested H2 by comparing MMIV of LV in India (where the brand has only been established since 2003) and the United States (where it has operated for more than 50 years).

#### 4. Methodology

LV brand was chosen for this study because of its high brand value, following the method adopted in prior studies (Oh & Kim, 2011; Paul, 2015). The study compares masstige value of LV in France, its home market, with that in the United States, a developed country with the world's largest economy, and India, a developing country. We selected these countries mainly because of the theoretical rationale behind it to compare the effectiveness of marketing strategy at home country with that of a strategically important developed foreign country and a developing country. Second, the United States and India were selected as foreign markets, as the brand generates substantial revenue from the United States and India being a country in which the brand has recently entered. In addition, the United States, France, and India show an adequate range of cultural variation. For example, Long-Term Orientation (LTO) scores for India, the United States, and France are 51, 26, and 63 on Hofstede's cultural dimensions index (Hofstede, 1991). This shows that US society does not have LTO, whereas French culture is based on LTO. India is in between. Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) scores on the same index for India, the United States, and France are 40, 46, and 86, respectively.<sup>2</sup> We conducted interviews with LV customers and potential customers in the Study Markets,

<sup>2</sup> Source of data: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/> (Accessed on 3 April 2018).

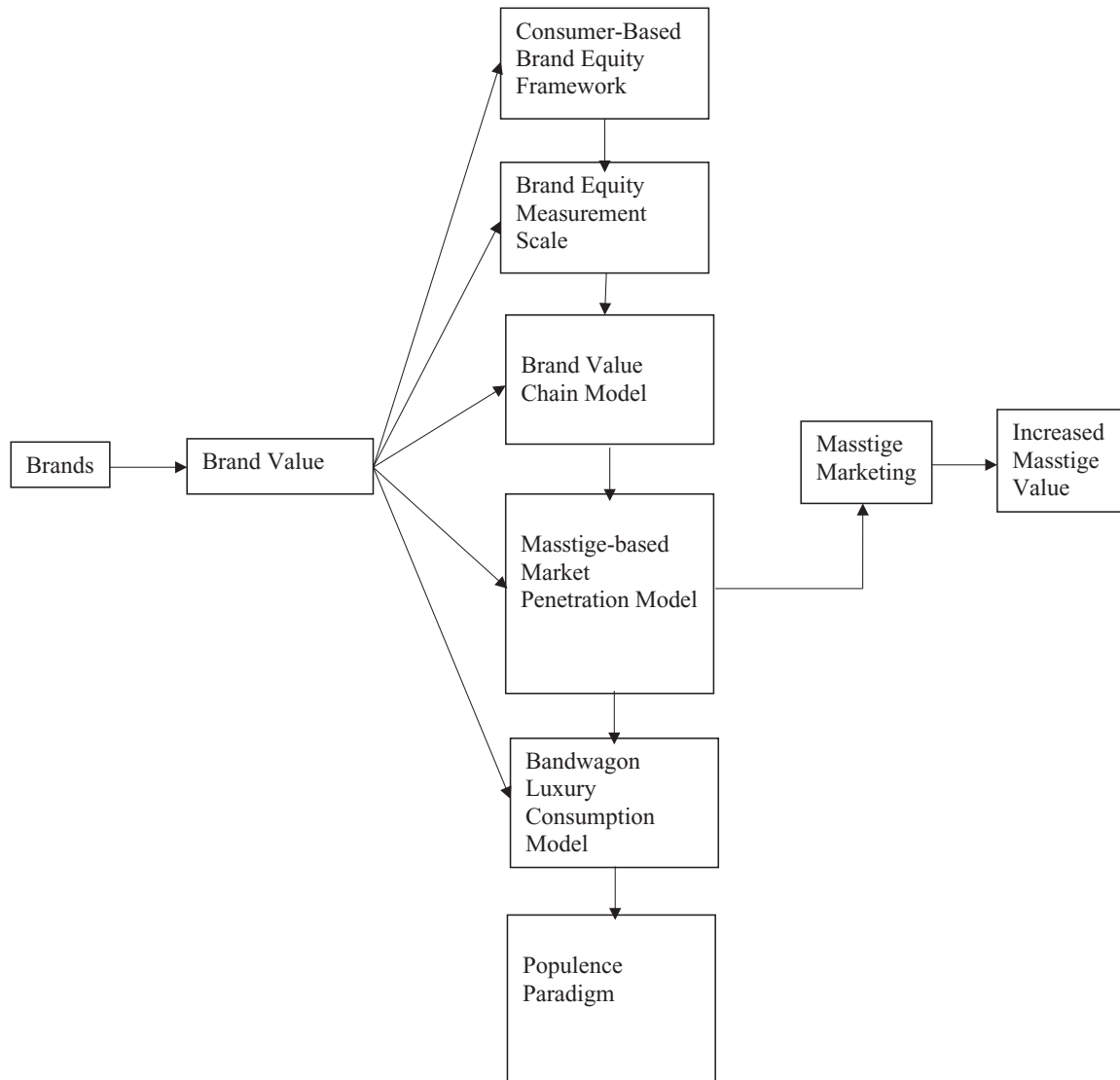


Fig. 1. Theoretical foundation and models.

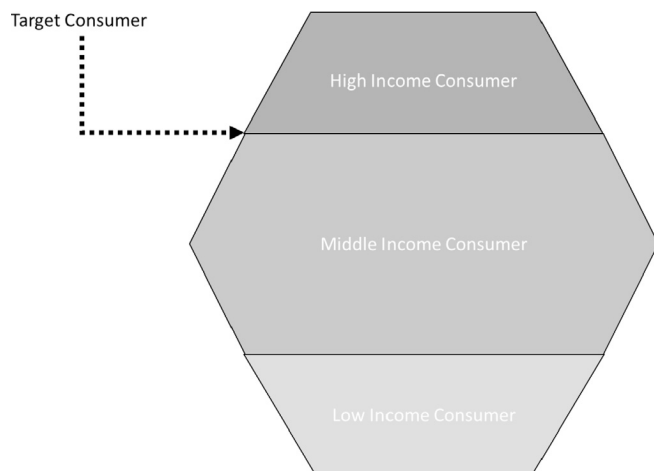


Fig. 2. Marketing model for a typical luxury goods firm.

interviewing 200 persons aged from 18 to 40 years per country, totaling 600 (the “Sample”) people. Based on this sample, we estimated MMIV using “MMSS” and computed a Masstige Mean Score Index (“MMSI”). While examining the MMSS’ robustness, we tested for reliability and validity.

We distributed the hardcopy questionnaire to customers shopping from LV stores as well as to customers shopping from competing brands. Being a luxury product, LV depends on an exclusive group of customers. Therefore, we collected data from customers who had purchased LV or competing prestigious brands in their life. Ninety percent of the respondents in our sample turned out to be in the age group of 20–30 years. The respondents from France are mainly based in Versailles, Paris, and Grenoble. Indian sample consists of respondents based in Mumbai and New Delhi, and most American respondents are from Washington State. The overall response rate in France was 60%, in the United States was 50%, and in India was 65%. In addition, we assess the universality of our masstige scale based on the sample data from different countries, as confirming the universality enables cross-cultural benchmarking of brand equity because the measure is not bound to a

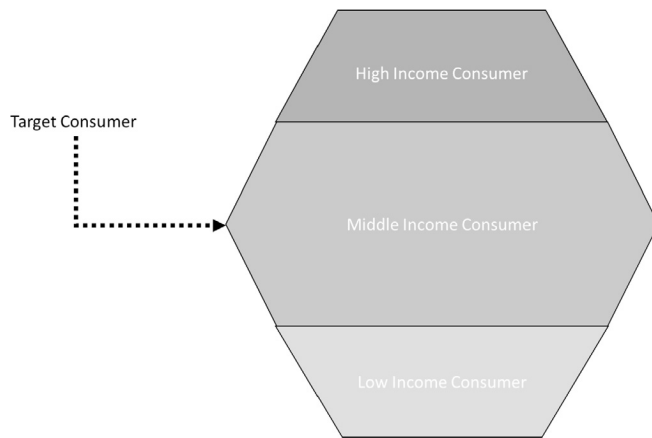


Fig. 3. Model targeting middle-income consumers.

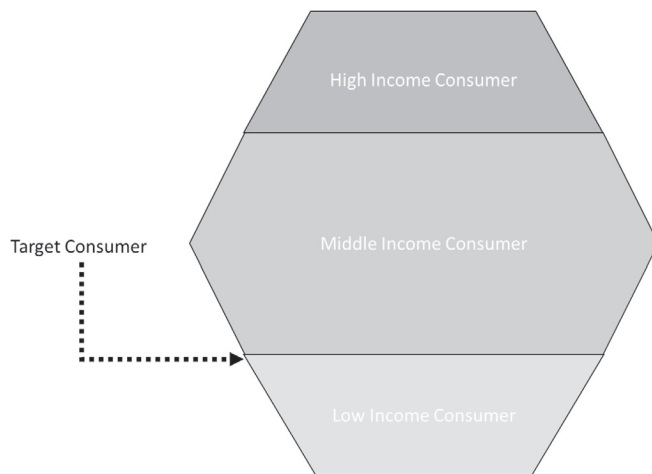


Fig. 4. Masstige marketing model for long-term success.

particular culture or country.

## 5. Theoretical frameworks, models, and measures

Brand equity is an important marketing concept that has generated substantial amount of research interest. Further, several researchers have addressed the conceptualization, measurement, and management of brand equity (e.g., Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993a, b; Keller, 2001; Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kumar & Paul, 2018;

**Table 2**  
LVMH group, fashion and leather goods division financial statements.

Revenue (EURO millions)	2014	2011	2009
	6305	5828	5422
Revenue by geographic region (%)			
France	8	9	9
Europe (excluding France)	21	20	19
The United States	22	23	24
Japan	20	22	26
Asia (excluding Japan)	25	23	20
Other markets	7	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Compiled from Official Annual Reports, LVMH Group, Paris.

**Table 3**  
Reliability test results for the aggregate sample.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.82	.84	10

Pappu et al., 2005; Paul, 2015; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). To position this article in a manner that displays similarities and differences with existing approaches, we briefly review the established theoretical frameworks for brand equity measurement and management. Based on that review exercise, we describe different dimensions of masstige approach for strategic marketing and label it as masstige model for strategic marketing and brand management. Keeping the aforesaid objective in mind, in this section, we identify and critically examine the theoretical frameworks/measures in this area for comparison and for building up the masstige model in this article (See Fig. 1).

### 5.1. Customer-based brand equity framework (Keller, 1993a,b)

Keller (1993a,b) chose the term CBBE because he wanted to distinguish consumer-focused view of brand equity from financially oriented views of brand equity. CBBE approach is characterized by three theoretical dimensions (Keller, 2016): (i) differential effects of brands; (ii) brand knowledge – defined broadly as any type of mental brand association; and (iii) response to a wide variety of different marketing variables. The concept of brand knowledge can be broken down into two key components. First, brand awareness was based on brand recall and recognition. Second, brand image was characterized by strength, favorability, and uniqueness.

### 5.2. Brand equity measurement scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2001)

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multidimensional measure of CBBE and assessed its psychometric properties by measuring cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey. Their measure is reliable and valid and has been used in several other studies and gained hundreds of citations. The latent structure of the measure was assessed for generalizability across multiple samples drawn from Koreans, Korean Americans, and Americans.

### 5.3. Brand value chain model (Keller & Lehmann, 2003)

The brand value chain model was designed to help marketers trace the value creation process to better understand the financial impact of marketing expenditures and investments to create loyal customers and strong brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2003). First, brand value creation begins when the firm targets the customers to develop the brand. Second, customers' mindset and response to all subsequent marketing activities – pricing, channels, advertisement – and the product itself has an influence on the resulting market share and profitability of the brand (Keller, 2016).

### 5.4. Masstige-based market penetration model (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)

Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term “masstige” in their Harvard Business Review article based on the middle class consumer behavior in the United States. The concept was also elaborated in a book entitled “Trading up: Why consumers want new luxury goods and how companies create them” (Silverstein, Fiske, &

Butman, 2008). These products are considered luxury or premium goods and priced between the middle class and the super-premium. With the growing number of middle class consumers, and many consumers acquiring higher levels of quality and taste, luxury goods no longer remain just for the upper-affluent, but they are now within the reach and attainable for mass-market consumers (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Brands such as Starbucks, Victoria's secret, etc. are cited as examples of masstige brands.

#### 5.5. Bandwagon luxury consumption model (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012)

Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) studied the impact of certain psychological factors on consumers' propensity to engage in "bandwagon" luxury consumption. Market penetration and brand position strategies leading to mass consumption of a luxury brand, in particular, among middle class consumers creating mass prestige, is called "bandwagon luxury consumption" (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Brands such as Gucci, Versace and Louis Vuitton capitalize on this type of buying behavior. In general, they demonstrated that consumers' interdependent self-identity underlies bandwagon luxury consumption. This is the core tenet of the masstige model.

#### 5.6. Populace paradigm (Granot, Russel, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013)

Granot et al. (2013) showed that the meaning of luxury has changed based on a comprehensive review of research. They offer theoretical extensions and propose a new luxury paradigm that they refer to as "Populace" based on the new trends in the United States. "Populace," according to them, is the process through which the prestige goods can be marketed and popularized toward more consumers (Paul, 2018). The masstige marketing model and measure are grounded in the populace paradigm.

#### 5.7. Summary and extension

Grounded in consumer behavior theory, the above-mentioned models/measures offer marketers a comprehensive set of tools to help them devise branding strategies and tactics. However, because these models/measures are often viewed as tools for marketers, much of this research has not been incorporated into strategic approach. In the reconceptualized masstige scale, we retain brand knowledge (Keller, 1993a,b; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) as a source of brand equity and mass prestige value but incorporate other factors such as perceived quality, excitement, and status because those are the core tenets of theory of prestige, as excitement to own a "premium, but attainable brand" leads to prestige and status. As a result, we suggest that masstige approach is promising in terms of future research potential, as it integrates marketing and strategy to understand the sources of strategic marketing as well as brand management with a broad and interdisciplinary perspective. Masstige approach and scale (see factors/components in Table 8) would also be useful to examine whether an expensive brand has succeeded in creating a higher mass prestige value than competing brands that are priced at a low level.

### 6. A new theoretical model and international expansion

In this section, we illustrate the international expansion process of LV from France to foreign markets, thus emphasizing on their marketing strategies and introducing a theoretical model, the hexagon model, for reconceptualizing masstige marketing strategy.

Established in France in 1854, LV has become one of the oldest

French multinational luxury brands with substantial market share in Japan and North America. Japan and the United States have been the main overseas market and revenue source of LV (see Table 2). During the 1960s–1980s, headquarters of LV in France led an "international business strategy, targeting high and middle-income countries first and later expanding to low-income countries" (Paul & Ferroul, 2010). Therefore, the brand focused on expanding to foreign markets such as the United States and Japan, while ignoring developing countries such as India. LV focused on product development and brand management, while adapting to market needs. To do so, the firm has strongly invested in creativity and innovation as well as quality and distribution control. In the United States, LV introduced new product categories such as jewelry, watches, and eyewear.<sup>3</sup> The "place" strategy of LV is to open stores at the best possible locations such as city centers, a strategy that has helped them to attract high-income customers to LV (Paul & Ferroul, 2010).

#### 6.1. Entry into the United States and India

In this sub-section, an effort has been made to categorize LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) group's business in the "study markets" using the Product Life Cycle (PLC) theory (Vernon, 1992). PLC theoretical cycles can be broadly classified as Introduction, Growth, Maturity, and Decline stages. The firm has been present in the United States market since the 1940s and 1950s, displaying its products at department stores; however, the firm did not generate a significant percentage of revenue from the United States during that initial stage (Introduction stage as per the PLC theory). Later, the LVMH group (the luxury goods conglomerate created from the merger of LV and Moët & Chandon and Hennessy, the world's leading champagne and brandy manufacturers) opened its own exclusive stores with a grand interior design that heightened the purchasing experience. As of December 2013, the LVMH group controlled over 550 stores in the United States. LVMH controlled prices, products, and items exported from France to the United States. As a quality control strategy, LV still exports from Europe and, despite high transportation costs, has not established a production facility in North America. The business model of LV still works because the firm charges premium prices (Paul & Ferroul, 2010). The United States market has been quite significant for LVMH group's revenue, generating 24%, 23%, and 22% of worldwide revenue of LVMH in 2007, 2009, and 2011, respectively, (see Table 2); it can be considered that LVMH is the "maturity" cycle in the United States, according to the PLC theory.

Because of import restrictions on leather products, entry of LV (Introduction stage as per PLC theory) into India was delayed, opening its first store in New Delhi, India's capital, only in 2003 and its second in Mumbai (Bombay), India's largest commercial city (Raghavendra, 2003). The expansion of LV in India was gradual, as the firm believed that, although Indian consumers were quality conscious, they were not ready for luxury. As of 2013, LV had established just five stores in India (Ganesan, 2013). Their business is still in the Introduction stage with a potential to move to Growth stage.

#### 6.2. A new masstige-based hexagon model

Paul (2015) introduced a pyramid model to explain the masstige marketing phenomenon. However, considering that most countries have large chunk of middle class people, an attempt has been made in this article to reconceptualize masstige marketing with the help

<sup>3</sup> Based on visits to LV stores in the United States.



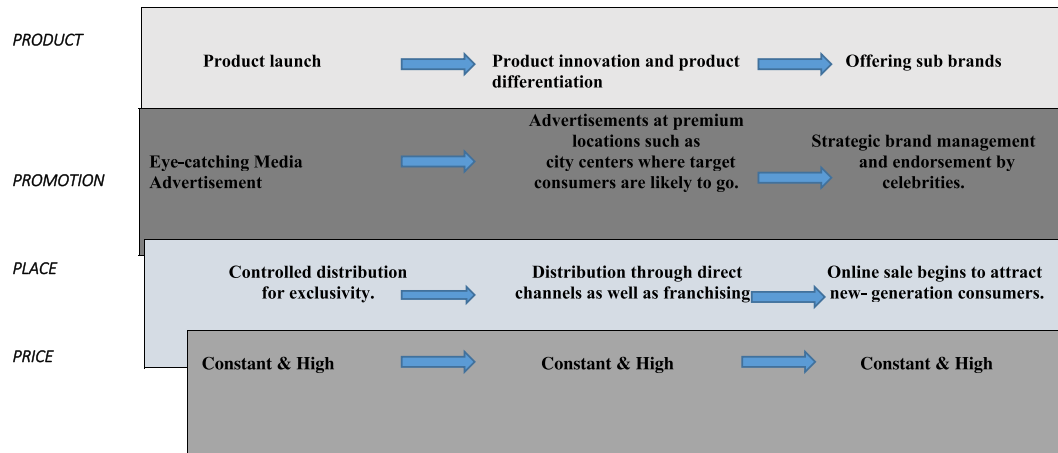


Fig. 5. A three-stage model for masstige marketing.

of a new hexagon model to explain how to target the consumers with the help of three diagrams (see Figs. 1–3). Most firms selling premium products target only high-income consumers, as shown in Fig. 1. However, when they reach the market saturation point, they start targeting middle-income consumers as well. We argue that premium goods firms can target both high-income and middle-income consumers from the beginning, as shown in Fig. 3. The masstige marketing strategy of LV in the United States can be broadly described as hexagon-model marketing (see Fig. 3). LV formulated a wise masstige strategy, targeting high-income and middle-income individuals. This strategy stayed true to the 4Ps of marketing (product, price, promotion, and place) and focused on ensuring the high quality its products and that it adapts to changing times and cultures. Following is a discussion of implementation of the marketing mix strategies by LV.

### 6.3. Model for masstige marketing and value creation

Price, Product, Promotion, and Place are the four Ps, known as marketing mix. Masstige Marketing has roots in Product and Promotion strategies, whereas it has nothing to do with the price change (assuming that Price remains constant at premium/moderately high). Appropriateness of product strategy, which includes innovation, quality, and intangible assets, contribute to masstige approach of strategic marketing. Similarly, promotion strategy based on the hexagon model, shown in the diagram, is also required as part of masstige marketing. On the other hand, while markets demand low price, masstige brands do not reduce the price for generating sales. Based on these, a stage-by-stage model for Masstige Marketing keeping prices constant is developed in this study (See Fig. 5). For example, LV products are priced high because they represent luxury and prestige. Their branded bags are priced between \$1000 and \$3,000<sup>4</sup> (see Table 2). Fig. 6 shows the effort taken to show how a firm can create masstige value based on its tenets.

With regard to its products, LV focused on constant quality improvement, thus offering lifetime repair guarantees for its customers. Striving to increase consumer loyalty, the firm focused on marketing and not just sales. Moreover, it has been observed that the broader is the range and quality of its offerings, the higher is its customer retention rate. In general, customers seek adequate quality, “fitness of use,” etc. However, LV handbags far surpassed customers’ desire by providing products of distinctive high quality

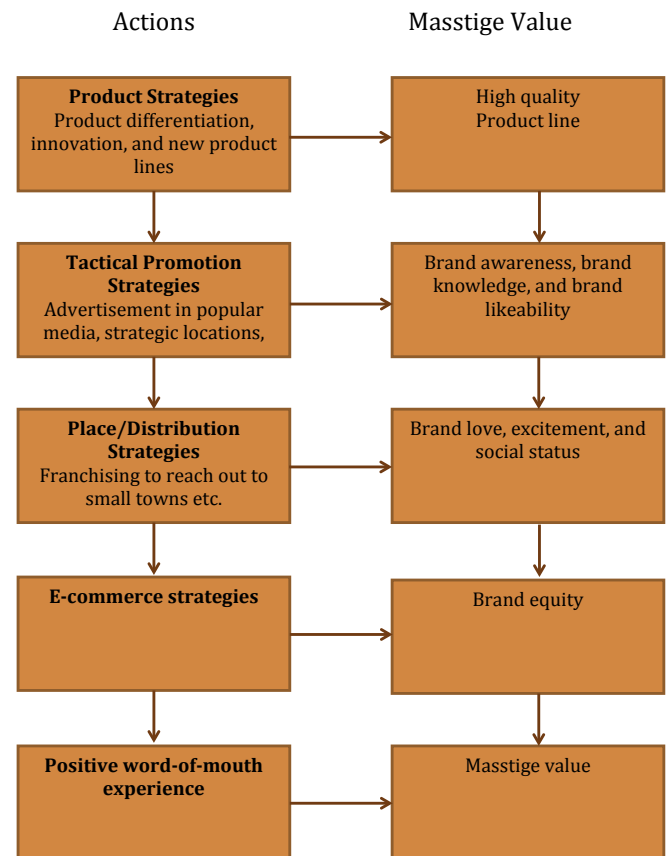


Fig. 6. The masstige value creation approach.

and great attention to detail (Paul & Ferroul, 2010). The masstige approach of LV was instrumental for the launch of newer product categories including jewelry, watches, and eyewear, which have witnessed a rapid growth in their demand in the United States. Ready-to-wear is another category wherein the firm intends to excel. According to them, online sales of LV and its incursion into children’s wear have also been fueling the growth of the firm.

According to Haig (2004), one of the secrets of success of LV is its mass marketing strategy to create masstige by making luxury items that are both appealing to and attainable by everyone, not just the wealthy, yet maintaining its exclusivity. For instance, the Company

<sup>4</sup> Based on information collected from an LV store in the United States.

**Table 4**  
KMO and Bartlett's test results.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.845
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square Df Sig.	1.708E3 136 .000

**Table 5**  
Reliability test results for the USA.

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
0.97	0.977	10

**Table 6**  
Reliability test results for India.

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
0.82	0.83	10

employs marketing techniques such as celebrity endorsements and sports sponsorships to reach the entire market and tap into the potential consumers. This strategy is enabled by another secret of success of LV: the ability to retain control. LV has seamlessly balanced its prestige with popularity, maintaining a luxury aura with mass marketing appeal (Haig, 2004). By implementing this strategy, LV was able to not only retain its core high-income consumers but also gain new middle- and upper low-income consumers.

LV has been using the traditional advertising medium, i.e., print mass media, particularly publishing their advertisements in high fashion magazines. The brand management and positioning strategy of the firm in the United States have generated a large business volume. As LV became global, the brand developed a successful advertising strategy in line with its global expansion strategy. It should be noted that rather than reducing its advertising budget, like most other luxury firms, the Company either increased or kept the same budget each year. The advertising budget of LV represented 5% of its revenues (Matlack, 2004).

Moreover, LV frequently published print advertisements in magazines and billboards in large cosmopolitan cities such as New York. Its campaigns often involved famous stars, including Gisele Bündchen, Eva Herzigova, Sean Connery, and Francis and Sofia Ford Coppola. The Company also bought TV advertising. Many customers were entranced by the 90-second advertisement that ended with the question, "Where will life take you?" The Company's media department was strategic in choosing the newspapers and magazines wherein to publish the advertisements to reach middle-income consumers (Paul & Ferroul, 2010).

In general, the greater the reach of distribution channels, the higher the sales potential for companies selling normal goods. However, this theory must not necessarily apply to all the other luxury goods. LV established a global but rigidly controlled distribution network from its headquarters, with exports from Europe to other countries including the United States and India, and only selling through few exclusive stores at prime locations. For example, in India, the first LV store was opened in the five-star Oberoi hotel in 2003 (Ganesan, 2013); this helped the brand to attract high-income group segment. As for the luxury sector in general, the location of stores is an important selling factor for LV. The brand ensured comfort and convenience, thus enhancing its consumers' buying experience at well-designed showrooms that are strategically located.

During the last decade, many firms invested capital in franchises

in the United States. However, most of 550 stores of LV were not franchises. LV succeeded in developed countries such as the United States and Japan by exporting its goods for over 40 years. The brand was very popular in those markets even though they did not have manufacturing facilities in those countries (Vaideville et al., 2013, pp. 279–294). The masstige marketing strategy of LV, which follows the hexagon model introduced in this article (see Figs. 1–3), helped the brand to generate approximately 20%–25% of worldwide revenue from the United States (See Table 2).

## 7. Reliability and validity tests

Reliability is related to the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consistent results. We tested for the reliability of MMSS using aggregate (combining data set of three countries) Cronbach's alpha as well as Cronbach's alpha values for each country (the United States, France, and India separately). The aggregate reliability score of MMSS was 0.82, which was well above the threshold, evidencing that reliability of all 10 questions measuring masstige value was relatively high (See Table 4). Reliability tests on a country-by-country basis show results above-threshold and high reliability (0.82–0.97), which are given in Tables 5–7.

To validate the scale, we conducted principal component analysis. The cases-to-variables ratio in principal component analysis should be at least 5:1. With 10 variables and 200 cases each from the United States, France, and India, the cases-to-variables ratio for all three countries surpasses the threshold. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were carried out for sampling adequacy. Results of these tests established that the sample is adequate, as the KMO value is 0.845, which far exceeds the required value of 0.5 for all the three countries (See Table 5). Principal component analysis requires that the probability associated with Bartlett's test of Sphericity be lesser than the level of significance. The probability associated with Bartlett's test for both the countries is < 0.001, which satisfies this requirement.

Construct validity was also tested using the standard procedure followed by Yoo and Donthu (2001), as samples are drawn across the culturally different countries to show the generalizability of the respective scales (multidimensional CBBE scale and masstige scale, respectively). We compared the variables/constructs included in the scale with brand knowledge, perceived quality, and excitement

**Table 7**  
Reliability test results for France.

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
0.87	0.875	10

**Table 8**  
Masstige mean index (MMI) for LV in the United States, France, and India.

Sr. No.	Factor	LV in US	LV in France	LV in India
<b>Brand Knowledge and Prestige</b>				
1	I like this brand because of brand knowledge.	6.6	6.3	4.5
2	I would buy this brand because of its mass prestige.	6.5	6.1	3.0
3	I would pay a higher price for this brand for status quo.	5.7	5.5	2.6
4	I consider this brand a top-of-mind brand in my country, state, or district.	6.5	6.6	2.5
5	I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives.	6.6	6.2	3.0
<b>Perceived Quality</b>				
6	I believe this brand is known for its high quality.	6.4	6.0	5.0
7	I believe this brand meets international standards.	6.2	5.9	4.5
<b>Excitement and Status</b>				
8	I love to buy this brand regardless of price.	4.9	4.4	3.0
9	Nothing is more exciting than this brand.	5.5	5.4	2.0
10	I believe that individuals in my country, state, or district perceive this brand as prestigious.	6.3	5.0	2.7
<b>Sum</b>		<b>63.2</b>	<b>56.1</b>	<b>32.8</b>

for validity purposes. In the masstige scale, these variables have been used as surrogates for mass prestige.

The reliability of the five-item measure of brand knowledge and prestige was 0.85, 0.90, and 0.82 for consumers in the United States, India, and France, respectively. The reliability of the two-item measure of perceived quality was 0.91, 0.92, and 0.88, respectively, for the same group of consumers in those countries. In addition, the prediction of a highly positive correlation between masstige and brand knowledge was supported with correlations of 0.64, 0.68, and 0.53 ( $p < 0.0001$ ) for American, Indian, and French consumers, respectively. The correlation between mass prestige and perceived quality was also high: 0.70, 0.69, and 0.64 ( $p < 0.0001$ ) for American, Indian, and French consumers, respectively. Thus, a high correlation reveals the construct validity of the masstige scale. Both brand knowledge and perceived quality items also showed high reliability.

## 8. Results

We extended and validated MMS containing 10 questions (See Table 8), to measure masstige marketing effectiveness in different markets in this section. Cross-country measurement variance was tested for the samples from three countries using the procedure recommended by prior researchers (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The measure/model was supported by values of fit obtained as the result of analysis conducted using LISREL 8 software (see Table 9). Its Goodness of Fit (GFI) index was 0.82, 0.83, and 0.89 for consumers in the United States, France, and India, respectively. Adjusted GFI was 0.82, 0.83, and 0.89.

**Table 9**  
Fit statistics.<sup>a</sup>

	Americans	French	Indians
SRMR	0.0751	0.0736	0.0598
GFI	0.82	0.83	0.89
AGFI	0.78	0.79	0.86
CFI	0.87	0.88	0.93
IFI	0.87	0.89	0.93

<sup>a</sup> SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, GFI = Goodness of Fit, AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, IFI = Incremental Fit Index.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.87, 0.88, and 0.93, and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) was 0.87, 0.87, and 0.93, respectively.

In the masstige score scale (instrument), individual total scores range between 10 and 70. The Sample mean constitutes the MMIV. The main proposition is that the higher the index value, the higher the brand equity (See Paul (2015) for understanding and interpreting the masstige mean values). For example, Masstige Mean Score more than 60 implies that firms created top-of-mind masstige brand awareness.

For hypothesis testing, we collected sample data, calculated mean scores of responses to each question, and summed up the mean scores to arrive at the MMI value called MMIV. Thereby, the study determines and compares masstige marketing effectiveness in different markets. As aforementioned, the sample consists of 600 individuals between the ages of 18 and 40 years from the United States, India, and France, with 200 from each country. We administered the questionnaire to determine MMIV of LV in foreign markets and in its home country, France. We selected the United States and India as foreign markets, as the brand generates substantial revenue from the United States and India being a country in which the brand has recently entered.

The results show that the masstige mean score of LV (in other words, MMIV) in the United States, France, and India is 63.2, 56.1, and 32.8, respectively (see Table 8), thus implying that the brand created top-of-mind masstige brand awareness in the United States, whereas the firm has succeeded in building masstige brand value in France, its home country, but not top-of-mind brand awareness. The MMIV of LV in India is 32.8, thus suggesting that the brand has not been received well in that market. Having determined a higher MMIV for the United States, we accept H1. However, based on the MMIV for India, we must interpret that brands can create a higher masstige value in some foreign markets but not everywhere. Because the MMIV in the United States is much higher than that in India, and the fact that LV is a best-selling brand in the United States (based on the statistics reported earlier), we also accept H2. As of 2015, a higher MMIV in the United States corresponds with the fact that LV is more popular with hundreds of stores in the United States (approximately 550) than in France (no more than 350) and India (only 5). Low MMIV of LV in India also implies that LV is not a best-selling brand (not popular) in India yet.



## 9. Limitations and directions for future research

This study has a few limitations. We used shoppers from only three countries with different cultures and levels of economic development. It may not be good enough to generalize the cross-country variance and predictive validity of the scale. Therefore, researchers worldwide could include other tools such as the common method variance test or the tests suggested by Hult et al. (2008) in their studies to further examine the cross-cultural validity and generalizability, while using the MMI and MMS validated and developed in this study. Future research may also include other relevant constructs or variables, which could be added to the 10-item scale, and modify the scale for conductive survey to include other antecedents and moderators identified in prior research (e.g., Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Riley et al., 2013; Shukla & Purani, 2012) and examine the convergent, discriminant, nonlogical, and predictive validity. There are also opportunities for conducting research in this area, focusing on a country, by comparing the masstige value of a brand in different states/regions. Comparative studies of competing brands using MMS and MMI would also be of immense use, as shown by Paul (2018).

Masstige as an area of research is still in the infancy stage. For example, researchers can carry out single brand market research studies and estimate the MMIV of brands such as Toyota Lexus, Victoria's Secret or Starbucks in different states/regions of countries, such as the United States or UK, by collecting data from between five and ten states/regions. Alternatively, they can conduct research choosing competing brands, such as Apple's iPhone and Samsung's Galaxy in the smartphone segment in a specific city or in a country and compare which brand is more successful in their marketing strategies using the score range specified on the index. In the laptop industry, it would be interesting to examine whether Apple's Mac brands have higher masstige value (despite its higher price) in comparison to competing brands such as Lenovo, HP, Acer, etc. Similarly, masstige index can be used for comparing the marketing effectiveness of brands such as Toyota, Honda, Ford, and GM in the car industry, or the brand popularity of television brands such as Sony, LG, Samsung, etc. can be estimated and compared using masstige index. We urge researchers to analyze whether there is any link between country of origin and masstige value as well (for example, masstige value of European versus American car brands, Japanese versus Korean Television brands, etc.).

Based on the above, we posit the following theoretical propositions ( $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ ) for future research, intending to improve strategic brand management.

- P1 The higher the MMIV of brands, the greater the likelihood of success in a distinct market;
- P2 The better the appropriateness of the marketing mix, the higher the MMIV in that market; and
- P3 Certain brands create higher brand equity in terms of masstige value in foreign markets.

## 10. Conclusions

On the basis of MMIV analysis and survey results, we conclude that the combination of a masstige marketing strategy with a scientific marketing plan may result in obtaining a greater market share and profit in foreign markets. Other findings can be summarized as follows:

- i) A firm may be in a position to create higher masstige value in a foreign market than in its home country.

- ii) Probability of higher masstige value increases with time if the brand uses marketing mix elements appropriately. MMI measures brands' masstige marketing effectiveness and popularity, regardless of industry and market.
- iii) In addition, MMI could serve as a benchmark for comparing brand equity of not only premium brands but also non-premium brands. For example, MMI can be employed to estimate the brand value in terms of masstige for competing brands (for instance, soft drink brands such as Pepsi and Coke and Television brands such as LG, Sony, and Sharp) in a specific market to examine the extent of their success in that market. This measure and comparison would help firms to understand their marketing effectiveness across markets as well.

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# Mass prestige value and competition between American versus Asian laptop brands in an emerging market—Theory and evidence

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, competition between brands have been linked to mass prestige associated with the brands. Mass Prestige (Masstige) is very important to study, and yet it is a relatively less investigated construct in the literature. This study is an attempt to contribute to the literature grounded in masstige theoretical approach by examining the prestige associated with the four best-selling laptop brands: 1) two American brands (HP, Dell); and 2) two Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer). We analyzed the competition between these brands in the second fastest growing emerging market, India. In order to measure Masstige, we used the Masstige Mean scale. The results show that American brands have the potential to be seen as prestige brands while Asian brands are trailing behind in masstige value and competition. Finally, but not less important, this paper discusses the potential reasons for different masstige value of four laptop brands.

## 1. Introduction

Brands are semiotic marketing systems that generate value for participants, society, and broader environment, through co-created meaningful exchange (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2014). Brands today are touching the lives of consumers across the globe in unprecedented ways. Brand Management as a topic has never been this important as it is today. The 'brand equity' as a concept has captured the attention of many researchers (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995) with competition intensifying in different industries with the globalization gathering momentum. Several researchers have addressed the conceptualization, measurement and management of brand equity (e.g.; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993, 2001, 2016; Keller & Lehmann, 2003, 2006; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Pertaining to the importance of brand equity, specifically consumer based brand equity (CBBE), Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multi-dimensional CBBE scale using students sample from America and Korea based on Aaker's (1996) and Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand equity. Subsequently, researchers (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2005) introduced a modified CBBE measure. Despite extensive research and significant advances over the last three decades in the area of brand equity conceptualization (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001), measurement (e.g. Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo &

Donthu, 2001) and management (e.g. Yoo et al., 2000), our understanding of brand equity is yet to be fully explored. For example, Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) in their review paper reported six different conceptual thoughts and sixteen measures of consumer based brand equity (CBBE). The available measures of CBBE across cultures are biased towards its country of origin (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). There exist gaps in global branding literature and the area offers the potential to advance and enrich the measurement scales and literature (Chabowski, Samiee, & Hult, 2013). Chabowski et al. (2013) examined 120 articles related to the global branding literature (GBL), and evaluated the knowledge structure of this area of research to date. They employed multidimensional scaling, leverage resource and capability-based paradigms, using the five underpinning knowledge groups (international branding strategy, brand positioning, brand/country origin, brand concept-image, and brand performance), to propose an agenda for future research by identifying the existing gaps. According to their findings, there is potential for research that advances and enriches the GBL. We respond to their call to fill the research gap by addressing perhaps the most important topic in branding literature – brand equity.

There are many studies analyzing national brands within the same country in repeated ways; however, the studies comparing the brand equity of foreign versus local brands are not many. It is interesting to report that research in some newly introduced measures of CBBE like

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masstige marketing is still in their infancy stage. Paul (2015) on call of existing literature extended the area of research of CBBE in terms of mass prestige approach and developed a measure – Masstige Mean score scale (MMSS) to measure the popularity of brands. This article attempts to contribute to the brand equity literature by advancing the understanding towards one of the least researched measures of brand equity – masstige marketing and analyses the competition between laptop brands in a developing country context.

“Masstige Marketing” is a strategic marketing term for market penetration of medium and large enterprises based on creating brand equity in terms of brand knowledge, likability, love and prestige. The concepts of brand love and brand attachment have received great attention in branding and consumer behavior research lately (Nguyen, Melewa, & Chen, 2013). The masstige strategy is based on the theory of downward brand extension to the masses. Masstige here is defined as “prestigious but attainable” as was proposed by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) in their Harvard Business Review article. In fact, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term “masstige,” (short for mass prestige). Prestige, mass prestige and masstige are treated in the same fashion here. Mass prestige is vast in scope and it is even associated with brands targeted at lower income groups (Paul, 2015). It can be understood by the fact that every brand even if it is promoted using mass promotion can have some value of prestige (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009) associated with it. Masstige products are considered prestigious goods and priced between the middle and premium range. With the growing number of middle class consumers, and many trading up to higher levels of quality and taste, prestigious goods are no longer just for the upper-affluent, but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein, Fiske, & Butman, 2008). Some scholars have called it Populence (Granot, Russelb, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013). Hence, masstige is for masses.

The concept of associating prestige with brands is rooted in the ideology that consumers are deeply reflected by their possessions (Belk, 1988) and they tend to achieve their ideal-self using brands. Consumers in emerging countries like India tend to follow upper mobility (Nijman, 2006) as part of reaching their ideal self. Middle class in emerging markets is always in search of comfort in life and continuously aspires for raising living standards, thus giving rise to a new middle class (Kravets & Sandikci, 2014). These new middle class consumers consider the act of attaining status as their fundamental motive (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013). These people could be better targeted with reasonable price premium coupled with socially accepted prestige status of brand (Truong et al., 2009). This prestige associated with brands provides them high status in society. Masstige marketing asking reasonable premium and targeting middle class people is a boon strategy to tap the market. The only way to tap this huge market is by making the luxury/prestige products available for masses. Good news for marketers is that it can be attempted with downward stretch. Down stretch even in unrelated categories is possible (Klink, 2001). For those who fear from the negative impact on the parent brand as a result of down stretch of prestige brand, the sub-branding is a good option (Kirmani, Sood, & Bridges, 1999). It has become even easier today as even lower end brands are qualifying themselves as luxury or prestigious brands, which is resulting in the increased use of terms such as masstige (Kapferer & Vincent, 2009). Masstige marketing positively influence consumers’ trust and satisfaction (Hong, Lee, & Yun, 2010), produces synergetic effects for achieving strong brand value in both core and extension brands (Kim & Ko, 2010). Mass prestige associated with brands help in shaping perceived quality and risk, therefore saves the cost of information search, which in turn positively influence purchase decision (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010). Not a surprise that masstige marketing is considered as one of the three critical strategies for success of brands in foreign markets (Oh & Kim, 2011).

The concept of “masstige marketing” advocating the reach of

prestige goods to masses seems like a unique buzzword. However, the research in this area is limited and still remains in its ‘infancy’ stage. The extant literature depicts that there has been some interest of scholars towards masstige marketing but it is not sufficient enough to take the construct towards maturity. Keller and Lehmann (2006) highlighted this when they showed concern over the lack of academic research on vertical extensions including downward stretch of prestige brands. Therefore, following prior research (Paul, 2015; Truong et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), and call of literature, this study is an attempt to advance the understanding of the concept (mass prestige) in the context of a strategically important emerging market. Brand popularity of certain popular Asian and American brands in a foreign market in terms of Masstige Mean Index (“MMI”) has been estimated to analyze the competition between brands in this study.

Brand equity in this study is defined in terms of mass prestige and popularity. This study seeks to provide insights for the brands to re-design their marketing strategies taking into account competition based on their score in terms of MMI. We identified that the foreign brands have captured significant and substantial market share in laptop sales during the last decade in emerging countries. Among the emerging economies, India is selected for this study for two strong reasons. First, India has been land of several kings and through its culture and belongings, consumers in India communicate their lavish belongings to society (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Not everyone can fulfill this desire of being royal. But rising income among the middle class has made them shift towards products, which are perceived to be prestige products. Second, since India has been the second fastest growing emerging market for several years, this has resulted into huge demand for prestige products.

For the current study, laptop is chosen as product category for the following reasons: a) GDP per capita of India in 2016 was US \$1709.4 as compared to US \$57,466.8 of USA (World-Bank, 2016). A nice Dell laptop would cost at least \$1200 in India. India’s low per capita income along with higher aspirations of Indians make a foreign laptop brand like Dell a masstige item; b) there are evidences in literature which consider laptop as a worldly possession (Batra & Ghoshal, 2017). It is not new to report that having worldly possessions are among the legitimate ways to display status and prestige; c) a laptop is found to be a status product which scores high on scales measuring status signaling (Kassim, Bogari, Salamah, & Zain, 2016; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). There are studies, which stated that people use brands to maintain their occupational prestige (Geiger-Oneto, Gelb, Walker, & Hess, 2013). Thus, laptops being important occupational products in this digital era fits well in the study of prestige brands; d) Truong et al. (2009) extended the conceptualization of Silverstein and Fiske (2003) and classified Ralph Lauren Polo shirts sold in outlets for \$9.00 or Swarovski crystals with prices as low as \$20.00 as new luxury goods belonging to the category of masstige brands. Even brands promoted using mass targeting have some prestige associated with it (Truong et al., 2009); e) Specifically in India, consumption of prestige brand is not only associated with its expensiveness and elusiveness but part of it is about the brand being a foreign brand especially western (Eng & Bogaert, 2010); A laptop brand is considered as a status symbol in India; and f) Paul (2015) has specifically highlighted that laptop brands (he even named three out of the four brands in present study – Dell, HP and Acer) are appropriate subjects for masstige marketing strategy analysis. In this context, we selected the best-selling laptop brands to study the extent of their success and popularity in India in terms of their mass prestige. This motivated us to critically analyze and measure brand equity of laptop brands for comparison in terms of mass prestige. This paper compares and contrasts the mass prestige associated with American (HP, Dell) and Asian (Lenovo, Acer) laptop brands. Consequently, this study aims to contribute towards the development of masstige

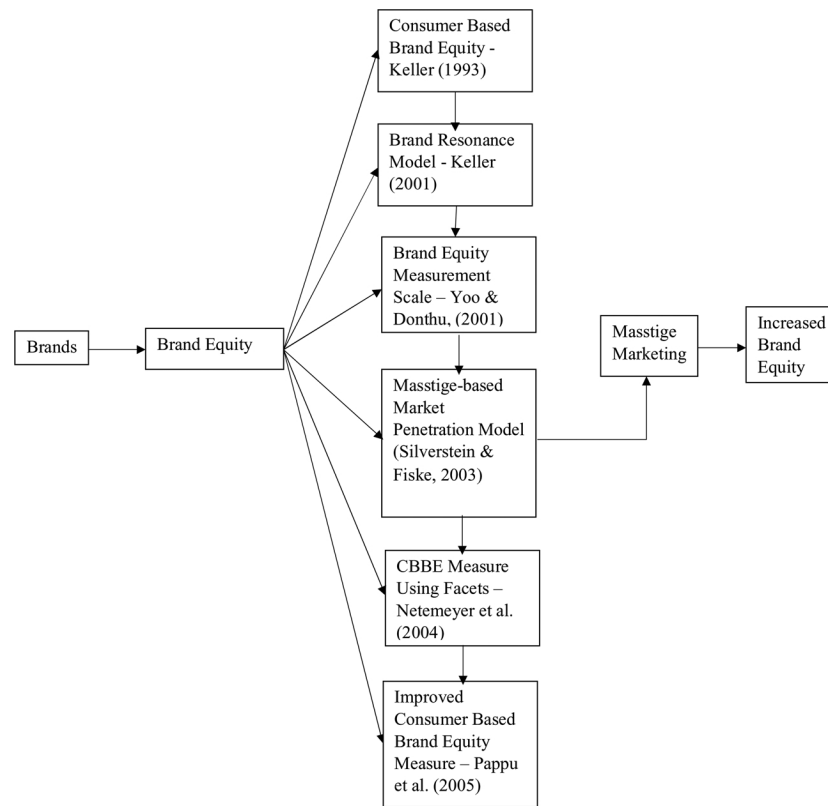


Fig. 1. Theoretical Foundation and Extension.

marketing theory and help managers to examine their marketing strategies' effectiveness. This study would aid firms, particularly, multinational firms in crafting their marketing plans, by determining and comparing their MMI values in a foreign market.

## 2. Theoretical foundation and extension

In order to position this article in a manner that display similarities and differences with extant literature and frameworks, we briefly present the established theoretical frameworks for brand equity measurement and management to record the theoretical emergence of mass prestige and its placement at relevant place on the continuum of brand equity. Based on this exercise, we describe different dimensions of masstige approach developed in this study for strategic brand management. Keeping the aforesaid objective in mind, we identify and critically examine the following prominent theoretical frameworks/measures in this context for comparison and to build up our case for using the masstige mean scale and index in this study (See Fig. 1).

### 2.1. Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework (Keller, 1993)

Keller (1993) CBBE framework grounded in consumer behavior theory, is characterized by three theoretical dimensions (Keller, 2016). They are: (1) Differential effects created by a brand; (2) Brand knowledge defined broadly as any type of mental brand association; and (3) Response to a wide variety of different marketing variables. The concept of brand knowledge can be broken down into two key components: a) Brand awareness consisting of brand recall and recognition; and b) Brand image characterized by strength, favorability and uniqueness.

### 2.2. Brand resonance model (Keller, 2001)

This model was first introduced by Keller (2001) grounded in four components- Behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement. Brand resonance is defined in terms of the extent to which a consumer is in 'synch' with a brand. Brands with strong resonance benefit from increased customer loyalty. Keller (2001) presented a pyramid model with a series of layers to build resonance: i. brand salience (how easily or often a consumer thinks of the brand); ii. Brand performance and imagery; iii. Judgement and feelings; and iv. Resonance.

### 2.3. Brand equity measurement scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2001)

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a multidimensional measure of consumer-based brand equity and assessed its psychometric properties to fill the gap in the literature. Consumer-based means measurement of cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey. Unlike most previous studies, they developed a measure of brand equity that is reliable, and acceptable. In addition, their measure's latent structure is assessed for generalizability across multiple samples drawn from several cultures, specifically, Koreans, Korean Americans and Americans.

### 2.4. Masstige-based market penetration model (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)

In 2003, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) contributed to the literature of brand equity with their seminal article on Masstige marketing, and proposed a masstige based market penetration model. According to this model, "Masstige" marketing strategy is a market penetration approach for medium and large firms. With the booming middle class, more

consumers are trading up to higher quality products which are no longer just for the affluent, but also for mass-market consumers (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). The term “Masstige” was derived based on recent consumer behavior in the United States (US). In the US, middle class consumers with relatively high incomes tend to seek high quality and low-price products (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). As opposed to traditional luxury brands, masstige brands sell at a relatively competitive price and boast mass-artisanal production, providing certain exclusivity to consumers (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). With the emergence of the masstige model, brand equity was introduced to one more dimension of its measurement. The Masstige model states that brand equity can also be operationalized using masstige marketing.

### 2.5. CBBE measure using facets (Netemeyer et al., 2004)

Netemeyer et al. (2004) added a measure to the literature of brand equity (CBBE). Building on the existing frameworks of brand equity, Netemeyer et al. (2004) extended the understanding of CBBE from the perspective of primary facets, which contributes to Brand Equity. These facets are: perceived quality, perceived value of the cost, uniqueness and willingness to pay price premium for brand.

### 2.6. Improved CBBE measure (Pappu et al., 2005)

A set of brand equity dimensions – brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty can be assessed through survey research (Keller, 1993, 2001; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). However, this set of dimensions were not unanimously accepted – For example, Pappu et al. (2005) critically examined the multi-dimensional brand equity scale developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and argued that brand awareness and associations should be seen as same dimension or variable. In this context, in order to improve the generalizability and reliability, Pappu et al. (2005) constructed a scale to measure CBBE, incorporating brand personality variable. They used sample of actual consumers from Australia in two product categories-cars (Toyota, Mitsubishi and Suzuki) and televisions (Sony, Hitachi and Toshiba) across six brands. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were employed as tools for analysis.

Grounded in consumer behavior theory, the above models/measures of brand equity offer marketers a comprehensive set of tools to help them devise branding strategies and tactics to build long term brand equity. However, because these models/measures/frameworks are often viewed as tools for marketers, much of this research has not been incorporated into broader approaches or strategy issues. In the masstige scale, brand knowledge and awareness (Keller, 1993, 2001; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) as sources of brand equity have been retained. Along with it, other factors such as perceived quality, excitement and status are also incorporated. As a result, we suggest that masstige approach is promising in terms of future research potential as it integrates marketing and strategy to understand the sources of strategic marketing and brand management with a broad and interdisciplinary perspective. Masstige approach and scale (See factors/components in Table 1) would also be useful to examine whether an expensive brand has succeeded in creating higher mass prestige value, compared to competing brands that are priced at low level. The above discussion on theoretical development of brand equity establishes mass prestige associated with brands or masstige marketing as an important measure of brand equity.

## 3. Review of literature

It is well documented in literature that purchase of prestige items is associated with conspicuous consumption. At the same time, usability,

quality, life enrichment are also important factors that affect the purchase of prestige brands (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Consumer would purchase a prestige product for satisfying common needs like status (Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013) to more abstract not generally talked about needs like ‘to defend the self-threat’ (Batra & Ghoshal, 2017). The argument that consumers today have become value conscious and prefer to choose brands over counterfeit products, highlight the importance of brands in their mind for communicating status or prestige. It is also important to note that a consumer perceives a brand as a prestige brand when it has symbolism; congruency in user and brand image; usability for status and conspicuous consumption (O’Cass & Frost, 2002); which results into clear identification and also generate word of mouth publicity (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008) for the brand. Prestige associated with brands can also be looked as an important positioning idea (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Therefore, selling prestige products is about creating a perception in the mind of consumers that the product is rare (Catry, 2003; Kapferer, 2012). Therefore, understanding, exploring factors responsible for these perceived differences in prestige products is an important contribution to the less researched field of masstige, which this article is trying to address.

Studies attempting to understand the perceptual differences about constructs across countries have cited multiple sources for perceived difference. Among these, especially for cross country studies, culture is cited as an important factor. It is not an exception for mass prestige also. Culture is found out to be impacting the customer equity drivers. For example, customer equity drivers primarily influence the western culture compared to eastern cultures (Zhang, Doom, & Leeftang, 2014). Thus, it is important to consider culture for desired results of masstige marketing. Other scholars, like Brandt, Mortanges, Bluemelhuber, and Riel (2011) have also advocated considering culture at the initial level of measurement of prestige and related constructs associated with brands. They routed the measurement of brand reputation through associative networks (picture analysis and metaphor-based elicitation techniques are used). The argument of cultural importance while measuring prestige have found support in studies like Adams (2011) who found that cultures like China relates prestige goods more with utilitarian use which is in contrast to the United States which has a different culture. Studies also confirmed that Asian consumers feel better in having prestigious western brands (Kapferer, 2012). Particularly, consumers in emerging economies prefer foreign brands (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010) high on awareness level. For example, Lenovo (one of the brand in this study) has an innovative strategy of “Dressing itself as foreign” which is very effective in some of the emerging economies. Lenovo is local for china and strongly built up using this strategy (Zhou et al., 2010). This entice us to question- how consumers in India see the brands of different countries/culture in terms of prestige associated with them. The dynamic culture of India along with the status of second fastest growing economy, motivated us to carry out this study as literature is devoid of prestige brand studies in the context of emerging markets, specifically India. Hence, the first research question is proposed as:

- RQ1: Is the mass prestige value of American and Asian Laptop brands in an emerging Asian market – India same or different?

As available in extant literature, factors affecting purchase of masstige and luxury brands may be divided in three broad categories: group level factors, individual and psychological factors (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Further scrutiny of literature for factors influencing the prestige and luxury associated with brands results into aspects like surrounding environment (Hung et al., 2011); conspicuousness, uniqueness, social status, emotional attachment, quality (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999); social goals (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009; Bian & Forsythe, 2012); culture

(Bian & Forsythe, 2012); rarity (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000); globalness of brand (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003); identity, symbolic meaning, brand image (Bian & Forsythe, 2012); trust and satisfaction (Paul, 2015) etc. Whereas plenty of work is reported on the factors cited above and there is unambiguous conformance to these factors and their role in impacting prestige of brands.

We tried to look at some rather less explored associations of prestige and luxury especially for the Indian market while extending first research question and developing the next two research questions. For example, for a long time prestige and luxury has been associated with rarity and if everyone has this brand it's not a prestigious brand (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Conversely, there are some contrary views reported in the literature. For example, Kapferer, Klippert, and Lepuoux (2014) reported in their article how Tiffany (luxury jeweler in America) has detached itself from the exclusivity but yet was perceived as luxury and prestige brand. Authors called it a good news for marketers as for luxury brands it will "...find a balance between exclusion and inclusion..."(p 10).

In addition to this, social status and social value associated with brand is a factor responsible for its purchase and it is considered as antecedent for prestige associated with brands. Researchers like Vigneron and Johnson (1999) have called bandwagon effect as motivation for association of social value with brands, which is supported by other researches also (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). The Bandwagon effect states that people will purchase a prestige brand because others are purchasing it and it is popular (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). This is absolutely opposite to the principle of rarity. Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) proved negative relationship between uniqueness and bandwagon consumption. This study found that there are people who want to play safe by following what others are doing. These people are bandwagon consumers who follow "follow the Joneses" notion. This points out that prestige may be associated with a brand because it is the most used brand. Literature is yet to be successfully introduced to this aspect in Indian context. This persuades us to explore the relationship between the popularity of a brand and prestige associated with it. We propose to operationalize the exploration of this relationship with the following research question:

- RQ2: Find out the mass prestige value associated with best-selling laptop brands in an emerging market – India?

In continuation to the discussion over the principle of rarity for prestige brands, uniqueness is also an important factor resulting in their purchase. Theory of prestige and luxury for brands emphasizes on the perceived uniqueness, which consumers associate with brands. There are studies which argued that 'being first in market' and 'being original' is a value associated with social identity and uniqueness (Barnett, Feng, & Luo, 2012). Similar results are supported by Gao and Knight (2007) when their study proved that first mover brands are considered to be genuine and unique as compared to others. Whereas such indirect associations can be formulated for relationship between the first mover advantage and the prestige associated with brands, but no direct study is reported (as per our knowledge) on this association for Indian market. Therefore, we propose to explore this relationship through the following research question:

- RQ3: Examine whether there is evidence to establish the link between first mover advantage and mass prestige value.

### 3.1. Hypotheses development

To address the first research question, we operationalize the concept of country-of-origin for understanding the prestige value associated with brands from different country/cultures (America, China and Taiwan in this study). Bilkey and Nes (1982) argued that country-of-origin act as an important information cue for consumer which

influences product decisions and plays an important role in the process of building brand equity. In fact country-of-origin is considered as antecedent of brand equity (Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007). We therefore use the conceptual framework of brand equity suggested by Yasin et al. (2007) which summarizes that country-of-origin influences brand equity dimensions and hence brand equity.<sup>2</sup> If masstige is taken as one the measures of brand equity than effect of country-of-origin of brand on masstige is an important proposition to emphasis.

Consumer-based brand equity is significantly associated with both the macro and micro images of the country-of-origin of the brand (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007; Roth, Diamantopoulos, & Montesinos, 2008). Studies on varied impact of country-of-origin of brands on consumers have kept the attention of scholars alive for a long time (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Chao, 2001; Hong & Wyer, 1989; Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005; Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dube, 1994; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). A product or brand's evaluation by consumer is impacted by the information of country-of-origin of this brand (Leclerc et al., 1994). Recent studies are extending this understanding by finding direct relationship between brands from specific country and prestige associated with them (Lee & Nguyen, 2017). Vohra and Gupta (2017) in the Indian context depicted that Indian consumers have predisposition towards foreign brands and it has a significant relation with materialistic value. The study highlighted "Reputation" as one dimension of predisposition towards foreign brands and it contributes towards the materialistic value (Vohra & Gupta, 2017). Moreover, Indian consumers stereotypes the products as per their country-of-origin (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). In case of laptops, research suggest that Indians prefer foreign brands as compared to Indian brands (Mukherjee & Sundararajan, 2012) and hence the effect of country-of-origin is wide and deep.

Following the prior research on the relationship between country-of-origin and brand equity (Phau, & Prendergast, 1999; Pappu et al., 2007; Pappu & Quester, 2010; Steenkamp et al., 2003), we specify hypothesis 1 (H1) as follows.

**H1.** There is significant difference in the mass prestige value associated with brands of different country of origin.

To address the second research question, it is assumed that prestige today is not limited to the concept of rarity. It is expanding its consumer base like never before. Kapferer and Laurent (2016) calls it luxury paradox. For instance,

*"On the demand side, modern luxury has broadened its consumer base well beyond the 'happy few.'" (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016;). "...For millennia, thus, the concept has been linked with the "happy few," the aristocracy, or the very rich and powerful (Castarède, 2009). This may today appear inconsistent with the high and continuous increase in sales of the luxury sector." (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016;).*

Such evidences point towards a potential link between increasing sales and prestige and makes such questions possible – can best-selling brands have prestige associated with it. A brand high on awareness level tends to perform better in sales figures. Foreign brands with well-known country-of-origin and brands with large market share are expected to be scoring high on prestige (Steenkamp et al., 2003). For example, concept of best-selling brands and prestige can also be understood by the evident linkage between the best-selling book and the prestige associated with it. For example, an author whose book is topping the sales charts might become prestigious author because of increased sales.

Another perspective of this dimension of prestige is the

<sup>2</sup> Yasin et al. (2007) started building the argument taking information processing theory as base and said that information cues becomes the base for generating beliefs towards products. Country of origin as information cue plays important role in formulation of brand equity.



consideration that consumers operationalize luxury or prestige associated with brands through the lens of the society that they are living in. In other words, they want to achieve social recognition through prestige brands. Hence, for Indian consumers, it is not only that the consumer sees the brand to be a prestige brand but also it is the society, which should accept the brand as prestige brand (Shukla & Purani, 2012). All brands under this study are best-selling brands with good awareness level in India. In this context, Paul (2015) showed that a best-selling brand would have higher masstige value in terms of MMI with the example of Louis Vuitton in Japan.

Thus, we propose the second hypothesis as follows.

**H2.** Best-selling brands would tend to have higher mass prestige value in that market.

To address the third research question, we reviewed the literature for studies exploring relationship between premium/prestige brands and exclusiveness of brands with first mover advantage. This review revealed that there are few studies which states that first mover advantage is an important reason for brands becoming premium (Steenkamp, 2017). Being first mover not only gives identity to organizations and enhances the idea of originality in mind of consumers (Barnett et al., 2012) but also positively influence market share (Robinson, 1988; Michael, 2003), competitive advantage (Kerin, Varadarajan, & Peterson, 1992), cost reduction (Mueller, 1997), performance (VanderWerf & Mahon, 1997), sustainable pricing advantage (Makadok, 1998), high potential returns (Robinson, Kalyanaram, & Urban, 1994), profit (Michael, 2003), favorable decision making process (Grewal, Cline, & Davies, 2003), broader product lines (Kalyanaram, Robinson, & Urban, 1995) etc. Many of the advantages listed above are directly or indirectly associated with prestige brands. General conceptions recorded in literature states multiple advantages of being a first mover in market but there is absence of studies exploring its impact on prestige of brands with few exceptions like Paul (2015) where he propounded that the first mover brands tend to create higher masstige value than late movers into a market. This study will attempt to explore the proposition of first mover advantage leading to formulation of brand preferred by customers (Kerin et al., 1992) for laptop category. Therefore, hypothesis 3 (H3) is formulated as follows (Fig. 2).

**H3.** First mover brands are likely to have higher mass prestige value in a society.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Selection of laptop brands

This study is an effort to measure the mass prestige, which Indian consumers associate with American and Asian laptop brands. Indian market is huge with over 1.2 billion people (Paul & Mas, 2016) with a potential of approximately 400 million laptop sales. Laptop brands in this study are selected in the following way: i) Four Best-selling laptop brands are identified as per the 2014-15 statistics, from Indian market; ii) Country-of-origin of these top selling laptop brands are identified. The process resulted into selection of following laptop brands – HP and

Dell (American), Lenovo (Chinese), and Acer (Taiwanese). These four brands are the top 4 best-selling laptop brands in India. HP has the largest market share (26%) followed by Dell (23.4%). Lenovo is at number three (19.8%) and Acer is at number four (10.1%) (Business Line, 2015; Mishra, 2015). Among these four brands, two brands are of American origin (HP and Dell) and the other two are put under the category of Asian brands (Lenovo – Chinese origin Brand, and Acer – Taiwan origin Brand).

### 4.2. Data collection and analysis

A review of the literature showed that despite the efforts to measure brand equity in the past, no major effort is documented to measure the mass prestige associated with a brand except two major studies, i) Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) propounded by Paul (2015) and ii) the study by Truong et al. (2009). MMSS consist of 10 items measuring the prestige value on a seven point likert scale is operationalized to measure mass prestige in current study. The responses across 10 items can be summed up to arrive at Masstige Mean Index (MMI). The value of MMI depicts the extent of prestige which consumers are perceived to be associating with a brand. Higher the masstige value, greater the awareness, prestige and vice versa. The benchmark values suggested while constructing the MMI to interpret the findings regarding the prestige value of brand using MMI score are strictly followed in this study. Questionnaire for the current study was prepared in line with the 10 items Masstige scale (See Table 1). In addition, demographic variables were also added to carry out the study at various levels. This questionnaire was floated live using the internet and some people also filled up in person. As MMI is used to operationalize the masstige value, so the comparison of masstige value of brands is done by comparing the mean of brands under study in accordance with the research questions and hypothesis as suggested by Paul (2015).

### 4.3. Sampling

Convenience sampling method was adopted to collect the responses. Online link of the questionnaire prepared using web survey tool (Google Forms) was placed on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) and sent to e-mail ids of potential respondents using which they submitted their responses. Respondents were also approached with physical questionnaire. Anyone who own and uses a laptop among these four brands can be a participant in this study. In total 260 responses were received. All the respondents answered the same questions from the masstige questionnaire for four brands.

Responses on the Masstige Questionnaire of 260 respondents revealed that 107 and 81 people owned Dell and HP respectively. There were 41 Lenovo and 31 Acer laptop owners among the respondents. Almost 74% of the respondents in this study were male and 26% were female. Majority of respondents in the study were young adults below 30 years of age (67.3%). Around 30% of respondents were above 30 years of age. We carried out T-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Discriminant analysis in this study.

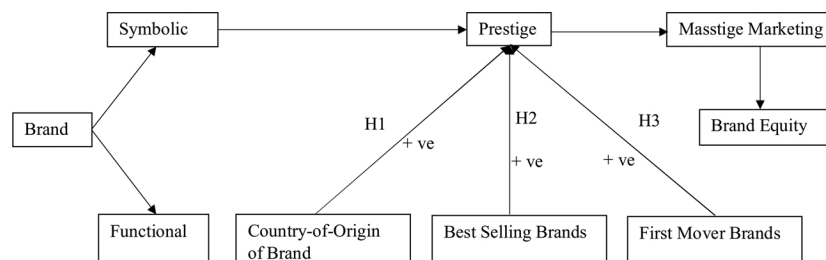


Fig. 2. Hypothesis and Scope of this Study.

## 5. Findings

The data collected through this research revealed that American brands HP and Dell are the most preferred laptop brands in India. This corroborated with the real industry market share statistics. It further depicts that American brands are preferred as compared to Asian brands of laptops in India.

Reliability and validity are essential components of any scale. Any scale should be first checked for both reliability and validity before accepting the results generated from the scale (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). Hence, the masstige questionnaire was tested for its reliability and validity both. Reliability test for the questionnaire was carried out using correlation analysis. Under correlation analysis, cronbach alpha and item-total statistics were estimated to analyze the reliability of the scale. Application of cronbach alpha returned a value of 0.86 for MMSS. As reliability is a measure of, whether all items in the scale are measuring one and same construct or not, each item of questionnaire is analyzed for its contribution in the reliability of the scale using “cronbach alpha if item deleted”. The value of “cronbach alpha if item deleted” is found out to be less than 0.86 for all items of the scale depicting that no item of the scale is advancing away from the cohesiveness of measuring one construct and hence the scale is taken ahead without any change. This establishes the independent contribution of each and every item to the reliability of the scale concluding that the scale is reliable.

Validity of the Masstige Questionnaire is examined using factor loading. Sum of squared factor loading for the scale is checked for its value. A value above 0.5 establishes the construct validity of the scale. All items of the scale were subjected to factor analysis using principal component analysis as extraction method. The factor loading for each item was squared and added. The resulting value was divided by the number of items (10). This resulted in a value of 0.51 (which is above 0.50) establishing the construct validity of the masstige questionnaire for this study (See Table 1).

After establishing the reliability and validity of the masstige questionnaire, the masstige score for all the four brands of laptop was calculated. MMI score was calculated by taking the mean of items individually using the data of all respondents and summing this mean for all the 10 statements. Of all the four brands under study, American brand HP is found to have the highest score (40.65) on masstige mean index (MMI). Dell, another American brand followed the HP in term of MMI with the second highest score (39.09). Acer, Taiwanese brand, was found in the third position with a score of 36.08 and Chinese brand Lenovo stands last with a MMI score of 34.78 (Table 2). This is in accordance with hypothesis 1.

These results reveal that the best-selling laptop brands in India do have higher masstige value as outlined in hypothesis 2. However, abiding by the benchmark for MMI score suggested by Paul (2015), HP and Dell have not been able to build the real mass prestige in the mind of people but there is a possibility that both these brands may do so in the future. (A brand needs to have a minimum score of 50 out of 70 on MMI to rate it as a prestigious brand in the study market and a total index score of 60 is required to be classified as a top-of mind brand). It can be inferred that HP and Dell are not yet perceived as the top of mind prestige brands in Indian market even though their masstige value is much higher than their competitors Acer and Lenovo. MMI score of Lenovo and Acer depicts that they have not been well received in the study market and these brands are way behind HP and Dell. This implies that there are more opportunities and potential for managers of these brands to create mass prestige and build brand equity. Table 2 reveals that there is substantial difference between the MMI score of American brands and Asian brands of laptop. But this difference is minimal within the brands of same country-of-origin (for instance, American brands). The masstige values of HP and Dell (both American brands) in terms of MMI score are very close to each other (40.65 and 39.09 respectively). The difference between the MMI score of two Asian brands (Lenovo – 34.78 and Acer – 36.80) under study is 2.02.

To report a better understanding about this narrow difference

**Table 1**  
Construct Validity of Masstige Questionnaire.

Statement	Factor Loading	Factor Loading Squared	Factor Loading Squared/Number of Statements
I like my Laptop Brand	0.52	0.28	0.51
I feel, I like to buy this lafigtop brand because of mass prestige.	0.66	0.44	
I tend to pay high price for my laptop brand for maintaining my status in society.	0.80	0.64	
I consider my laptop brand as a top of mind brand in my country/state/district.	0.65	0.42	
I would like to recommend my laptop brand to friends and relatives.	0.71	0.51	
Nothing is more exciting than my laptop brand.	0.67	0.45	
I believe my laptop brand is known for high quality.	0.80	0.64	
I believe my laptop brand is of international standard.	0.79	0.62	
I love to buy my laptop brand regardless of the price.	0.69	0.47	
I believe that people in my country/state/district consider my laptop brand as a synonym for prestige.	0.79	0.62	

**Table 2**  
Masstige Mean Index.

Statements	Brand	Dell	HP	Lenovo	Acer
I like my Laptop Brand	Mean	3.93	4.01	3.44	3.42
I feel, I like to buy this laptop brand because of mass prestige		3.85	3.84	3.32	3.32
I tend to pay high price for my laptop brand for maintaining my status in society.		2.57	3.15	2.66	2.74
I consider my laptop brand as a top of mind brand in my country/state/district.		3.96	3.95	3.10	3.39
I would like to recommend my laptop brand to friends and relatives.		4.64	5.00	4.49	4.58
Nothing is more exciting than my laptop brand.		3.18	3.35	2.83	3.45
I believe my laptop brand is known for high quality.		4.73	4.88	4.27	4.48
I believe my laptop brand is of international standard.		5.10	4.78	4.22	4.16
I love to buy my laptop brand regardless of the price.		3.62	3.86	3.24	4.00
I believe that people in my country/state/district consider my laptop brand as a synonym for prestige.		3.51	3.84	3.22	3.26
MMI Score		39.09	40.65	34.78	36.80

**Table 3**  
Mean Difference Test within Brands of Same Region.

Region	Mean Difference Test within Brands of Same Region				
	Laptop Brands	Mean	T	df	Sig.
America	Dell	39.09	– 1.07	186	0.285
	HP	40.65			
Asia	Lenovo	34.78	– 0.696	70	0.489
	Acer	36.80			

**Table 4**  
T test for Country of Origin of Brands.

Mean Difference Test for Region					
Region	N	Mean	t	Df	Sig.
America	188	39.76	2.544	110	0.01
Asia	72	35.65			

between the laptop brands of same country-of-origin/region, *t*-test is applied for MMI scores of HP and Dell; Lenovo and Acer separately. The application of *t*-test is to investigate whether the two brands being so close to each other in their masstige value actually differs from each other or not.

*T*-test is applied taking masstige score as testing variable and HP and Dell as grouping variable. Results of *t*-test applied to HP and Dell revealed that MMI score of HP and Dell is not significantly different from each other. This depicts that the masstige value of HP and Dell is not different in the minds of people in India. None of these two brands are perceived as prestige brands in India. *T* test application on the MMI scores of Lenovo and Acer also gave similar results depicting that Lenovo and Acer are no different from each other in terms of their masstige value (Table 3). Overall assessment of Lenovo and Acer shows that none of these brands have been able to establish themselves as prestige brands. The difference in scores of MMI in American (HP and Dell) and Asian (Lenovo and Acer) brands concludes that though none of the four brands in the study are accepted as prestige brands in India but still the American brands (HP and Dell) have the potential to be perceived as prestige as well as top of mind brands among the consumers in India. Above analysis did not result into any difference between the prestige values of laptop brands of the same region.

Addressing our goal of comparing the American and Asian brands for their masstige value, *t*-test is again applied keeping the region (American and Asian) as grouping variable and masstige score as testing variable. The results of application of *t*-test depicts that there exists a significant difference between MMI scores of American and Asian brands. Mean value of MMI scores reveals that American brands (HP and Dell) are potentially prestige brands as compared to Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer); still, it should be noted that this difference is not too much (Table 4). American brands being preferred to Asian brands and perceived as better than their Asian counterparts is important to note. The scores of MMI for all the four brands states that laptop brands under study targeted to middle class Indians are not seen as prestige brands. This strongly supports the hypothesis 1 as the brands having American country-of-origin are comparatively more prestigious than their Asian counterparts. It can be concluded that the country-of-origin of a brand have an impact on its perception about its prestige.

To have a clear and deeper understanding of the perception of Indian consumers for top four laptops brands regarding their prestige value, the results were analyzed for different demographics (gender and age). In order to understand the difference – if any – in the opinion of Indian respondents regarding the prestige value for the brands of laptop under study between male and female, *t*-test is again used with gender as a grouping variable. The result of *t*-test for all the brands showed

**Table 5**  
*T* test for Gender.

Brand of the Laptop	Gender of the Respondent	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test for Equality of Means		
				T	df	Sig.
Dell	Male	38.37	11.08	– 1.165	105	0.24
	Female	41.22	10.66			
HP	Male	41.09	7.72	0.625	24.30	0.53
	Female	39.30	12.08			
Lenovo	Male	34.00	12.15	– 0.609	39	0.54
	Female	36.66	14.16			
Acer	Male	37.27	11.91	0.343	29.00	0.73
	Female	35.66	11.64			

non-significant results stating that male and female respondents do not see the prestige value associated with four brands in this study differently. Whereas the earlier results states that the brands of the same region are not seen as differently from overall perspective, current results depict that the same is true at the gender level. Further detailed analysis of this difference revealed that male who own a HP laptop do have more converged opinion about the prestige value of HP brand than those male or female who own other brands of laptop (standard deviation for male owning HP brand is minimum among all the possible combinations of male and female for brands of laptop). This means that the number of people whose opinion vary from the average opinion of the users are the least for HP brand. On the other hand, the same analyses gave opposite picture for Lenovo brand. Females who own Lenovo laptops are having more difference of opinion about the prestige value of Lenovo (Standard deviation is maximum for the females having Lenovo brand) (See Table 5).

This opinion of respondents about the prestige for the laptop brands is also analyzed under age category. *T* test is applied for two groups of age as grouping variable (below 30 years and above 30 years) for all the four brands of laptop to find out if the opinion differs for different age group individuals or not. The results of *t*-test state that significant difference exists in the opinion about the prestige value of Dell and Lenovo between the tested age groups of respondents. The results reported non-significant difference for HP and Acer (See Table 6).

Meanwhile, people below the age of 30 years found Dell to be having the potential of building itself into a prestige brand while the consumers above 30 years of age think differently. People above 30 years perceive that Dell is not a prestige brand and they do not think that it can be a prestige brand. It can be concluded that the young people associate the probability of prestige with Dell, but older people do not feel so. The results for HP were not significant. This concludes though young consumers below 30 years treat HP to be comparatively more prestigious than older consumers but this difference should not be treated as different. *T* test on age further substantiate the findings of Lenovo for the most differentiated responses about its prestige status, as it reveals that this difference in opinion is because of respondents above 30 years of age. The results depicts that for Lenovo, respondents below 30 years are less converged for their opinion about the prestigious status of Lenovo. Lenovo as mentioned above, is not perceived as a prestige brand and it is not perceived to be among the category, which is marked as the potential prestige brand. Still significant results are reported for age suggesting that the young respondents (below 30 years) are slightly less rigid in their opinion about the Lenovo being a non-prestige brand of laptop.

*T*-test revealed that American and Asian laptop brands have different mass prestige associated with them. As part of detailed analysis, *t*-test is applied at micro level (for demographics like age and gender) to understand the masstige scores across demographics. *T* test gave significant results for region (American/Asian) and age.

To validate the results of *t*-test on region (American and Asian) and age, ANOVA was applied taking MMI score as dependent variable and

**Table 6**  
T test for Age.

Brand of the Laptop	Age Category	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test for Equality of Means		
				t	df	Sig.
Dell	Below 30 Years	43.25	9.46	5.934	105.00	0.00
	30 Years and Above	31.84	9.75			
HP	Below 30 Years	41.43	9.51	1.331	79.00	0.18
	30 Years and Above	38.42	6.78			
Lenovo	Below 30 Years	38.25	13.25	2.18	39.00	0.03
	30 Years and Above	29.88	10.21			
Acer	Below 30 Years	38.39	11.89	1.29	29.00	0.20
	30 Years and Above	32.25	10.29			

laptop brands as factor variable. Application of ANOVA gave significant results depicting that there is difference between the MMI score of four brands under study (Table 7). To understand where this difference actually lies, post hoc test (Games-Howell) was applied. Results revealed that among the four brands, MMI score of HP is different from that of Lenovo. This result is in support of the earlier result which depicts that there is difference in prestige associated with American (HP) and Asian (Lenovo) brands.

To further validate the results of t-test and ANOVA, a more robust analysis tool – Discriminant Analysis was applied taking the region (American/Asian) as dependent variable and MMI Score along with income, age of respondent as predictor variables. (Discriminant analysis is a tool, which makes linear combination of independent variables in such a way that it discriminates the groups in dependent variable in best possible way in terms of independent variables). Application of discriminant analysis here would generate a discriminant function, which would conclude about the difference in groups being tested (American and Asian Laptop Brands) in terms of independent variables (Masstige Score, Income and Age collectively).

Application of discriminant analysis can be substantiated from the documented literature (Malhotra & Satyabhushan, 2016), which advocate it to be a great tool to examine the differences between groups in terms of some specific variables (Masstige Score, Income and Age collectively in this study). To apply discriminant analysis, 70% of total responses (260) were randomly selected as analysis sample, rest 30% was reserved as validation sample. As a result, SPSS selected 187 responses (71.9%) as analysis sample. The discriminant function generated from analysis was found to be significant. The results showed that among the three predictor variables (Masstige score, Income and Age),

only Masstige score is contributing significantly to the discriminant function. Moreover, the coefficient value (Standardized and unstandardized) for Masstige Score is maximum among the three predictor variables in discriminant function (Table 8). Comparison of three applications (t-test, ANOVA and discriminant analysis) has one result in common that the laptops of two regions can be differentiated on the basis of masstige score (As t-test, ANOVA and discriminant analysis generated significant results for masstige score for laptops of these two regions).

## 6. Discussion

Many consumers in India perceive the brand “America” as a role model country. The results of the study show high masstige score for American brands (See Table 2), which are also the top best-selling laptop brands in India. Hence, hypothesis 1 (H1) and hypothesis 2 (H2) are supported. The empirical evidence for accepting hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 corroborate with the generalized findings of prior research (Pappu & Quester, 2010; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006; Roth et al., 2008; for hypothesis 1 and Paul, 2015 for hypothesis 2). The preference towards American brands as far as prestige associated with brands are concerned is linked to the legacy of country-of-origin. After the implementation of structural adjustment programs grounded in liberalization, privatization and globalization policies, in 1991, many cultural changes are observed in India (Ghosh, 2011) and it is true even for future (Arnett, 2002). These liberalized policies have led to westernization (Nadeem, 2009) of Indian culture. Westernization as a concept represents America and its culture. This is a possible explanation of perceiving the brands originating from America as to be potential

**Table 7**  
ANOVA on Masstige Scores of Laptop Brands.

Laptop Brands	MMI Score	Levene Statistics	Robust Test of Equality of Means		Post-Hoc test					
			Welch	Brown-Forsythe	Games-Howell (Sig)					
					HP-Dell	HP-Lenovo	HP-Acer	Dell-Lenovo	Dell-Acer	Lenovo-Acer
		Sig	Sig	Sig						
HP	39.09	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.70	0.04	0.35	0.22	0.76	0.89
Dell	40.65									
Lenovo	34.78									
Acer	36.80									

**Table 8**  
Discriminant Analysis.

Independent Variables	Canonical Discriminant Function		Test of Equality of Group Means		Canonical Discriminant Coefficient for Discriminant Function		
	Chi-Square	Sig.	F	Sig	Unstandardized	Standardized	Structure Matrix Coefficients
Masstige Score	19.31	0.000	9.215	0.003	0.098	1.015	0.670
Age of Respondent			0.443	0.507	0.001	0.009	0.392
Annual Income			3.157	0.077	0.000	0.812	0.147



prestige brands. Moreover, the top brands list released by Inter-brand every year have many American brands in its top 100 lists. The same is the story for the top global brands of 2015. One of the brand in current study (HP) lists in the top 20 global brands by Inter-brand in 2015 (Frampton, 2015). Similar results have already been reported in literature as Hellofs and Jacobson (1999) revealed that for the premium brands, customer might link high selling figures with better quality. The same might not be true for general brands (Hellofs & Jacobson, 1999). It can be inferred that American brands are perceived to be better on quality and hence prestige in Indian market.

Another dimension of understanding the support for hypothesis 2 (H2) from literature perspective takes us back to the work of Keller and Lehmann (2003) where he proposed a link between the perception which a consumer holds towards marketing mix elements and brand equity. Marketing mix is related with the dimensions of brand equity and hence brand equity itself. Not a surprise that higher the presence in advertising, higher the brand equity for a brand (Yoo et al., 2000). A top selling brand (American brands) is expected to have more awareness in the minds of people (brand awareness which includes advertising is a part of marketing mix). This might increase the brand equity for these brands as Keller and Lehmann (2003) argued. Brands name and prestige associated with it have long association as brand is documented to be a reference to the prestige associated with brand (Brucks, Zeithaml, & Naylor, 2000). The results of this study can be considered as empirical evidence to the indirect association discussed above. The results of this study can also be seen as support to the findings of Steenkamp et al. (2003) where they concluded relationship between the brand prestige and globalness of brand. HP is a global brand with the brand image of American country-of-origin. And hence, the prestige associated with HP is relatively high.

HP is also the oldest brand in India starting Indian operations from 1989. Being the first laptop brand to enter without competition (only IBM was in computer hardware business when HP entered India), HP soon became the market leader (Prasad, 2011). HP always had first mover advantage. The popularity and brand image of HP might have played a role in making HP to be topping the MMI score. This strongly supports the third hypothesis. Supporting the third hypothesis in this study seems to be filling an important gap in literature.

The other American brand in this study was Dell, after entering India in 2007, it became the first market player to defeat all others to achieve number one position in 2010 with 15.3% market share (Prasad, 2011), although HP had the highest market share in 2015. Dell has been one of those laptop brands in India, which has gained popularity at mass scale. It is possible that this could explain the fact that Dell is the second most preferred brand in this study. Studies relating the prestige value of brands with the first mover's advantages are miniscule. This current study extends the understanding of first mover's advantage to mass prestige marketing.

It can be inferred from this study that young people are contributing the maximum in establishing American brands as potential prestige brands. This can be explained by the demographic status of India. For example, India today is considered as a young nation with majority of its population being below 35 years of age. These young people are culturally more diverted to westernization. Moreover, the younger generation is more computer friendly and conscious about the development taking place in technological environment (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008) as compared to the older generation. These people explore the technological products like laptops more and hence they might unconsciously be carrying the country-of-origin factor to the brands of laptop. On the other hand, Asia is dominated by China, Japan and South Korea in terms of economy. But still, these countries are not equivalent to America when it comes to preference.

Another aspect of preferring American brands may be the perceptions of consumers for Asian brands. Brands originating from Asia are somewhat having negative country-of-origin perceptions (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2007). Consumers have reservations in perceiving Asian

brands as status symbol and as truly international brands (Henderson, Cote, Leong, & Schmitt, 2003). There are evidences to support this point too. Makovsky (2012) showed that Lenovo has perception problems among the consumers. The low level of brand equity arising out of perception may have an impact on the sales.

Some literature suggests that China specifically had problems in producing a global brand (Fan, 2006; Makovsky, 2012). There are evidences suggesting the impact of country image on the purchase of specific brands (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004). This is further found out to be moderated by the socio demographics factors. Hsieh et al. (2004) highlighted the fact that for economically better-developed countries, the relationship becomes even stronger. This can explain that the poor brand image of Chinese brands might have translated to the Lenovo brand of laptop. Moreover, global consumers have image of Chinese products as being cheap, not dependable, not original and away from quality (Ille, 2009) especially for low involvement products. There are problems with image of Chinese brands in India (Srivastava, 2014). The impact of this perception on the high involvement products is not well researched. Such negative impressions of consumers might impact other good brands coming out of that country. This was documented by Pullig, Netemeyer, and Biswas (2006) when they found attitudes towards brands coupled with low certainty are highly sensitive towards negative publicity of brand.

On the other hand, there are studies highlighting Lenovo as a successful brand (Ille, 2009). More work is required to do away with the ambiguity over the perception of Chinese brands including Lenovo. This can be done in terms of the concepts like perceived brand foreignness and confidence in brand origin identification (Zhou et al., 2010). With this history behind, Lenovo's association with China might be a potential reason in the mind of respondents in India to not see it as a prestige brand. Popularity, brand value and image, deflection towards westernization and its culture, dominated the country brand equity of America. It could be the potential reasons for American brands being preferred and scoring more on prestige value as compared with Asian brands.

Literature is not void of studies depicting that foreign products are preferred in emerging markets. This current study is supporting this aspect. Originality and contribution of the current study and its results can be evaluated by two points: a) majority of studies in literature which are reporting the preference of foreign products against local products are carried out at aggregate level. For example – ranging from highly cited study of Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander (2000) to the most recent study of Lee and Nguyen (2017) on foreign vs local brands are carried out with multiple brands. In addition, these studies do not make it clear if the respondents were actual users of these brands or not (For more such studies world over, see Davvetas, Schtmann, & Diamantopoulos, 2015; Steenkamp et al., 2003). Studies comparing the preference of local vs foreign brands with Indian data like Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2004); Mukherjee, Satija, Goyal, Mantrala, and Zou (2012), Kumar, Lee, and Kim (2009), Kinra (2006) have reported results at aggregate level; and b) Though, there are studies like Bhardwaj, Kumar, and Kim (2010) which test the preference for individual brand but here also it is not clear whether the respondents were users of the brand (Levi) under study or not?

The present study is about individual brand and the respondents are users of those brands. Their opinions about prestige associated with their brand might vary from the opinion of someone who would just give perception about a brand as he/she has never actually used it. Therefore, results in this study are user based results which is important contribution to the existing literature. For a subject like brand-equity which is operationalized here in terms of mass prestige, results at aggregate and individual level for brands may be different. It is further supported by the work of Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) where they conclude that for a construct like brand equity, the variation in nature of brands and the different product categories they belong to, separate measures of brand equity are required.

### 6.1. Limitations and directions for future research

This research was carried out using the responses from any person who owns and uses any of the four laptop brands selected. Responses from sample of 260 respondents may not be sufficient enough to generalize the findings of this study for the whole country –keeping in mind the diversity associated with India. It may give different results if we carry out a similar study through different states in India. Researchers can attempt the region/state/district-wise study of masstige associated with brands. The results can also vary if the similar type of study is done for various product categories, for example luxury vs. non-luxury, utilitarian vs. hedonic, country-of-origin vs. country-of-brand etc. Hence, this study may be replicated considering different types of product categories and different context. This is the first study attempting the measurement of masstige value of laptop brands in the world. With the absence of earlier work and literature, this paper seeks to contribute to the formulation of the subject matter of masstige theory and approach for brand management and strategic marketing. It could be possible that research on new construct like this one may be exposed to certain errors, which might have been overlooked. It would need more work on this topic to validate the findings of this research in different country contexts. This field of literature should witness more attempts even for the same product category to take the masstige scale and the findings of this study to the level of maturity. For example, understanding the reasons of the difference in mass prestige among American and Asian brands would be an important contribution. Understanding the latent hidden reasons for perceiving a brand as masstige brand should also be explored. Scholars may also attempt to substantiate the arguments developed in discussion section.

As mentioned in the discussion section, there are opportunities to study the degree of relationship/causality between country-of-origin and mass prestige value with brands from specific country of origin (for example, Chinese brands versus Japanese brands or Korean brands versus German brands) and formulate hypothesis accordingly in future research. In continuation to this, future research should also try to explore that what potential impact would other brand related variables have on the relationship between masstige and brand origin. These type of studies can be carried out in the context of developing and developed countries. It also makes sense to carry out such cross-country studies in culturally different countries as well.

One of the limitations of our study is that we confined to four best-selling laptop brands. It would have more appropriate if we had included Apple, as the concept of mass prestige is better associated with the brands that sell regular products with moderately high prices (such as Apple, Starbucks or Bodyshops). Therefore, future researchers could undertake studies comparing and analyzing the mass prestige value and competition between Apple and other brands, not only in laptop segment, but also in smart phone segment in the context of developing as well as developed countries.

Likewise, there are some possible areas for future research in this subject as, investigations to examine the effectiveness of masstige marketing strategy in terms of masstige mean score and masstige index in an industry. There are opportunities to carry out such studies in most of the industries such as personal computers, smart phones, television, perfume, luxury clothing, jewellery etc. Single-brand studies or comparative studies of different competing brands in a specific industry can be undertaken. The scope of masstige marketing research is much more in emerging countries as there are more number of products that are generally considered as ‘expensive’ but attainable from the point of view of ‘middle class’ and upper low-income group consumers. These products include cars, diamonds, laptops, smart phones, cosmetics, perfumes, television etc. Therefore, researchers can carry out studies estimating masstige values of such brands in any of those industries with data from a developing country. There are many opportunities for undertaking cross-country studies as well.

In order to facilitate future theory development and intellectual

dialogue, some propositions are desirable. Thus, we posit the following propositions, which can be tested as hypotheses in future studies:

- Proposition 1: The higher the Masstige value of a brand, the higher the likelihood to succeed in a distinct market.
- Proposition 2: The higher the brand’s market orientation targeting the middle and bottom of the pyramid segments, the higher the likelihood of sustaining the success in the long run.
- Proposition 3: The better the marketing mix with reference to product, promotion and place, the higher the likelihood to increase sales and thereby the MMS.

### 7. Conclusion

Our study established four facets of masstige marketing: (1) Brands from different countries of origin tend to have different prestige associated with it; (2) Best-selling brands tend to have higher masstige value; (3) First mover brands to a foreign market are likely to have higher masstige value; and (4) Competition induces the brands to formulate strategies to create higher masstige value. However, findings of this study show that none of the top selling Laptop brands in India (HP, Dell, Lenovo and Acer) are considered as the highly prestige brands for masses. It is found out that the American brands (HP and Dell) are more popular than Asian brands (Lenovo and Acer). Among all the brands under study, HP was found to be having the top MMI score followed by Dell, Acer and Lenovo. Though, HP leads in the score but it is very close to the score of Dell and there is no difference between the prestige value of HP and Dell. Yet, the score is not sufficient enough to call HP and Dell as really prestigious brands but they have potential for the same. At the same time, those American brands are far ahead than Asian brands (China’s Lenovo and Taiwan’s Acer) on the mass prestige index while Asian brands are not at all perceived as prestigious brands by consumers in India. Both the Asian brands are perceived almost equally by the respondents as far as prestige associated with these brands are concerned. It can be concluded that American brands have the potential to be accepted as the brands having prestige among its users in a developing country like India. The reason behind it could be partly because of brand equity associated with the country of origin of United States of America.

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# ‘Masstige’ marketing: A review, synthesis and research agenda

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## ABSTRACT

This article reviews the literature on Mass Prestige (Masstige) based marketing and analyzes the evolution of the ‘masstige strategy’ with a focus on how this phenomenon evolved from conventional way of marketing premium brands. We synthesise the findings of prior studies, analyse different dimensions, identify research gaps, call for using existing measures like Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) and develop new measures which would facilitate further research in this niche area as well as help the practitioners in developing marketing strategies for luxury/premium brands. It was found that masstige research hitherto has focused on product-based brands and not taken into account the brands from service sector. This review aims to critically examine the previous studies on masstige marketing and identify potential research opportunities. We propose the Mass-Luxury continuum to place product or service brands in terms of mass prestige. Moreover, we develop ideas for future researchers based on the identified research gaps.

## 1. Introduction

Economic growth has created a huge middle class with immense market potential (Beinhocker, 2007; Farrell, Gersch, & Stephenson, 2006; Kharas & Gertz, 2010). But, branding theory and practice have not fully embraced new ways of thinking in today’s dynamic world (Von Wallpach, Voyer, Kastanakis, & Mühlbacher, 2017). Businesses have begun to explore the unconventional way of marketing luxury goods and services which promise status, indulgence, and superior experience for the consumers. In recent years, term ‘luxury’ has been re-framed, giving birth to the concept of new luxury (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015) that involves affordability, market proliferation and availability in the mass market. Marketing luxury brands to the ‘mass market’ focusing on middle class, with the goal of creating Mass Prestige (masstige marketing) is a new phenomenon and presents a big opportunity. Though Silverstein and Fiske brought ‘masstige’ into main stream research through their Harvard Business Review article in 2003, the concept is still in its infancy stage. This offers an opportunity to scholars to develop their understanding for the phenomenon called ‘masstige’.

Masstige stands for Mass Prestige. Masstige theory can be explained in terms of its relationships with components of marketing mix (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2018) which can be presented in form of two

equations:

- (1) Premium Price = f (Mass Prestige), and
- (2) Mass Prestige = f (Product, Promotion, Place strategies) (Paul, 2018).

According to masstige theoretical model, brands which succeed in building mass prestige and brand value, can charge high prices from the consumers and consumers are also willing to pay relatively higher prices for such brands compared to mass brands.

The story of ‘masstige marketing’ begins from the concept of luxury. Luxury is a latin word that originated from ‘luxatio’ which means disruption (Kapferer, 2015). Luxury and luxury brands are not new to mankind as the usage of the term luxury can be traced back to the times of ancient Greeks and Romans (Brun & Castelli, 2013). The luxury trade is considered as one of the oldest businesses (Kapferer, 2015). Subsequently, meaning of luxury has evolved over the period of time (Brun & Castelli, 2013). It is argued that recent growth story of luxury started from 1980s (Kapferer, 2015). Of late, countries (even developing countries) across the globe have witnessed upsurge in the consumption of luxury goods (Cavender, 2012) and services which consumers buy to increase their pleasure and create a positive feeling (Petersen, Dretsche, & Loureiro, 2018). Such phenomenal growth in luxury brands has

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attracted the attention of scholars' and they have started picking up luxury as an important marketing construct. In due course of time, research around luxury have increased manifold. Prior research suggests that an important reason for the popularity of luxury is that luxury consumption can make consumers happy (Loureiro, Maximiano, & Panchapakesan, 2018). An important research area in the field of luxury has been - how to build a prestigious brand. Marketer's efforts and thoughtful positioning give birth to a premium/prestigious/luxury brand.

With time, when luxury became popular, it gave rise to a paradox (Kapferer, Klippert, & Leproux, 2014). For long, luxury has been associated with rarity and status. When a product or service does not afford discrimination, it ceases to be rare and hence not perceived as a status symbol (Veblen, 1992). The concept of rarity was supported by studies which reveal that limited availability of the product or service in market may help in establishing luxury image (Luck, Muratovski, & Hedley, 2014). With increase in purchasing power across the world, more and more people started purchasing luxury goods and services. This scaled up consumption of luxury products made them less rare. For luxury goods and services, growth and rarity come at opposite ends. In actual, growth of luxury brands poses challenge of maintaining rarity to the marketer (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Kapferer, 2014). The popularity of luxury goods and services acts against the basic tenet of luxury – rarity. Popularity and widespread adoption changes the perception of luxury goods and services as not rare and hence, the paradox. However, it did not take long for scholars to understand that luxury is not about rarity alone. Prior research (Granot, Russell, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012) show that luxury is not only for the rich and sophisticated; and also, it is no longer about exclusivity alone. The shift of luxury from 'rarity' to 'mass market adoption' and willingness to enhance 'prestige' by spending comparatively less leads to mass prestige. This market and its associated unconventional way of marketing called 'Masstige Marketing' is the subject of this review.

A subject advances when studies are documented logically based on the findings of prior studies. In this context, Masstige strategy require more attention as it has not received the deserving acceptance among the researchers due to it being a relatively recent phenomenon. We feel that masstige marketing is the next big paradigm shift in brand management. The argument find support in earlier literature where almost all studies on masstige agree that masstige has not evolved as a comprehensive theory yet, and work on masstige need more attention of scholars to refine, develop and synthesise a robust theoretical framework (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2015, 2018, 2019; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Hence, masstige qualifies to be an important research question to be addressed by marketing scholars. Marketers normally do not attempt to overlook this phenomenon of shift from rarity to mass prestige. It is worth mentioning that researchers' effort to develop 'masstige' concept/ theory would contribute towards better decision making of marketers. Despite several remarkable studies on masstige marketing (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Granot et al., 2013; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2015), there is no review article available on this topic. In this article, we review and revisit the various exploratory and descriptive attempts of researchers which contribute towards 'masstige marketing' and present a platform to the academic community from where they can view the evolution of masstige and take it further for research in the field of masstige marketing in future. Initially, the review differentiates masstige from other related constructs. Then, masstige branding is placed in a continuum to reduce the ambiguity about the masstige construct. Subsequently, we propose an agenda for future research based on the prospects for potential contribution.

The purpose of our review is three-fold. First, we take into account the importance of the topic (masstige marketing), by examining the literature to analyse the theoretical approaches and highlight the findings. Second, we draw upon the assertion (Jones & Gatrell, 2014)

that literature reviews are essential for making sense of existing research, and provide new directions for future researches. Third, we propose a mass-luxury continuum as a construct to place masstige in context. Through this article, we review the evolution of 'masstige marketing' and the related literature to have in-depth understanding of the topic using Theory, Methods and Context (TCM) framework (following Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The method followed for this review is discussed in section two. Section three provides an overview of evolution of 'masstige marketing' from the tenets of luxury marketing. Theoretical underpinnings are explored in section four. Section five is dedicated to summarize the findings of prior studies related to masstige marketing. We propose a new Mass-luxury continuum in section six. Section seven is for discussion. Agenda for future research is outlined in detail in section eight with reference to theory, methods and context. Summary of findings are reported in conclusion in section nine.

## 2. Method

Following the systematic search method found in the review articles (Canabal & White, 2008; Rosado-Serrano, Paul, & Dikova, 2018; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), we explored online databases such as EBSCO, Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus and their reference lists, to identify all articles published in the field of Masstige Marketing during the last two decades. This search strategy of using multiple sources helped us to ensure that we have included all notable studies in our review. To locate the most relevant studies in this area, we used keywords such as *Mass Prestige*, *Masstige*, *Masstige Marketing*, *Populence*, *Democratisation of Luxury*, *Bandwagon luxury*, *Mass Affluence*, *Massification and Accessible Luxury*, *Prestige Brands* (These are the keywords we have found to be used in previous literature on masstige). The terms found in these articles (because of which the articles were selected) are specifically mentioned in Tables 2–4 under the columns of "Covering Masstige" and "Use of Synonyms of Masstige". If any of these terms are not mentioned in the article, it was not included in the final selection list. The review focused on the articles published in all well recognised journals after 2003 (as Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term 'Masstige' in 2003). However, articles published before 2003 which refer to prestige and other related constructs are also reviewed to reach at a balanced understanding of masstige and to trace the evolution of the concept over time. Our search yielded a total of 93 relevant articles (Out of these 93 articles, we found 7 articles published before 2003, 2 articles in 2003 and 84 articles after 2003).

The initial collection of articles were reviewed and notes were exchanged among three co-authors to decide which articles to exclude from final sample. Further, the selection criterion was refined to include the articles, which focus on the theme of Masstige Marketing. Following Hao, Paul, Trott, Guo, and Wu (2019), the final selection was restricted to those journals which are either listed on the Social Science Citation Index or ranked in the Association of Business Deans Council, Australia. 2016 (accessed in May 2019). We operationalised this by ensuring that the terms used as key words for search and other related terms of masstige should be mentioned specifically in the articles. This process left us with 36 articles in the final list. The list of these articles is exhibited in Table 1.

Scrutiny of the selected articles gave deep insight into the evolution of masstige marketing. In order to develop the positioning of the paper, we kept on documenting the important aspects related to masstige marketing in these papers. We kept on placing the learnings from the research articles in categories depending on its context and emphasis. Following this process, we could identify three broad categories across which the aspects related to masstige can be segregated. These three categories are: evolution of Masstige Marketing (termed as "From Luxury Marketing to 'Masstige Marketing'"), theoretical differentiation between luxury and masstige (termed as "Theoretical Underpinnings"),

**Table 1**  
Articles included in this review.

Journal Name	Articles	Reference
Journal of Consumer Research	1	(Park et al., 1991)
Academy of Marketing Science Review	1	(Vigneron & Johnson, 1999)
Harvard Business Review	2	(Nunes et al., 2004; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)
Journal of Strategic Marketing	1	(Truong et al., 2008)
Journal of Brand Management	5	(Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Kapferer, 2015; Magnoni & Roux, 2012; Miller & Mills, 2012; Truong et al., 2009)
Journal of Customer Behaviour	1	(Eng & Bogaert, 2010)
Journal of Marketing	1	(Monga & John, 2010)
Journal of Product & Brand Management	2	(Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016)
Journal of Business Research	5	(Dall'Omo Riley et al., 2013; Gurzki & Woisetschlager, 2017; Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Zhan & He, 2012)
International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	1	(Brun & Castelli, 2013)
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	1	(Granot et al., 2013)
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2	(Paul, 2015; Walley et al., 2013)
European Journal of Marketing	1	(Roper et al., 2013)
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal	3	(Cavender & Kincade, 2014; Hennigs et al., 2013; Kim, Lloyd, Adebeshin, & Kang, 2019)
Business Horizons	1	(Kapferer, 2014)
Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	1	(Kapferer et al., 2014)
Journal of International Consumer Marketing	1	(Arora et al., 2015)
Journal of Marketing Management	1	(Riley et al., 2015)
International Journal of Business Excellence	1	(Dollet et al., 2017)
International Business Review	1	(Kumar & Paul, 2018)
Current Psychology	1	(Dogan et al., 2018)
European Journal of International Management	1	(Paul, 2018)
European Management Journal	1	(Paul, 2019)
Total Number of Journal Articles	36	articles from 23 journals

progression of masstige research after Silverstein and Fiske (2003) article (termed as “Masstige Marketing Research”). Based on our reading of the literature on masstige, we realized the need for conceptual clarity on ‘what is masstige’. As many as 19 terms are found in the articles that refer to masstige (these terms are mentioned in “Masstige marketing research” section). Another ambiguity to be addressed is where does the luxury end and from where masstige begins. In order to provide clarity on this aspect, another section - “Mass-Luxury Continuum” is added. This section attempts to clarify the relative positioning of masstige from luxury. All these three categories are further enriched by related relevant literature. These three categories are presented in subsequent sections of this paper.

### 3. From luxury marketing to ‘masstige’ marketing

Early research on luxury suggested that one of the easiest ways of placing a good or a service as luxury is to launch it at a very high price. Price plays an important role in creating perceptions of luxury in consumers’ mind (Kapferer et al., 2014). The importance of price is further substantiated by studies which argue that marketer can use price to position a product or service as a luxury brand, especially when the brand is unknown (Kapferer et al., 2014). Other methods of positioning a brand as luxury, include ‘artification’ (Kapferer, 2014); being authentic and prestigious (Heine, Phan, & Atwal, 2016) etc. are also reported in literature. There were attempts to develop measurement scales in luxury consumption (Kapferer, 2015).

Another important aspect of luxury research literature is study of luxury consumption from consumer perspective. Riley et al. (2015) examined the role of perceived value in the relationship between brand attitude, perceived fit, extension attitude and consumers’ purchase intention of downscale vertical extensions of luxury and premium brands for cars and shoes. Findings suggest that perceived value for downward scale extensions influences purchase intention. Brand attitude was also found to be positively associated with perceived value. In general, it was found that consumer’s perceived value is an important parameter that explains the development of the attitude towards the brand (Riley et al., 2015). Desire is reported as an important determinant of luxury consumption (Loureiro et al., 2018). A brand should be able to develop

an emotional connect with consumers in order to be on the priority list of consumers (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). These research efforts contributed towards making luxury a flourishing and mature topic in literature.

The concept of luxury branding is changing (Kapferer, 2015). The notion of luxury has evolved a lot from the time when luxury was meant for a lucky few to the point when it is democratised. When Ford adopted cost cutting and downward extension as a strategy to manage Jaguar, it was called democratisation of luxury (Kapferer, 2015). This downward extension was given many terminologies like, ‘masstige’ (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), ‘democratisation of luxury’ (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Danziger, 2004; Truong, Simmons, McColl, & Kitchen, 2008), ‘new luxury’ (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Eckhardt et al., 2015; Truong et al., 2008) ‘populence’ (Granot et al., 2013) ‘bandwagon luxury’ (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), ‘mass affluence’ (Nunes, Johnson, & Breene, 2004), ‘accessible luxury’ (Walley, Custance, Copley, & Perry, 2013), and ‘Vertical Brand Extension Model’ (Riley et al., 2015). This new concept of luxury is different from the traditional perspective of luxury. Today, consumers use luxury to support their own individual identity projects (Bauer, Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2011). Masstige goes with the concept- affordable luxury- as consumers seek prestige status. Consumers can now afford the products which were inaccessible to them in the past. This has escalated the consumption of brands by consumers as a proxy to attain ideal self. Consumers across the globe like this price reduction strategy. From marketers perspective, it gives an opportunity to increase profit by broadening the product line (Kekre & Srinivasan, 1990) and create a new high growth segment - Masstige. There are even evidences that reducing the price of high end products (adopting masstige) can be a master solution to tackle cannibalisation in certain scenarios (Moorthy & Png, 1992). Hence, marketers starting adopting such a strategy. Being a relatively new strategy, marketers across product categories have chances of benefiting in market share by gaining first mover advantage (Murthi, Srinivasan, & Kalyanaram, 1996) as result of masstige strategy adoption. Already there are evidences of marketers exercising different strategies to capture this market like introduction of diffusion brands (diffusion brands are sub brands (low price brands) of their parent brands). For example: Prada is the parent brand and Miu miu is the diffusion brand (Arora, McIntyre, Wu, &

**Table 2**  
Progression of research on Masstige marketing (Phase 1).

Sr. No.	Study	Objective	Methodology	Covering Masstige	Use of Synonyms of Masstige	Brands Referred	Country Context	Findings
1	(Park et al., 1991)	Differentiate between successful and unsuccessful brand extensions	Multi Stage Study using Mean and Anova	Not specifically	Prestige Brands	Timex and Rolex	USA	Concept consistency between brand and extension is important for prestige brands
2	(Vigneron & Johnson, 1999)	Conceptualization of Prestige brands	Review & Theoretical proposition	Prestige seeking consumer behaviour	Prestige	Multiple brands	Australia	5 types of motivations drive prestige-seeking consumers
3	(Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)	To understand changing luxury consumption habits	Perspective	Yes	Mass Prestige, New luxury	–	–	Masstige brands have great potential
4	(Nunes et al., 2004)	–	Perspective	Yes	New Middle Ground	–	–	Marketers should capitalise on Masstige
5	(Truong et al., 2008)	Study of Status and consumption for New Luxury Brands	Factor Analysis	Not Specifically	Democratisation of luxury, New Luxury	Multiple Brands: 9 Car, 9 Fashion and 8 Watch Brands	France	Status and Luxury are different for New Luxury Brands
6	(Kapferer & Bastien, 2009)	To explore management of luxury brands	–	Yes	Democratisation of luxury, New Luxury, Mass luxury	–	–	Luxury brands management is different from premium & trading up
7	(Truong et al., 2009)	Identify positioning strategy of Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren	Factor Analysis	Yes	Masstige, New luxury	Calvin Klein & Ralph Lauren	France	Both brands are positioned as masstige brands
8	(Eng & Bogaert, 2010)	To understand consumer behaviour for luxury brands in India	Focus groups and personal interview	Yes	–	Versace, Gucci, Vacheron Constantin	India	Luxury Consumption signals status and social identity in India.
9	(Monga & John, 2010)	To study the impact of parent brand on brand extensions in Sport	Multiple Studies, Interview and Anova	Not Specifically	Prestige Brands	Toyota, Mercedes-Benz, HP, Mac	USA	Parent brand affects the brand extensions in Sports
10	(Bauer et al., 2011)	To conceptualize luxury from consumer perspective	Interview, Indicative Categorization Process	Yes	New Luxury, Accessible Luxury, Democratisation of luxury, Luxurification of society	Multiple brands	Austria, Finland, Spain & South Korea	Luxury experiences are transient and support individualistic consumer identity
11	(Hwang & Kandampully, 2012).	Roles of emotional factors for younger consumer-luxury brand relationships	Structural Equation Modelling, Multidimensional Scaling	Yes	–	Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Chanel, Ralph Lauren, Gap	USA	Emotional attachment has the strongest impact on brand loyalty.
12	(Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012)	To understand bandwagon consumption	Structural Equation Modelling	Yes	Bandwagon Consumption, Democratisation of luxury, Mass Affluence	Multiple brands - Not Mentioned	United Kingdom, London	Status and social approval form reason for this consumption
13	(Miller & Mills, 2012)	To better understand brand luxury	Multiple lens approach	Yes	New Luxury, Mass luxury, Luxurification	–	–	A clear distinction of brand luxury is provided
14	(Zhan & He, 2012)	Understand motivation of consumer's luxury consumption	Structural Equation Modelling	Not Specifically	No	No Specific brands	China	Middle class consumers seek identity using brands without spending much
15	(Magnoni & Roux, 2012)	To understand the impact of step-down extension on luxury brand	Pseudo-experimental	Not specifically	Not specifically	BMW, Peugeot	France	Step-down extension negatively impact luxury brand

**Table 3**  
Progression of research on Masstige marketing (2013–2015, Phase 2).

Sr. No.	Study	Objective	Methodology	Covering Masstige	Use of Synonyms of Masstige	Brands Referred	Country Context	Findings
1	(Brun & Castelli, 2013)	To identify customer dimensions of luxury	Experimental design, Focus Group	Yes	New Luxury, Accessible Luxury, Democratization of luxury	Beluga Caviar, Gucci, Bang & Olufsen, LeoCut		Luxury customer profiles are identified
2	(Granot et al., 2013)	To understand populance	In-depth Interview, Thematic Analysis	Yes	Populance, New Luxury, Democratization of luxury, Mass prestige	Respondent selected multiple brands	United States	8 themes of populance emerged
3	(Walley et al., 2013)	Identification of key dimensions of luxury	In-depth Interviews, Factor Analysis	Yes	Accessible Luxury, New Luxury, Democratization of luxury	No Specific brands	United Kingdom	Five dimensions of luxury identified.
4	(Roper et al., 2013)	Identify the meaning of luxury in masstige era	Qualitative Study, Discourse Analysis, In-depth Interviews	Yes	New Luxury, Chav, Bling	No specific brands	United Kingdom	Consumers understand luxury in subjective, experiential, moral and artistic forms
5	(Dall'Omo Riley et al., 2013)	To analyse vertical downscale extensions	Factorial experiment	Yes	Prestige brands	Porsche, Prada, Audi, Diesel	United Kingdom	Consumers hold less positive attitude and express lower purchase intention
6	(Hennigs et al., 2013).	Perception related to luxury brand extensions	Interviews, Implicit Association Test	Not Specifically	Accessible luxury, Democratization of luxury	H&M, Karl Lagerfeld	Germany	Consumer perception is influenced by luxury brand extension
7	(Cavender & H. Kincaide, 2014)	To develop definitions for marketing dimensions of luxury goods	Case study, In-depth Historical Review	Yes	–	Louis Vuitton Moët-Hennessy (Its brands)	–	Success and failure of brand management for luxury brand and their sub variables were identified
8	(Kapferer, 2014)	Understand the role of artification in luxury brands	–	Yes	Democratization of luxury, New Luxury, Globalization of luxury	Multiple brands	–	Artification is an important method for globalization of luxury.
9	(Kapferer et al., 2014)	Understand the luxury from price perspective	Descriptives	Yes	New Luxury, Accessible luxury	Mauboussin jeweler, Ralph Lauren, Hermès, Louis Vuitton	Paris	High the price, high the perceived luxury
10	(Arora et al., 2015)	Understand consumer response for luxury and diffusion brands	Experiments, ACNOVA, t test	Not Specifically	–	Prada, Miu Miu, Wryst, Wryst Airborne	USA	There is a difference between two types of brands
11	(Kapferer, 2015)	To report the changing face of luxury branding	Perspective	Yes	Mass Prestige, Democratization of luxury	Multiple brands	–	Areas of concern for future of luxury branding are reported
12	(Paul, 2015)	To introduce a theoretical model and a measure to operationalise mass prestige	Content Analysis, Case Study	Yes	New Luxury	Louis Vuitton	Japan & France	Masstige Mean Index is developed
13	(Riley et al., 2015).	Role of perceived value in downscale extensions of luxury brands	Structural Equation Modelling	Not Specifically	Massification, Democratization of luxury	Porsche, Prada, Audi, Diesel	United Kingdom	Perceived value affect the attitude towards brand, extension and purchase intention

**Table 4**  
Progression of research on Masstige marketing (2015–2018, Phase 3).

Sr. No.	Study	Objective	Methodology	Covering Masstige	Use of Synonyms of Masstige	Brands Referred	Country Context	Findings
1	(Heine et al., 2016).	Exploring essential characteristic of luxury brands	Case study method	Yes	–	Château d'Yquem (Wine), Veuve Cliquot	France	Authenticity and prestige are two important characteristics
2	(Kapferer & Laurent, 2016)	To understand the luxury in context of price	Descriptive	Partly	New Luxury, Mass Prestige	–	France, Italy, UK Spain Germany USA	High expense is related with luxury
3	(Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016).	How can luxury brands prevent becoming a victim of their own success?	Factor Analysis, Partial Least Square	Yes	–	Multiple Brands	Japan France	Experiential and perceptual aspects influence the desirability of luxury brands
4	(Gurzi & Woisetschlager, 2017)	Bibliometric Analysis of luxury research	Bibliometric Analysis	Yes	Masstige	–	–	10 clusters of luxury research are presented
5	(Dollet et al., 2017)	To analyse trend of premiumisation	Case study method, Qualitative study	Yes	Democratisation of luxury, Mass luxury, Premiumness	Nespresso and L'Oréal, MH, and Diageo Reserve	–	Premium FMCG is not a threat to luxury brands
6	(Dogan et al., 2018)	Develop a scale for Luxury Consumption Tendency	Factor Analysis & Confirmatory Factor Analysis	Yes	Democratisation of luxury	No Specific brands	United States	18 item luxury consumption tendency scale generated
7	(Kumar & Paul, 2018)	Mass prestige associated with laptop brands in India	Descriptives, Discriminant Analysis, ANOVA, t test	Yes	Populence, Mass prestige	Lenovo, Acer, HP, Dell	India	American brands have more prestige in comparison to Asian Brands
8	(Loureiro et al., 2018)	How desire, perceived self, social values and involvement are related to consumer engagement	Factor Analysis, Partial Least Square	Yes	New Luxury	Guess, Gucci, D&G, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Chanel, Trussardi, Burberry, and Coach	Portugal	Desire is the most significant driver of consumer engagement for luxury brands
9	Paul (2019)	Conceptualize a 3 stage model for Masstige marketing	Scale Validation, Conceptual Model	Yes	Masstige	Louis Vuitton	USA, France & India	Presented a Hexagon Model, 3-P based 3 stage model for Masstige Marketing
10	Paul (2018)	Compare the masstige value of domestic and foreign car brands	Non-parametric tests, ANOVA	Yes	Masstige	Toyota, Honda, GM, Ford	USA	Foreign brands have higher prestige than domestic brands
11	(Kim et al., 2019)	To identify the symbolism associated with masstige brands	Semiotic Analysis	Yes	Masstige	Multiple	–	Identity values are associated with masstige brands



Arora, 2015). Other examples include Giorgio Armani's Emporio Armani; and Garnier from L'Oréal. All these proceedings resulted in increased interest in masstige marketing and masstige brands.

People high on self-consciousness are more prone to use these brands (luxury/masstige) to establish their identity and ideal self (Solomon, 2016; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999a). Brands are strong means of consumer's identity (Fournier, 1998; Mehta & Belk, 1991). Consumers seek prestige brands to create their identity (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999a). Research suggests that consumer may also seek alternative means of self-expression (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011). It is important to note that middle class consumers who seek identity by using brands may not be willing to spend too much on brands (Zhan & He, 2012), yet they seek the help of brands to establish a desirable self-image. Different terminologies have emerged for such trading up consumers such as "Chav", "Bling" etc. (Roper, Caruana, Medway, & Murphy, 2013). For such consumers, masstige brands are good and affordable options. As an example, a user can book Radisson Hotel without spending too much. Similarly there are smartphone brands like One-Plus which has evolved to occupy affordable luxury positioning and can be used to attain desirable identity without crossing the financial limits. Hence, masstige brands have become important means of self-expression and formidable alternatives to traditional luxury items. This shift from traditional luxury to masstige is also referred to as a shift from old luxury to new luxury (Granot et al., 2013). Masstige marketing is about finding a space between the exclusivity and mass consumption (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). In developing countries with mass consumers at lower socio-economic strata who may not have high disposable income, luxury is extending its reach through masstige brands (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). This has enriched the literature of luxury branding and added masstige marketing as an important element. In this context, we review the important models that are useful for marketing premium/luxury brands grounded in the concepts "Unconventional luxury" and "Marketing to the Maximum" (see Fig. 1).

### 3.1. Masstige marketing conceptualisation (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003)

Silverstein and Fiske (2003) introduced the term "masstige" in their Harvard Business Review article based on the middle class consumer behaviour in the United States (US). They considered luxury or premium goods priced between the middle class and the super-premium as possible 'Masstige' products. They elaborated that with the growing number of middle class consumers, and many consumers aspiring for higher levels of quality and taste, luxury goods no longer remain just for the upper-affluent, but they are now within the reach and attainable for mass-market consumers (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Brands such as Starbucks, Victoria's secret, etc. were considered as examples of masstige brands in the US. It is worth noting that the article by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) led the marketing practitioners and researchers to view 'Masstige' as an unconventional approach for marketing.

### 3.2. Bandwagon luxury consumption model (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012)

It is evident to see the advancement of scholars towards consumption of luxury brands by masses. The importance was highlighted by the term "bandwagon luxury consumption" coined by Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012). Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) studied the factors influencing the consumers' propensity to engage in "bandwagon" luxury consumption and described the phenomenon as market penetration and brand position strategies leading to mass consumption of a luxury brand, in particular, among middle class consumers creating mass prestige. They cited that brands such as Gucci, Versace and Louis Vuitton (LV) capitalise on this type of buying behaviour in certain markets. In general, they demonstrated that consumers' interdependent self-identity underlies bandwagon luxury consumption. The concept 'masstige marketing' is grounded in this proposition.

### 3.3. Populence paradigm (Granot et al., 2013)

Granot et al. (2013) showed that the meaning of luxury has changed based on a comprehensive review of research. They offer theoretical extensions and propose a new luxury paradigm that they refer to as "Populence" based on the recent developments in the US. "Populence," according to them, is the process through which the premium goods can be marketed and popularized towards maximum consumers. The concept of populence was another step towards the acceptability of ideology of luxury for the masses.

### 3.4. Masstige model and masstige mean index (Paul, 2015)

Paul (2015) developed a pyramid model for marketing luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton (LV) to the middle and upper low income group, based on the marketing strategy of LV in Japan. He also conceptualised 'Masstige value' as an alternative to brand equity and introduced a Masstige Mean Score Scale (MMSS) and Masstige Mean Index (MMI) based on the data from Japan and France, as a benchmark measure for estimating and comparing the 'Masstige value'. This scale measures the masstige score with maximum value of 70 having 10 items on the likert scale. Score on masstige scale represents the masstige value. Higher the masstige score, greater the brand carries prestige. Paul (2015) concludes that MMS score of more than 60 depicts that brand has been perceived as a top of mind masstige brand. Score between 50 & 60 suggests that a brand is seen as a masstige brand but not a top masstige brand while a score below 50 speaks of that the brand has not been able to position itself as a masstige brand.

Paul (2018) in his article titled 'Toward a Masstige Theory and Strategy for marketing' shows that 'masstige' as a concept is grounded in the notion that Price = f (Mass Prestige) and Mass Prestige = f (Promotion, Place, Product/service strategies). Further, Paul (2019) presented a three stage theoretical model for masstige marketing based on certain actions for masstige value creation, and developed a hexagon model to demonstrate how managers can penetrate into maximum number of consumers while marketing luxury brands. Research shows that brands can charge higher price, if they create higher masstige value, citing the example of LV. Masstige Model is developed based on the notion that companies, shops, etc. can keep the prices relatively high, if they implement the appropriate product strategies (focused on quality, innovation, differentiation, etc.), promotion (strategies to attract not only the high and middle income group, but also to attract low income group and young consumers in 20s) and place strategy (store ambience, location, etc.). Companies that follow Masstige Model include Starbucks, Louis Vuitton, Armani, Apple, Victoria Secret, and Gucci. However, their strategies varies from market to market.

## 4. Theoretical underpinnings

Consumes have their own understanding of the term luxury (Roper et al., 2013). It is important to note that marketers arguably, are no longer in a position to control the consumers' perception of luxury (Granot et al., 2013). Roper et al. (2013) state that luxury is not only for the affluent few but luxury is already democratised. Hence, terms like masstige have become more relevant. Masstige is different from luxury (Kapferer, 2015). Miller and Mills (2012) also believe that luxury brands are different from prestige brands and this difference is to be accepted. To illustrate the point, a product and service produced at mass level is a non-luxury product (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Behrens, Klarmann, & Carduck, 2013). As per Vigneron and Johnson (1999), prestige brands belong to upmarket and premium segment. Hence, masstige brands sit above the middle range brands in prestige and price (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009). Another point of difference between luxury and masstige is that quality is an inherent part of luxury goods and need not be mentioned, whereas quality needs to be emphasized for premium or masstige products (Kapferer et al., 2014). The objectives

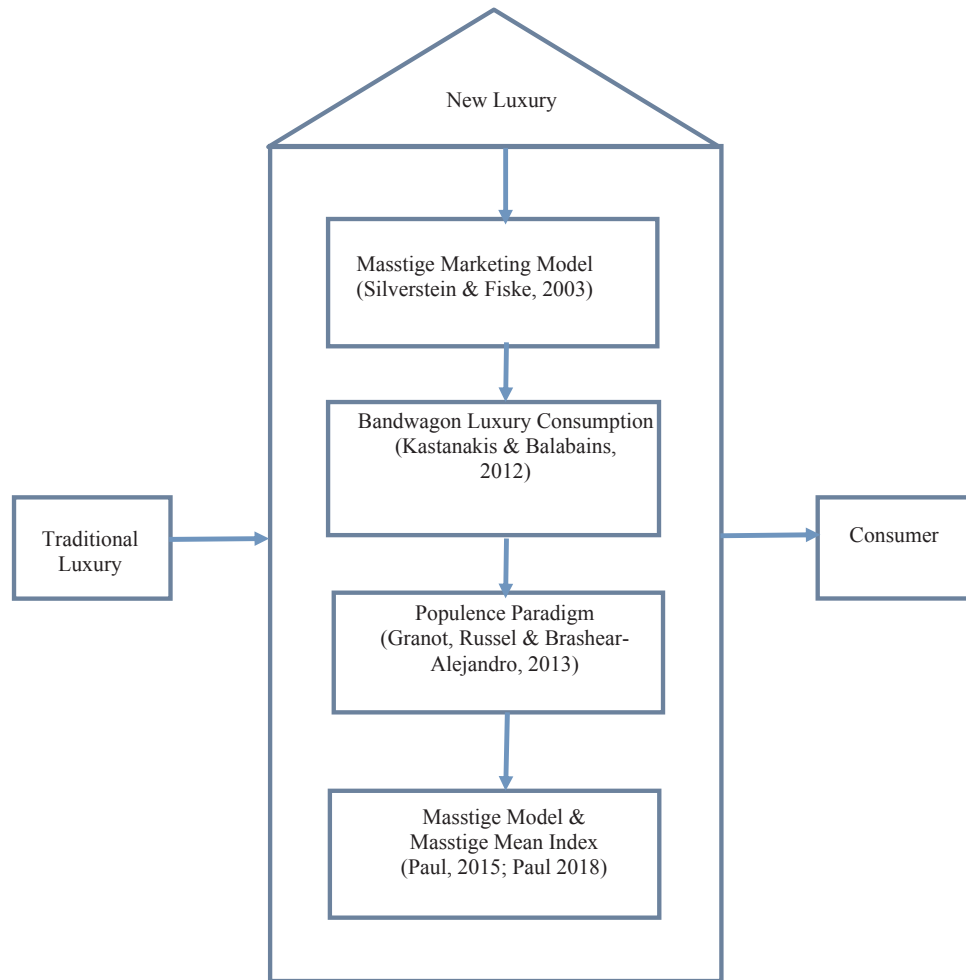


Fig. 1. Evolution of Masstige marketing strategy.

for the consumption of luxury brands and masstige brands are also different (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Miller & Mills, 2012). A consumer seeking true luxury looks for heritage, family name and country of origin (Kapferer, 2015) but a consumer of masstige brand looks to portray a desirable ideal-self by using a brand. Prior research show that foreign brands could create higher mass prestige than domestic brands in some markets including the United States, France, India and Japan (Paul, 2019) as foreign brands are considered rare in local culture and they can help in attaining the ideal-self. In a way, masstige brands result from the downward extension of luxury brands. It means that if price of a luxury brand is reduced to the extent that it becomes affordable for masses without sacrificing much of its quality, it qualifies to be a masstige brand. However, masstige strategy is to be executed with caution as simply reducing the price of a luxury brand to make it available to masses may negatively impact the consumer attitude and purchase intention towards this brand (Dall’Omo Riley, Pina, & Bravo, 2013). It may also change the perception of luxury brand as one with less luxury (Hennigs et al., 2013).

There is evidence that downward extensions may dilute the relationship between the consumer and brand, in the case of luxury brand, negatively (Magnoni & Roux, 2012). Riley et al. (2015) examined the role of perceived value in the relationship between brand attitude, perceived fit, extension attitude and consumers’ purchase intention of downscale vertical extensions of luxury and premium brands for cars and shoes. Findings suggest that perceived value for downscale extensions influences purchase intention. Brand attitude was also

found to be positively associated with perceived value. In general, it was found that perceived value partially mediates the relationships of brand attitude and of extension attitude with purchase intention. Therefore, while doing downscale extensions as part of masstige strategy, it is recommended to keep in mind the concept consistency (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991) to reap rich benefits.

The common features of both luxury and masstige consumption are status and conspicuousness. It is important to note that status and conspicuousness are two different constructs (Truong et al., 2008). Those who seek status from brands may or may not use the brands internally and externally both; whereas, those who use brands for conspicuousness will only use it externally (Truong et al., 2008). Status and conspicuousness influence both luxury and masstige consumption. Consumers engage in masstige consumption to reach at specific status and abide by social approval (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), whereas luxury brands are used mostly to maintain the status as part of consumer’s lifestyle.

Masstige strategy can help in creating high mass prestige. Paul (2019) discussed the evolution of the literature of masstige and presented a theoretical model to develop a masstige brand. It was advocated that product and promotion are critical for masstige. Even among lower income consumers, the middle class aspires for elitism (Roper et al., 2013). Masstige brand has an affordable price which might be of specific interest for young consumers (Loureiro et al., 2018). This aspect of affordability is so important that consumers tend to overlook their cultural norms including religious norms (even for



Islamic countries) to indulge in prestige consumption if they can afford it (Nwankwo, Hamelin, & Khaled, 2014). Hence, Masstige may be considered as a growth strategy for developing countries. For example, it is strongly argued that India, with low per capita income, young age and status conscious consumers, is a great ground for masstige consumption (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Additionally, developing countries are better places to study masstige as they explore the foreign brands to display their status (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). For such countries, pure traditional luxury consumption may not be as attractive as masstige consumption.

Luxury and its dimensions are covered extensively through research (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Dogan, Ozkara, & Dogan, 2018; Miller & Mills, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Walley et al., 2013) whereas masstige is a relatively new topic. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) conceptualized five types of effects of prestige-seeking consumer behaviour and classified them as veblenian (conspicuous), snob, bandwagon, hedonist and perfectionist and called for scale development. However, there was no scale for the measurement of masstige or mass prestige associated with brands till Paul (2015) introduced Masstige Mean Score Scale. This scale contained 10 items and the consumer's responses on these 10 items would give a masstige score for a brand. Study also proposed a pyramid model to establish the relevance of masstige brands and to position the masstige brands just below traditional luxury brands. It was stated that middle income consumers would be the best target for masstige brands. Such studies exploring masstige strategy are few at present. On the contrary, the literature for marketing of luxury goods is maturing.

With the above differentiation between luxury and masstige, we define Masstige marketing as - A marketing strategy which envisages to make brands prestigious while retaining its affordability for the mass consumers, by grounding in product and promotion strategies, and keeping prices relatively high.

To understand the above definition, let's try to look at some brands. Louis Vuitton, a well known luxury brand from France generated 20 to 30 percent of their worldwide revenue from Japan because of their strategy to target the middle income and upper part of low income group and yet has retained its prestigiousness (Paul, 2015). Toyota and Honda have offered the comparatively low priced cars in US markets while maintaining its prestige (Paul, 2018). Another known brands who have kept the prices relatively high and targeted upper middle class while retaining its value include Bath and Body works body lotion, Coach, BMW 325 range, Mercedes Benz, Tiffany, Burberry (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). All these example brands have one thing in common that they have made the brands prestigious, kept their prices high along with maintaining its affordability by emphasising on product and promotion. Masstige brands are able to command a premium over the mass market brands due to their perceptions of quality and cultivated imagery. For example Starbucks is able to charge a premium for the coffee due the prestige perception among customers. They retain the prestigious perception through promotion, maintaining a superior service experience and the judicious use of promotions. At the same time, Starbucks makes their products available for the upper segment of the mass market. Masstige brands enjoy a price premium in comparison with the average reference prices of the mass brands (Lubel & Beard, 2016).

## 5. 'Masstige marketing' research

After the publication of article by Silverstein and Fiske (2003), terms such as democratisation of luxury, new luxury and masstige became popular. However, literature suggests that 'democratisation of luxury' as part of downward extension was mentioned even before that. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) used the term 'democratisation of luxury' while developing a scale to measure dimensions of brand luxury.

The term 'masstige' was coined in 2003, however the term 'mass prestige' (in different ways and by different names) used to get repeated

mention in literature even before 2003. Some researchers used to describe the concept using the simple term- Prestige. After 2003, several articles published on luxury branding topic talked about masstige brands (See Tables 2–4). The importance and growing acceptance of masstige dawned from the fact that 15 noted publications were found on masstige or related terms (Table 2) in the immediate 10 year period (Phase 1) after Silverstein and Fiske (2003) coined the term Masstige, in a Harvard Business Review article (It also include 2 studies which published before 2003 article). Whereas next three years, 2013–15 (Phase 2) witnessed 13 publications on masstige or related terms (Table 3). From 2016 till 2019 (Phase 3), we found 11 publications related to masstige (Table 4). The logic of deciding phases is to depict the increased interest in masstige phenomenon. First phase is taken as the first 10 years after publication of 2003 article (From 2003 to 2012). The logic of taking phase 2 as covering only three years is to demonstrate that for first 13 publications after Silverstein and Fiske (2003) article (There are two studies refereed in above table which were published before 2003), it took 10 years and for next 13 publications it took just three years. That way, the second phase represents a revived interest in masstige research. Thereafter third stage is till 2019. This period (3 years) has seen 11 publications. This depicts the increased interest in this research area and the growth of masstige brands. Gradually, 'masstige' phenomenon grounded in the unconventional approach has become an important part of the literature on luxury branding.

The seminal article by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) has been cited over 500 times. Many of those cited articles are based on luxury branding. We tried to find out the number of articles citing Silverstein and Fiske (2003) which have used masstige or related terms in title and abstract to understand the acceptance and impact of masstige strategy (Terms used in search include: 'masstige', 'trading up', 'bandwagon consumption', 'democratisation of luxury', 'mass affluence', 'populace', 'new luxury', 'mass prestige', 'accessible luxury', 'chav', 'bling', 'massification', 'globalization of luxury', 'premiumness', 'luxurification of society', 'prestige brands', 'mass luxury', 'luxurification' and 'diffusion brands'). In 11 articles, we found use of the following eight terms (masstige or synonyms for masstige) in the title- 'masstige' (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2015; Truong et al., 2009), 'trading up' (Ko & Sung, 2007), 'bandwagon consumption' (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), 'populace' (Granot et al., 2013), 'new luxury' (Fujioka, Li, & Kaneko, 2017; Truong et al., 2009), 'mass prestige' (Kumar & Paul, 2018), 'accessible luxury' (Agerup, 2018), and 'diffusion brands' (Arora et al., 2015). As masstige marketing is a phenomenon based on unconventional way of marketing luxury or premium brands, this relatively low number of articles on masstige also indicate that there are research gaps and opportunities for future research grounded in the idea of unconventional way of marketing premium brands such as Apple, Strabucks, Victoria's secret, Armani, hotels like Ritz Carlton, Singapore Airways, Swiss Airlines etc.

In addition, many other terms which represent masstige are neither found in the title nor in the abstract but they are used elsewhere in the papers. The repeated references and usage of the term masstige in the literature for luxury branding highlights its potential and significance.

## 6. Masstige-luxury continuum

As masstige marketing is primarily the downward extension of premium brands, it has been a dilemma for scholars to find a place for it in existing luxury branding literature. Different scholars have attempted to segregate the masstige concept from luxury. Yet, there is confusion around the point where masstige consumption ends and luxury consumption begins. The confusion is further substantiated by various terms used for luxury and masstige such as, 'accessible super premium', 'old luxury brand extension' (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), 'traditional luxury brands', 'new luxury brands', 'middle range brands' (Truong et al., 2009), 'traditional luxury market' (Truong et al., 2008),

'exclusivity', 'mass consumption' (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), 'luxury', 'premium', 'upmarket', (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999b), 'luxury', 'premium', 'massification' (Dall'Omo Riley et al., 2013), 'uniluxury', 'uberluxury', 'mass exclusivity', 'mass luxury', 'ready to luxe' (Dollet, Díaz, Moya, & Solís, 2017) etc. All this has created confusion about what should be treated as a masstige brand. After a comprehensive review, we have tried to do away with this confusion regarding the positioning of masstige brands by introducing the mass-luxury brand continuum.

We have looked at this placement from multiple dimensions which include price, consumer income, brands, market, consumption, status and exclusivity. Masstige marketing and the associated brands are to be considered as different from other type of brands and their marketing. Masstige is also to be looked as a differentiation strategy. Hence masstige can give rise to a separate segment. Making their products look different is termed as best strategy (Villas-Boas, 1998) which a marketer can afford. Especially if the differences are created to extent the product line by establishing a high end segment or low end segment, the product line would still be profitable (Villas-Boas, 1998). Masstige marketing give marketer a way to achieve this by exercising the downward extension. For prestige brands, brand extensions have generally been accepted by consumers (Monga & John, 2010). The segregation of these extensions from parent brands or from competing brands might looked blurred which need explanation to realise the existing difference. Fig. 2 depicts the mass-luxury continuum which shows how masstige is different from other related constructs/metaphors. The horizontal line for different dimensions depicts the spread or range. To exemplify from the perspective of market (which is the second dimension in the continuum), the market which caters to low income group for necessity-based consumption offers common products at low or moderate price. Similarly, masstige market (purple line) which is called with different names including new luxury (blue line), sells upmarket brands (brown line) to consumers. Further, masstige market is related with prestige consumption (green line) and it is the middle-income group (red line) which is ready to pay moderate premium (pink line) for masstige consumption. The figure also depicts that

the spread for masstige market enters into premium brands as extension of upmarket brands. It indicates that the prestige seeking middle class consumer can even stretch to pay more than the moderate premium. Masstige comes below both old luxury and traditional luxury. The lower range of old luxury goods can be clubbed together with the brands which are priced relatively high targeting the middle-class consumers who are willing to pay premium because of the perception of mass prestige. This can be understood through the lens of already documented literature which agrees that consumers would tend to consider a high quality product while still being price conscious (Moorthy, 1988). Consumers indulge in luxury consumption to attain and maintain the desired social class (Dogan et al., 2018) and to achieve uniqueness and status (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013), whereas consumers indulge in masstige consumption to achieve status and to satisfy the aspirations for these brands with their rise in income (Bauer et al., 2011). Keeping this in consideration, the mass-luxury continuum helps to distinguish masstige from other related constructs.

To further understand the Masstige and its role in luxury branding literature, we also propose how a masstige brand can be developed. Fig. 3 depicts the marketing mix which can be followed in order to develop a masstige brand. Brand managers keep the prices relatively high or high once their brand has mass prestige. A product or service should be subjected to innovation right from its birth so that it can be differentiated from others. It is important to communicate the prestige by look and feel of the product or the place. Such a product or service should be supported for its masstige image by introducing it at relatively-high or high price. Once priced, experimentations with the prices should be avoided. The mass prestige attempted in product and price must be supported by the place where the brand is sold. A controlled and selective distribution along with direct marketing is the key. Promotion also has a vital role to play in formulating a masstige brand. The prestige must be supported by premium packaging, selective endorsers and execution of advertising on selective communication media. It is better if below-the-line advertising is used at optimal level to communicate the prestigious-ness of the brand. Further to note is the double-sided arrows in Fig. 3 depicting that all the four Ps are not in isolation,

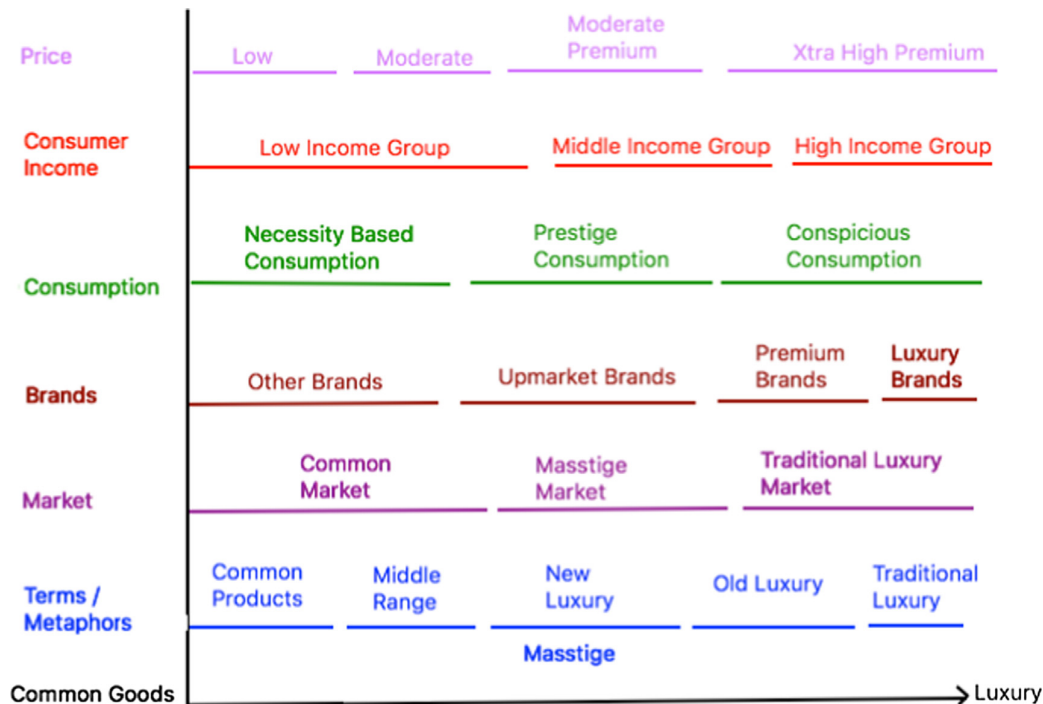


Fig. 2. Mass-luxury continuum.

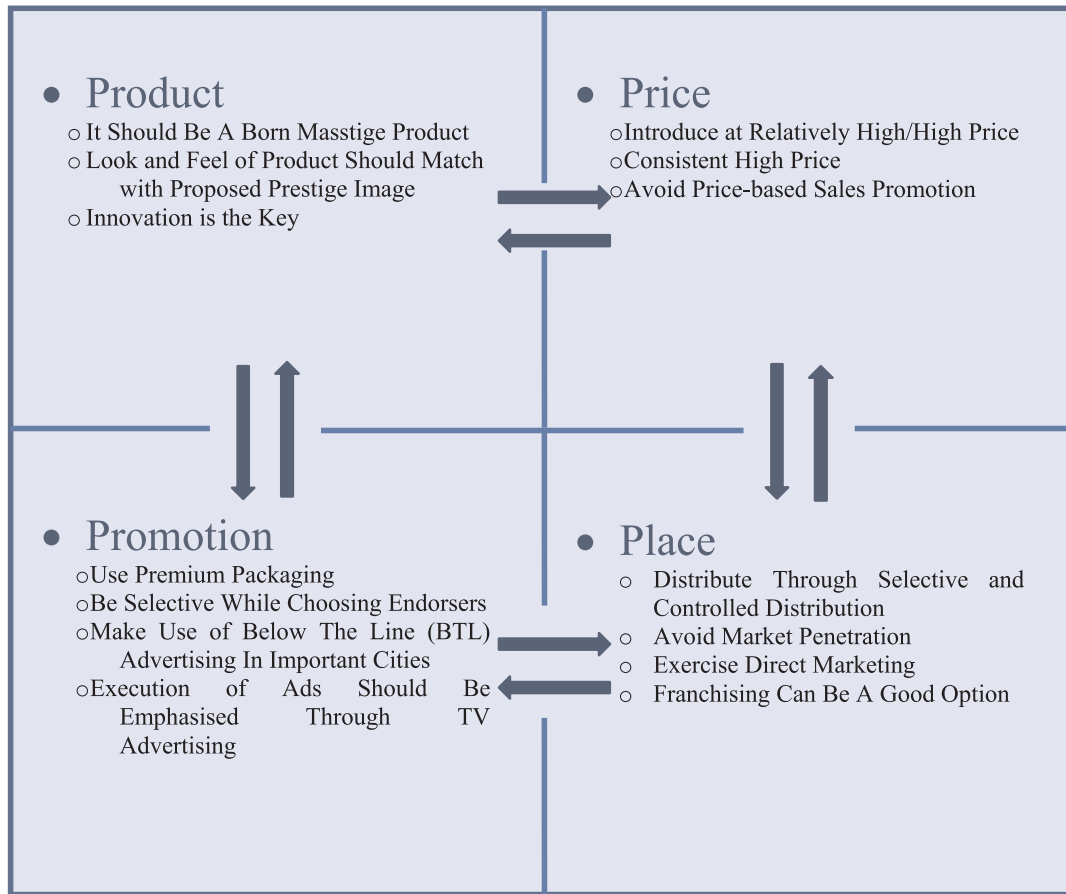


Fig. 3. Developing A Masstige brand and its marketing mix.

they are interconnected with each other. Change in any one would have impact on all other Ps. It can be said that price could be fixed as relatively high or premium, as an outcome of the mass prestige grounded in Product/service, promotion and place strategies. Thus, masstige value is a function of three Ps strategies, i.e. Product/ service, promotion and place; but not price.

## 7. Discussion

Reviewed Literature demonstrates that masstige marketing is an optimistic strategy to offer premium goods or services at an affordable price to the masses. Over a period of time, it has become an inherent part of the literature on branding. Specifically, it is the downward extension of luxury branding. It is known by different names, however, the term Masstige has gained tremendous acceptance among scholars. Masstige need to be viewed as different from luxury. Masstige brands are mainly used by those who are high on self-consciousness and are trying to achieve their ideal self. To further clarify this distinction and to highlight the significance of masstige, a Mass-Luxury continuum is introduced in this article. This continuum aims to position masstige in branding theory using multiple dimensions. Further, masstige brands have enormous potential ahead with a large market waiting to be explored. For a price conscious middle-income consumer, masstige strategy is an alluring alternative which provides a win-win situation for both the marketer and the consumer.

This review synthesized the themes researched by scholars. For example, till now, we have seen that research in the area of masstige is conducted in few countries, across limited number of brands. Lack of studies in the area of services (brands in sectors such as airlines, banks,

insurance etc.) opens up new opportunities to carry out research in services industries too. Until now, we only see quantitative approach being used to understand the concept of masstige. There is only one measure (Masstige Mean Index or Masstige Mean score scale) available to estimate masstige value. Therefore, a synthesis of this masstige literature is depicted in Fig. 4 in a Tree format. The tree depicts the areas of masstige which are researched, along with it also highlights which are unexplored areas. Therefore, the tree speaks of further scope of masstige research in terms of its various aspects like geographic coverage, products, brands, methods used to study and measures.

## 8. Agenda for future research

Masstige strategy is relatively new and the masstige marketing is a novel topic which has started gaining attention of scholars in recent times. The extant literature has explored the construct from varied dimensions. There is potential to compute masstige value using MMI and compare from cross-cultural perspective. In addition, there are opportunities to explore the construct from many different angles. Following the prior reviews (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019), we provide directions for future research in this area using Theory, Method and Context (TMC) framework.

### 8.1. Theory

Brand equity tenets have been widely researched so far (Arya, Sethi, & Paul, 2019; Gilal, Paul, Gilal, & Gilal, 2019; Paul & Bhakar, 2018). Nevertheless, masstige tenets have not been replicated in research. As the concept of masstige has emerged from the tenets of brand equity, it

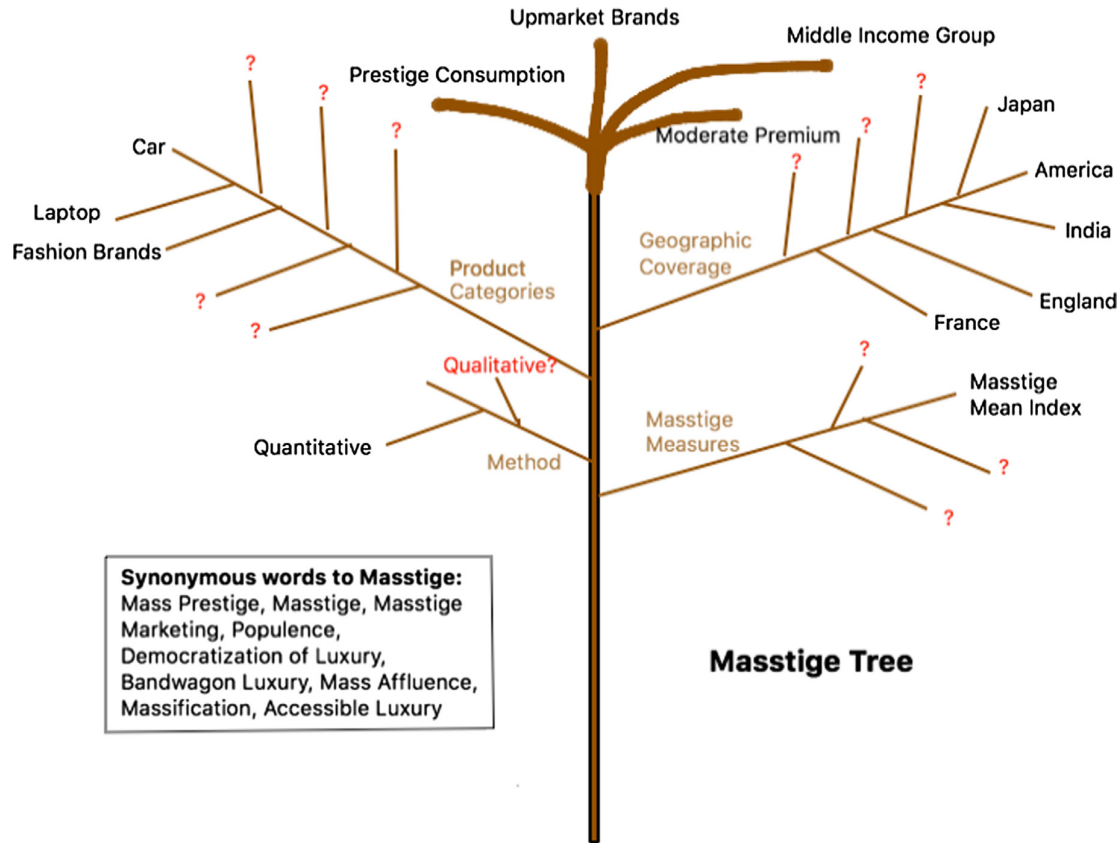


Fig. 4. Masstige tree.

is not an independent stream of study. While luxury is a well-researched topic in marketing literature, masstige is relatively new with scope for further development. Masstige marketing is part of the larger ecosystem of branding literature. Masstige and its measures (Masstige Mean score scale) can be treated as a measure of brand equity (Paul, 2015). Outside the few exceptions such as Kumar and Paul (2018), the contribution of masstige towards consumer-based brand equity has been less explored. Thus, the exploration of the relationship between masstige marketing and brand equity or other brand constructs will be an important contribution towards the theory of branding. This will not only help to increase the share of theoretical contribution of masstige marketing towards brand equity, but also cement the position of masstige in brand equity theory. In addition, we propose to future researchers to extend the application of masstige model, measure and theory in the context of service sector brands as it has so far been focused on product-based brands only. The same methods and measures, for example, Masstige Mean Score Scale and Masstige Index could be used for measuring masstige value for service brands also. For example, there are opportunities to carry out research and estimate the masstige value of hotel brands such as Ritz Carlton, Marriot, Hilton, Best Western Plus, etc. using MMSS. Mass prestige value of service brands such as Uber, Lyft, Ola and MyTaxi, etc. can also be estimated in a given country or across countries or independent studies can be conducted in different states of a specific country and compare the masstige values in different states using the MMSS. Similar studies could be undertaken in industries such as airlines, financial services such as banks and insurance brands. For instance, masstige value of banking brands such as Chase, Citi and Bank of America could be estimated in the United States. The same research could be conducted in developing nations like India estimating the masstige value of foreign banks (Citi, Barclays, etc.) versus domestic public (State Bank of India, Union Bank of India) versus private (ICICI,

Axis) banks. This can be proposed as a research question, as follows:

RQ1 - The concept of masstige is equally important in services and it can be applied across all competing services brands to compare the Masstige value to analyse their success or failure in a market.

Thus, we derive a testable proposition, which could be used as a hypothesis in future studies.

Higher the masstige value of a brand, higher the probability to succeed in that market.

Theoretical foundation of masstige is considerably weak to answer important questions such as why consumers involve in such consumption. Though literature has hypothesized the need to attain status and the ideal self as reasons behind masstige consumption (Kumar & Paul, 2018), there is still scope for further empirical evidences and navigate the other underlying motives for such consumption. Luxury consumption has been explored from this perspective quite a lot. There are multiple reasons and explanations for consumption of prestigious goods or services (Garfein, 1989). These explanations can be called as the antecedents of 'masstige consumption'. Some of the important antecedents of masstige/luxury consumption include: traits of consumer (Dogan et al., 2018), symbolic meaning (Dogan et al., 2018), exclusivity (Brun & Castelli, 2013), status (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013), country of origin (Brun & Castelli, 2013), etc. The difference between luxury and masstige indicate that there will be differences in their antecedents. This entice us to propose another set of research questions:

RQ2 - Masstige consumption is linked to attainment of ideal-self through services and products consumption.

RQ3 - Antecedents of luxury and masstige consumption are different from each other.

Barring few studies such as Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012), there are no direct references to the reasons behind masstige consumption by consumers. While the topic is in formative stages, research along this

dimension would be an important contribution towards developing a robust understanding of masstige and theory development in this area. We also propose that masstige strategy is to be looked from theoretical perspective. Literature has to move from masstige strategy to masstige theory. When properly developed, Masstige Theory, in our view would help explaining the relationship of masstige with product/service, promotion and place which points towards development of masstige brands by choosing an optimal mix of product/service, promotion and place. The same can be depicted with an equation:

$\text{Masstige} = f(\text{Product/Service, Promotion, Place strategies})$  where prices are kept high. This could have great acceptance from a theoretical lens if more researchers get motivated to engage in this area for theory development and for applying the theoretical models and tenets.

Pertaining to above discussion we propose:

RQ4 - Masstige consumption can be explained as a function of product/service, promotion and place provided that prices are kept higher.

## 8.2. Methods

Extant literature reveals that quantitative methodology has been predominantly adopted to understand masstige consumption so far. There is only one notable scale available (Masstige Mean Index) to operationalize the masstige value for brands. To comment on the robustness of such existing methods as Masstige Mean Index, the scale can be scrutinized and applied in different conditions, at different places, and on various product or service categories. Unless the existing measures are operationalized and evaluated critically, the advancement will not take place. This process contributes to the maturity of the construct and its measurement. In order to improvise the existing methods, such methods should be subjected to operationalization in wider contexts. This extensive testing will help take the construct and its measurement and the research methods closer to maturity. Scholars could also think about applying other methods such as Factor analysis, Partial least squares, and structural equation modelling for future research in this area using Masstige strategy.

Another dimension of the methodology found missing in present literature is the qualitative aspect of masstige consumption. Theoretical roots of masstige consumption point out that consumers high on self-consciousness are better targets for masstige brands as masstige brands are used to attain social status and are used as an approach towards ideal self. However, the concepts of self-consciousness, social status and ideal self are all grounded in the psychological framework of consumers' mind. In order to understand such complex framework, qualitative method can be a good alternative. The qualitative aspects may enable us to answer the questions such as: Will in-depth interviews, focus groups, personal interviews reveal hitherto hidden dimensions and perspective of masstige? Even luxury consumption (from where the masstige consumption has originated) has been studied from the perspective of such dimensions (Walley et al., 2013). The latent reason for indulging in masstige consumption can be attained by in-depth interviews (For example, a respondent who is using masstige brand may be asked why he/she is using this brand without letting him/her know the reason of the same). It is also recommended to look at luxury consumption from psychological perspective (Husic & Cicic, 2009). This could be taken as a basis to propose that future researchers could attempt to test the propositions pertaining to methods adopted for masstige like:

RQ 5 - Masstige consumption for services/products can be explained equally well or even better with qualitative methodology.

Researchers interested in this proposition and qualitative method of research could carry out primary research interviewing consumers of premium brands with a structured questionnaire on the rationale for their purchase and willingness to pay premium price and delve into the factors determining their consumer behaviour and purchase intention. Such studies can be undertaken in the case of brands in the services

industries or brands in non-service sectors.

## 8.3. Context

Like other marketing constructs, masstige is not immune to variations. Pertaining to existing marketing theories, it can be hypothesized that perception of consumer towards masstige changes when context is changed. The context can be so important that a brand may be perceived differently in terms of its masstige value in different markets. For example, domestic brand Ford is found to score low in terms of mass prestige in USA in comparison with Japanese brands Toyota and Honda (Paul, 2018), similarly, Kumar and Paul (2018) have found that foreign (American) brands have high value of mass prestige in India. Contextualizing such findings, it can be hypothesized that a brand from a developed country might have high mass prestige value in an emerging market. Therefore, context is important and it plays an important role in understanding the construct. It may excite scholars to explore some important context-based research propositions such as:

RQ 6 - How different country/industry context/ situations and circumstances affect the mass-luxury continuum?

RQ 7 - How consumers in developing countries respond to masstige brands in comparison to consumers from developed countries?

RQ 8 - How consumers perceive a masstige brand formed afresh in comparison to a masstige brand formed as a result of downward extension?

Another important research point could be understanding luxury and masstige from the perspective of country of origin. As reported in literature, research on luxury branding and country of origin is skewed towards a few countries (Examples include Italian leather, Swiss Watch, etc.) although the contribution towards luxury branding research has been reported from across the globe. As masstige is a mass phenomenon, masstige (unlike luxury) should find its manifestation across many more markets around the world. However, the geographic spread of research on 'masstige marketing' is limited to France, England, America, Japan and India (Fig. 4). With the vast scope of masstige, the past coverage is miniscule. Scholars can attempt to understand masstige around the globe as it is more practical to indulge in masstige consumption as compared to luxury consumption. To measure the 'masstige' value and to compare it with the competing brands in the same industry, scholars can use several brands such as Singapore Airlines, Apple, Starbucks, Victoria's Secret, Gucci, and Swizz watch in a local country context, or any other premium brand in an emerging country context.

Another context related proposition is the scrutiny of masstige along various product categories. It is interesting to note that cars (Paul, 2018; Truong et al., 2008), apparel (Truong et al., 2009), fashion brands (Paul, 2015), laptop brands (Kumar & Paul, 2018) are the product categories which have been explored for masstige brands so far (Fig. 4). Masstige strategy can be extended to all those product and service categories which may be used by consumers to attain their ideal self by paying relatively high prices but without spending excessively. It is an important aspect of the application of masstige brands which has been highlighted by prior researchers. There are some promising applications of masstige in specific services which are hitherto unattended. Some of these can be -

RQ 9 - Mass prestige value of Airline or hotel or banking brands (or any service brand) in a country could be estimated and compared using Masstige Mean Score Scale.

For example, the Masstige value of airlines from the US (American, United, Delta) and foreign airlines in the US (Singapore Airways, Qatar Airways, Cathay Pacific) can be compared and analyzed. Similar studies can be conducted in all other country contexts too. For example, Mass prestige value of domestic airlines (All Nippon Airlines, Japan Airlines) and foreign airlines (Emirates, Thai, American) in Japan, using data from consumers, could be computed and compared and the results will have important practical implications for marketers. On the other hand,



such comparative studies can also be undertaken to compare the Mass prestige of public sector and private sector brands in a country in several industries such as airlines, hotels, banking and financial services etc. The impact of mass prestige on market share can also be analyzed measuring cause and effect relationship between the two applying regression and other techniques. Like any construct, masstige strategy will take time to mature as a concept. At this stage, every study around masstige will be an important contribution in this area. Moreover, there are opportunities to develop robust measures to quantify masstige and propensity to buy masstige brands.

## 9. Conclusion

Pertaining to the review of masstige literature, it can be concluded that masstige is gaining popularity among scholars. It is equally welcomed by marketers and consumers both. It can be clearly stated that masstige as a concept has evolved from luxury literature but at the same time it is quite different from traditional luxury. Whereas the interest in masstige has increased, yet there is lot of scope in the theoretical evolution of masstige. Currently, the exploration of masstige is limited to certain product categories, geographic regions and methodologies, which can be further extended to many products, brands, countries and industry contexts and thus taking the concept towards maturity. It would be prudent to use different methods for analysis too. There is lot of scope of contribution towards masstige theory, method and context. From marketers' perspectives, when competition is intensifying sky-high, masstige strategy is a boon. Marketers till now have been successful in downward extension and consumers are looking upward to masstige brands for fulfilling their ideal self. This review has provided a window to look back towards masstige from its inception till date. Along with, the review has also contributed towards masstige literature in terms of segregating the masstige from luxury clearly. Nevertheless, it is important to place on record the relative newness of the masstige as a concept is one of its potential limitations. Masstige strategy and theory are still in evolution stage and therefore generalizing anything about it without evidences would not be prudent.

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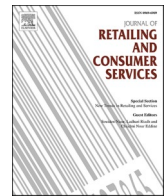
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# Do brands make consumers happy?- A masstige theory perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Happiness has been topic of research since ancient times. This study explores the theory of consumer happiness grounded in the tenets of mass prestige (Masstige), self-consciousness and social ideal self by linking it with brand-induced happiness (Brand Happiness). The relationship is explored in light of self-consciousness and social ideal self by taking them as moderators. Data was collected from a European country using a standard questionnaire measuring brand happiness, masstige, self-consciousness and social ideal self from 346 respondents for three mobile phone brands from America, South Korea and China – iPhone, Samsung and Huawei. Exploratory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling, and Moderation Analysis revealed that the consumption of masstige brands lead to brand happiness. This relationship is moderated by self-consciousness, whereas social ideal self is not moderating the relationship. The study also revealed that only iPhone is a masstige brand. Implications of the findings and managerial applications along with theoretical contributions are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Everyone wants to be happy! Happiness is the ultimate goal that most people strive for (Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017). People invest time, money, and energy to achieve a happy life, but it is quite difficult (Van Boven, 2005). A happy customer may not only tend to evaluate everything around him positively but thinking positive and being in a positive mood may also favorably impact future experiences (Peters et al., 2010) and decisions (Labroo and Patrick, 2009). Therefore, happiness construct has attracted great interest among researchers in the field of psychology and marketing (Barbosa, 2017). Despite that, one of the main unresolved question in consumer research is: “Can a brand make consumer happy?”. This study calls for exploration of happiness in the consumer-brand encounter context.

The present study is an attempt to examine the relationship between masstige (mass prestige associated with brands) and brand happiness (happiness induced due to usage of a brand). These constructs are relatively new in literature and therefore research gaps exist. Brand happiness is the least explored (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018) and there is a dearth of studies on masstige brands (Paul, 2019). Prior studies measuring the role of brands in making consumers happy are not

prevalent in literature. After reviewing the existing literature, just one study was found (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009) proposing a framework to understand the linkage of brands with happiness. They proposed to measure happiness from the brand's perspective through three stages: physiological, emotional and subjective well-being. There are traces in literature which indirectly supports the importance of this proposal (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991) as an important research area. Yet, such effect of brand consumption has hitherto been ignored in research (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Steenkamp, 2005). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to understand the relationship between masstige brands and brand happiness. We attempt to address the evaluations of consumers' brand happiness as a result of the usage of brands in light of the masstige theory.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 is dedicated to a detailed literature review. This section starts with the theoretical underpinning of happiness. The reviewed literature is further divided into 4 sub-sections. The literature review section is followed by the method section (Section 3). After the method section, the implications are presented in discussion. The concluding remarks are given in the last section.

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## 2. Literature review, theory and hypotheses

Ancient Greek philosophers Epicure and Cicero viewed happiness as an absence of pain (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009). However, utilitarian philosophers considered happiness as the sum of material pleasures (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009) which means that an increase in the level of happiness comes from an increase in affluence and control over the material environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The definition of happiness depends on the author and the discipline of the study (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009). Economists and psychologists have long ignored each other in the study of happiness and subjective well-being (SWB). Psychologists generally use the “subjective well-being” construct (Diener et al., 1999). The second wave of research in psychology considers happiness as one of the many human affects, ignoring the cognitive aspect of happiness. In addition, researchers in the field of neurobiology consider happiness as an activation state in a particular part of the human brain (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009). For economists, happiness is a function of personal income and utility derived from consumption (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009). Early economists and philosophers, from Aristotle to Bentham, Mill and Smith, incorporated the concept of happiness into the definition of welfare (Graham, 2016). According to the economic definition of well-being, “higher levels of income are associated with higher levels of well-being through greater levels of material consumption” (Fuentes and Rojas, 2001). In economics and marketing literature, the term happiness is used interchangeably with subjective well-being, utility, welfare, positive affect, and life satisfaction (Barbosa, 2017; Dominko and Verbič, 2019). Some authors have confirmed that happiness and well-being are interrelated concepts (Nicolao et al., 2009; Seligman, 2002) and that the rating of happiness is highly correlated with other measures of psychological and physiological well-being (Sutton and Davison, 2000). Although the measures of subjective well-being include other cognitive and affective items, happiness explains most of the variance in the construct of subjective well-being (Compton et al., 1996). The winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2017, Richard Thaler, has emphasized in behavioral economics and has advocated that consumers are irrational in decision making and they derive satisfaction and happiness psychologically while consuming physically (Committee for the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobe, 2017; Dean and Croft, 2009). This advancement further dilutes the economists’ perspective that happiness is entirely coming out of utilitarian consumption or materialism. The 2017 Nobel prize is a leap forward in giving more weight to the affect-based psychological perspective when it comes to happiness. This study takes into account this affect-based psychological perspective of happiness by operationalizing happiness with the construct of brand happiness.

### 2.1. Happiness research in marketing and consumption

Research on the concept of happiness in marketing is interesting and useful for many reasons. For example, how happiness affects consumer behavior and consumption (the search for information, evaluation, decision making, etc.); how consumption affects consumer happiness (satisfaction, experience, etc.); what are the outcomes of making consumers happy (loyalty, word-of-mouth, repurchase of product etc.) and how the concept of happiness can be integrated into a marketing strategy (Barbosa, 2017).

#### 2.1.1. Influence of consumption on happiness

According to neoclassical economic theory, there is a direct positive relationship between consumption and happiness (Noll and Weick, 2015; Wang et al., 2019). Consumption is the only way to achieve satisfaction because people are insatiable. Consumption is a much more relevant measure of utility, life satisfaction and material standard of living than income (Headey et al., 2008). According to Wang et al. (2019), “consumption reflects an individual’s spending behavior and

directly reflects whether the acquisition of specific goods or services improves their happiness” (p.20). A large number of studies have been conducted on the impact of consumption on happiness. Most of the studies have measured the impact of absolute consumption on happiness (Headey et al., 2008; Noll and Weick, 2015; Stanca Vesenhoven, 2015; Zhang and Xiong, 2015), while few studies have measured the impact of relative consumption on happiness (Fafchamps and Shilpi, 2008; Wang et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2019) considered the impact of relative consumption on happiness in China and found that an increase in average consumption has positive effect on happiness.

Prior studies have shown various types of consumption resulting in happiness, such as car ownership, smoking, leisure activities, as well as the influence of certain demographic and economic factors such as income, employment, race, age, etc. (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009; Robertson, 2016). Earlier studies depict that consumption of products make life easier for people and improve their material status (housing, food, durable goods) (Cheng et al., 2016). Conspicuous or status products (cars, jewelry, luxury travel, cosmetics, etc.) improves the status of an individual in society (Duesenbery, 1949). Consumers engage in spending on leisure activities or charitable activities, because happiness is achieved through the “effect on social relationship” (Wang et al., 2019). Such engagement and consumption is testimony to the idea that consumption leads to happiness for consumer. Researchers have focused on consumption in general or consumption of a particular product category (cars, phones, etc.), while they have rarely shown the relationship between consumption of a particular brand and happiness. This entices us to study the influence of a specific brand’s consumption on happiness.

### 2.2. Marketing, brand and consumer happiness

Can marketers play an important role in making a consumer happy? Literature suggests that through consumption, a marketer can influence consumer’s happiness (Costley et al., 2007; Headey et al., 2008). This can be understood through a simple logic: Consumers spend their money on products because they expect and receive something (fulfillment of demand, satisfaction, etc.) in return. The experiential feeling is termed as an important reward of consumption (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). When people indulge in experiential purchase, they experience increased happiness in comparison to materialistic purchase (Van Boven, 2005; Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003; Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Dunn et al., 2011) and hence it should be looked as inherent part of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Hence, it can be claimed that marketing activities (Desmeules, 2002), purchase and usage of products (Chancellor and Lyubomirsky, 2011; Goldsmith, 2016) are associated with bringing happiness to an individual. Marketers can make consumers to spend money on brands to achieve happiness. They have to play an important role in using this strategy because people are not predisposed to spend their money in such a way that they can maximize their happiness (Hsee and Hastie, 2006). Conspicuous consumption theory gives strong reasons to believe that the usage of brands conspicuously increases happiness (Perez-Truglia, 2013). It is also believed that brands, when consumed conspicuously, may help consumers to accomplish their desired identity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Having achieved the desired identity perceptually makes consumers happy. Happiness and self-identity relationship has been well documented in literature. Happiness is achieved through narrative identity (Bauer et al., 2008), and various elements of self identity (Vignoles et al., 2006; Christiansen, 2000; Kan et al., 2009; McGregor and Little, 1998). There are studies which are connecting long term and short term happiness with identities of humans (Leveto, 2016). For prestige brands, consumers give extended meaning to brands and enhance their identities along with the line of brand’s image (Wiedmann and Hennigs, 2013). This depicts that literature has formidable evidence of happiness and self identity linkage irrespective of identity types and elements (Glu-Aygün, 2004).

Hence, it can be summed up that consumption of brands make consumers happy in multiple ways.

### 2.3. *Masstige theory and brand happiness*

Consumers no longer consume a product for its basic utility, but they seek to fulfill multiple needs (Schiffman et al., 2012) including the need of happiness. Bruhn and Schnebelen's (2017) emphasized this and studied the happiness generated from usage of brand and operationalized this using brand happiness. They defined brand happiness as "a consumer's greatest emotional fulfillment, a moment-based experience of pleasant high and low arousal emotions, induced at different brand contact points" (p.102). Brand Happiness being a relatively novel construct need to be understood for its distinction from affective and cognitive constructs like customer satisfaction, brand experience (Schmitt et al., 2014) etc. (see Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018) for the classical distinction of brand happiness from all other related constructs). For example, customer satisfaction is largely seen as the non-emotional evaluation and judgement related to brands (Yi and Natarajan, 2018; Schmitt et al., 2014) whereas brand happiness is pleasant emotional experience as seen from its definition (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). To be specific, customer satisfaction is largely seen as the difference between expectations and perceptions of customers (Yi and Natarajan, 2018; Yuan and Wu, 2008; Peterson and Wilson, 1992) which is a cognitive evaluation. Studies looking for relationship between brand happiness and customer satisfaction are testimony to this distinction (Gong and Yi, 2018).

Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017) have developed a theoretical appraisal framework of the antecedents and consequences of brand happiness. According to them, there are brand appraisal determinants (brand self-relevance, brand relationship quality, actual and ideal brand self-congruence, and brand goal-congruence) and situational appraisal determinants (certainty, pleasantness, and fairness) of brand happiness. The most important factors influencing brand happiness can be rational (price, quality, services, etc.), situational (each situation differently affects brand happiness), and cultural (products in accordance with the cultural values can make consumers happy). Bettingen and Luedicke (2009) argue that there are three levels of brand experience (brand cues, brand systems for consumers, and brand systems for society) that may affect brand happiness. The emotional fulfillment that brands provide to consumers, as well as their power to influence consumer behavior, qualifies brand happiness as one of the most important branding goals and one of the key research areas of the future (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). If a marketer can make brands to influence consumer happiness, such brands have a competitive advantage over other brands. This can affect preferences, purchase intentions, consumer loyalty and brand equity (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009; Mishra et al., 2014; Barbosa, 2017). According to Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017), brand happiness strongly predicts (re)purchase intention and willingness to pay premium price (as problem-focused coping strategies), word of mouth, brand evangelism and brand forgiveness (as emotional coping strategies). Despite such robust evidences of brand happiness, the impact of brands usage on consumer happiness is underestimated in research. There are only a few studies related to this topic (Bettingen and Luedicke, 2009; Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018).

In light of the above discussion, the brand induced happiness (brand happiness) seems an existing possibility. We extend the prior research about brand happiness towards a new field of research - masstige brands-as masstige value is considered as an important measure of brand equity (Paul, 2018, 2019). Silvestein and Fiske (2003) introduced the term masstige in Harvard Business Review and argued that even non-luxury brands or mass brands can have prestige associated with it. Masstige strategy is about making the prestige attainable to masses by downward extension by mixing product, promotion and place factors appropriately (Paul, 2018). Therefore, where luxury is just for a few people, masstige is for masses (Kumar and Paul, 2018). Since long,

luxury, conspicuous and prestigious brands have been associated with rarity (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999) and has been linked to the experience of happiness. Does it mean that only few consumers who can afford to buy luxury brands can experience happiness? It will be interesting to note whether the consumption of masstige brands can also lead to happiness in consumers. Where the studies directly exploring the masstige brands and brand happiness are scarce, yet literature indirectly has been pointing towards this relationship since long. Hwang and Hyun (2012) confirmed this relationship when he found that consumption of prestige product enhances the happiness of consumers. Similar results were documented by Hwang and Han (2014) for prestige products. Hwang and Han (2014) clearly depicts that prestige of a product/brand leads to happiness for consumers. Similarly, Loureiro and Cunha (2017) found that consumption of prestige wine brand positively influences the happiness and overall satisfaction. Kruger (2018) depicts that ownership of prestige brand, its appearance and other related associations makes consumer happy. Evidences like engagement with brands having symbolic representations enhances consumer happiness because of brands (Niedermeier et al., 2019) is a testimony to the idea that consumption of prestige brands leads to brand induced happiness in consumers.

Following Gilliam and Voss's (2013), we searched for what constitutes the brand happiness and for the studies linking the constituents of brand happiness and prestige (this was done because the studies related to brand happiness and prestige associated with brands are not available). To find out constituents, we used the definition of brand happiness given by Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017). We identified 'pleasant emotions, experiences' induced as result of brand contact as to be the main constituent. We therefore looked for the papers linking pleasant experiences and prestige. This scrutiny again reaffirmed that prestige and brand happiness are related. It is because, buying prestige and luxury brands have been associated with pleasant experiences (Perez et al., 2010; Norton, Durgee and VanDeVelde, 2010) since long. Marketers have also looked at experiences as an important vehicle to communicate the prestige of a brand (Choi et al., 2017).

Pertaining to the above literature, we propose to explore brand induced happiness for regular consumers, who do not consume luxury brands but yet attempt for the attainment of happiness as a result of the consumption of brands. Masstige brands would be a better fit in understanding this relationship between brand consumption and happiness as masstige theory is underlined by many of the concepts (masstige is related to prestige consumption, consumers who are high on self-consciousness are more prone to prestigious brands), which are specifically held responsible for generating happiness due to brand usage. We therefore hypothesize:

**H1.** Consumption of a masstige brands lead to brand happiness among consumers.

### 2.4. *Social ideal self, self consciousness, masstige, and brand happiness*

The general factors identified in the literature that influence happiness includes personal traits, attitudes towards self/others' life, socially developed traits, relationships with other people, and the wider economic, political and social environment (Dolan et al., 2008). Studies have shown a stronger correlation between relative income and happiness (Ball and Chernova, 2008; Frey and Stutzer, 2002). According to the relative income hypothesis, developed by James Duesenberry, "the satisfaction (or utility) an individual derives from a given income level depends on its relative magnitude in the society (e.g., relative to the average income) rather than its absolute level." (as cited in Ozglen, 2019, p.14). This hypothesis is based on the old claim of economists and psychologists that people attach great importance to their social status and relationships.

Engaging in relations is an important predictor of happiness for consumers (Aksoy et al., 2015; Munzel et al., 2018). It is even depicted that lack of relationships can result in lack of happiness. From branding

perspective, we have been witnessing formation of relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998; Long-Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012). It is evident that prestige associated with brands affect the quality of relationship which a consumer shares with brand (Choi et al., 2017). We have evidence of translating the relationship and happiness connection in branding theory. For example, brand owners when get engaged in social relationships with other brand owners, it brings happiness to them (Kruger, 2018). In other words, brands consumption can make consumers happy because of the social relationships generated due to consumption (Costley et al., 2007). Online brand communities of prestigious brands is great example of the notion that getting in social relationship due to brands bring a definitive happiness in consumers (Niedermeier et al., 2019). Similar results were reported by Duan and Dholakia (2017) when they found that interpersonal relationships are influenced by brand purchases and it ultimately leads to happiness. This literature supports that consumption of brands is considered as an important factor influencing social relationships and self. Prestige brands which are consumed for symbolism, experiences, and status attainment are meant to enhance specific social relationships and help in attainment of desired self. Prosocial spending on such brands would result in enhancing social relationships and promoting happiness (Yamaguchi et al., 2016). We are referring to this induced happiness as brand happiness. Therefore, it can be said that brand happiness can alternatively be formed through social relations of humans. Prior research has identified many external, situational, and social status factors that can affect happiness (Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017). Manifesting the above perspective with the literature on consumer behavior, we have enough evidence to believe that consumers give enormous weight to social consumption. The importance given to foreign brands in terms of prestige is one such example (Kumar and Paul, 2018; Lee and Nguyen, 2017; O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2013). It also culminates that consumers draw increased happiness from their social presence. Branding literature also has enough evidence that consumers see brands as partners (Coelho et al., 2018). Brands are strong means of attaining ideal self, be it in the form of attaining membership of an ideal group or attaining ideal self in general (Schiffman et al., 2012). This is even true in the case of masstige brands as consumers tend to get in masstige consumption to fulfill their social image (Kumar et al., 2019).

It is an established fact that one who wishes to use brands as a means of attaining an ideal self (Kumar et al., 2019) is more prone to impression management (Solomon, 2016). These people are more concerned about their social image and would, therefore, be sensitive to their social appearance. Engaging in a specific consumption can give a desired social face to a consumer (Swinyard et al., 2001). Those who wish to attain their ideal self would eventually be more interested in using brands socially. This is because brands are strong means to fulfill one's identity (Kumar and Paul, 2018). There are robust proofs in the literature that happiness, especially the short-lived state of happiness is impacted by an ideal-self depending on the situation (Mikulincer and Peer-Goldin, 1991). This might be true when one talks of social setting (ideal social self). There is confirmed evidence that the consumption of brands is related to the actual and ideal self of consumers (Huber et al., 2018). Those who have a larger gap between their actual and ideal self would psychologically be yearning towards positive goals (Carver et al., 1999) like happiness. It is said that avoidance of undesired self is equally or even more important than approach of ideal self or desired self; and this can strongly influence happiness (Ogilvie, 1987; Phillips et al., 2007). Social comparison theory, self-esteem, and upper mobility construct stress on the notion that people generally are optimistic about their future (Schiffman et al., 2017). People tune to their ideal self, especially social ideal self for fulfilling the valence created by the above concepts. Therefore, it is important to consider the self-related constructs (like social ideal self) to understand happiness (Reich et al., 2013). The social ideal self is exercised by people to attain happiness. This connotes that those who wish to fulfill their social ideal self would use the brands to attain it. We, therefore, propose that those who are more concerned

about their social ideal self would draw more happiness from the consumption of masstige brands. It is hypothesized that:

**H2.** Social ideal self would positively moderate the relationship between masstige brands' usage and brand happiness.

This discussion can be extended to self-consciousness. Masstige brands that fit well in social consumption are best suited for maintaining self-image in society (Hawkins et al., 2014). The theory of self encompasses the components of self-consciousness and social ideal self (Schiffman et al., 2017). It is evident to note that the evaluation of self is influenced by these components. Concept of self-consciousness projects that people high on self-consciousness (specifically public self-consciousness) would be more observant towards their possessions including brands (Solomon, 2016). Arousal of self-consciousness would influence the happiness (Tracy and Robins, 2004). In a study, a related construct to self-consciousness (face consciousness) is found to be moderating the relationship between income and well-being (Zhang and Cao, 2010). It is also proved that to be happy, being aware of oneself plays an important role (Harrington and Loffredo, 2011). There is even biological evidence that changes in self-consciousness may affect the state of happiness of an individual (Martins et al., 2016). It, therefore, is elementary to believe that the level of public self-consciousness a consumer has would influence one's evaluation of himself (Solomon, 2016), which in turn would bring a noticeable effect on happiness. Literature evidences are also available depicting relationship between self consciousness and happiness (Harrington and Loffredo, 2001; Harrington et al., 2014). The above evidences project that public self-consciousness shares a relationship with happiness, and it can also influence the relationship of happiness with other constructs as a moderator. Self-consciousness as moderating variable is not new to behavioral research (Carver et al., 1985; Kimmelmeier, 2001; Bartholow et al., 2000; Carver and Scheier, 1981; LaBrie et al., 2008; Park et al., 2006). Based on this and following the prior literature on moderating variables (Baron and Kenny, 1986), we hypothesize that:

**H3.** Public Self-consciousness would positively moderate the relationship between masstige brands' consumption and brand happiness.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Product category and brands

The study aims to address the overall objective of exploring the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. It also attempts to check the influence of social ideal self and self-consciousness as moderators on the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. The study was carried out in Serbia, an emerging country in Europe (US News, 2018) with an approximate population size of 7 million. Emerging markets set ideal context to study masstige value of brands (Paul, 2015; Kumar et al., 2019). To explore the relationship between masstige and brand happiness, the study was conducted in the context of three popular mobile phone brands - iPhone, Samsung, and Huawei (Country of Origin- United States, South Korea, and China respectively). All users of these three mobile phone brands were invited to fill up the questionnaire designed for the purpose. Reasons for choosing these mobile brands are multiple: 1) Mobile brands are almost owned by everyone in Serbia. In December 2018, the tele density of Serbia was recorded to be above 97 (CEIC, 2019); 2) Mobile phone brands are an important category that fits well in the masstige study. Even one of the brands in the current study - iPhone is recommended to be studied for its mass prestige (Kumar and Paul, 2018); 3) Certain brands of smartphones are used by consumers to display their status (Suki, 2013) and consumers generate happiness from these mobile phones (Chan, 2015); 4) Samsung, Huawei and Apple, recently captured more than 50% of the smartphone global market, with the rest of the market left for hundreds of other brands to compete fiercely. In the first quarter of 2020, global market share of these brands



was 20% for Samsung, 17% for Huawei and 14% for Apple (Counterpoint Technology Market Research, 2020). In Europe, market share of these three brands is 34.42% for Samsung, 25.71% for iPhone, and Huawei stands at 18.6%. Therefore, globally and in the European region, these three brands are the top brands. Prior research (Kumar and Paul, 2018) has already pointed out that best selling brands are expected to be having prestige associated with them. This makes a strong case of selection of these three brands.

### 3.2. Measure

A structured questionnaire was designed to measure four constructs in the study (Masstige, Brand Happiness, Self-consciousness and Ideal Social Self). The questionnaire was divided into six parts. The first part measures the ownership of the phone by the respondent. The second part measures the masstige associated with the mobile phone concerned. Masstige is operationalized by the only available scale propounded by Paul (2015, 2019) (Appendix 1). Schnebelen and Bruhn's (2018) brand happiness scale is used to measure brand happiness (Appendix 2) in third part. Bruhn and Schnebelen developed a scale for measuring brand happiness, which is stable across brands, cultures, and respondents (Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2016). For now, this is the only scale for measuring brand happiness in the extant scientific literature. Self-consciousness is operationalized using public self-consciousness part of the self-consciousness scale proposed by Fenigstein et al. (1975) in fourth part. The public self-consciousness scale (Appendix 3) was chosen because, in the context of this study, we measure the self-consciousness, which one experiences due to the usage of a brand (mobile phone) in the public domain. The ideal social self is operationalized by scale propounded by Sirgy et al. (1997) as fifth part of questionnaire. Sirgy et al. (1997) scale of self-congruity has four operational dimensions of which one is Ideal Social self-congruity. The dimension "Ideal social self-congruity" is used to operationalized the ideal social self (Appendix 4) in this study. Questions relating to demographics are kept in the sixth part of the questionnaire as suggested by Malhotra (2008). On all the four scales used in this study, the scoring instructions as advocated by original authors are followed.

The final questionnaire was transcribed in google forms and the link of the google form was provided to the potential respondents using social media (Facebook and WhatsApp). Following the convenience sampling, we got 346 useable responses. These responses were analyzed using factor analysis, structural equation modelling and moderation analysis for addressing the objectives.

### 4. Analysis

Data revealed that among the three brands of mobile phones in this study, Samsung is the most used brand followed by Huawei and iPhone. From the sample, 191 respondents were female whereas 155 respondents were male. Almost all respondents are living in urban parts of Serbia. The majority of the respondents are earning 50,000 to 100,000 dinars monthly (see Table 1).

To achieve the overall objective of understanding whether masstige brands leads to brand happiness, the reliability of all the constructs was checked. All the scales were found to be reliable as cronbach alpha for masstige, brand happiness, social ideal self, and self-consciousness was 0.851, 0.967, 0.973 and 0.762 respectively. To begin with, the masstige score of the three brands was calculated. To calculate the masstige score, the score of all 10 items on the Masstige Mean Score scale (Paul, 2019) was summed up. Analysis reveals that iPhone is scoring 72 percent (highest) on the masstige score (36.06) followed by Huawei, 68 percent (34.16) and Samsung, 65 percent (32.91). The difference between the masstige scores of three brands were further subjected to ANOVA and *t*-test to see if the three brands in study statistically differ in their masstige scores from each other or not. ANOVA gave significant result depicting that masstige score of brands under study are different

**Table 1**  
Demographics of respondents.

Demographics	Demographic Categories	Mobile Phone Brand			
		Samsung	iPhone	Huawei	Total
Gender	Male	59	40	56	155
	Female	93	46	52	191
	Total	152	86	108	346
Living Area	Urban Area	145	86	106	337
	Rural Area	7	0	2	9
	Total	152	86	108	346
Monthly Income	Nil	23	22	14	59
	Less than 30,000 Dinars	10	1	3	14
	Between 30,000 and 50,000 Dinars	23	8	19	50
	Between 50,000 and 70,000 Dinars	31	17	31	79
	Between 70,000 and 100,000 Dinars	35	17	15	67
	Between 100,000 and 130,000 Dinars	16	9	11	36
	Above 130,000 Dinars	14	12	15	41
	Total	152	86	108	346

(Table 2). We also applied one sample *t*-test by taking the benchmark value of masstige to check mass prestige of brand (Paul, 2015). Result of *t*-test depict that masstige score of Huawei and Samsung are significantly different from the test value (35.71) depicting that Huawei and Samsung's score is significantly less than the benchmark score required to call a brand as masstige brand. Corroborating these two findings (ANOVA and *t*-test) clearly depicts that only Apple's iPhone is a masstige brand. Huawei and Samsung have not been perceived as masstige brands in Serbia.

The scale of brand happiness has 11 items in it. These 11 items were subjected to factor analysis with principal component analysis as an extraction method and varimax as a rotation method to find dimensions of brand happiness if any. Factor analysis gave one-factor solution explaining 75 percent of variance (KMO: 0.930, Bartlett's test of sphericity's significance: 0.00). The gross mean of 11 items was calculated as a score of this factor which is called brand happiness (see Table 2). As suggested by propounders of scales of social ideal self and self-consciousness, the scoring for social ideal self was done by taking a gross mean of the three statements of the scale and the score of self-consciousness was calculated by summing up the 7 items of self-consciousness scale (Table 2).

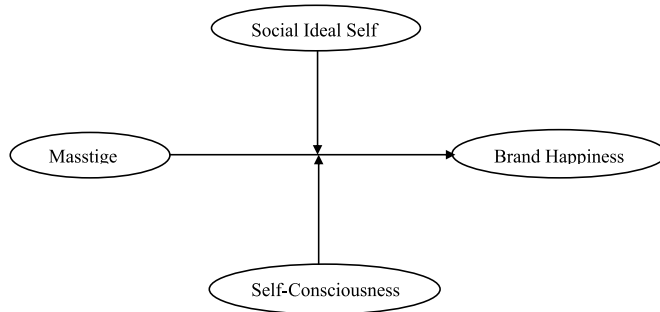
To evaluate the relationship between masstige and brand happiness, and whether this relationship is moderated by social ideal self and self-consciousness individually or both together, a structural model was built in AMOS.

Masstige was taken as an independent variable and brand happiness was taken as a dependent variable. Social ideal self and self-consciousness were taken as moderating variables in the model. A hybrid model was run in AMOS (taking the masstige, brand happiness, social ideal self and self-consciousness as latent variables). A simple line-based description of the model is shown in Fig. 1. First, this model was tested in AMOS for its reliability, validity and model fit. The composite reliability for masstige, social ideal self, and self-consciousness in the AMOS model were calculated as 0.839, 0.923 and 0.726 respectively. The square root of AVE for masstige, social ideal self and self-consciousness were reported as 0.598, 0.871 and 0.532 respectively. These figures confirm the reliability and validity of the model.

The model was also found to be having a good fit (Chi-square significance: 0.00, CMIN/DF: 2.57, CFI: 0.92, RMSEA: 0.03). This model gave significant regression weight (0.227) for the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. The relationship between the social ideal self and brand happiness is also found out to be significant (regression weight: 0.407). But the relationship between self-consciousness and

**Table 2**  
Score of constructs in study.

Brand	Masstige		Social Ideal Self		Self-Consciousness		Brand Happiness	
	Masstige (Maximum Score - 50)	ANOVA/ Welch Sig	Social Ideal Self (Maximum Score - 5)	ANOVA/ Welch Sig	Self-Consciousness (Maximum Score - 35)	ANOVA/ Welch Sig	Brand Happiness	ANOVA/ Welch Sig
Apple	36.06 (72%)	0.00	2.81	0.85	25.63	0.42	3.26	0.03
Samsung	32.92 (65%)		2.75		25.19		2.90	
Huawei	34.16 (68%)		2.60		25.59		2.96	



**Fig. 1.** Masstige brand happiness model.

brand happiness is not significant. This depicts that the masstige and social ideal self are positively contributing to the brand happiness for the three brands under study. This means that the more masstige value a brand has, the more happiness in owning that brand will produce. This finding supports the first hypothesis (H1). As the masstige value of Apple's iPhone is the highest among the three brands, so it can be said that iPhone has been able to establish mass prestige in Serbia and this mass prestige can be helpful for iPhone in increasing the perceived brand happiness for iPhone users. It further depicts that having a masstige brand is helpful for the marketer as it makes its consumers happy.

To test moderation effects, there are two methods prevalent. One is multi-group testing by having the moderating variable as a categorical variable and another is using interaction effects by taking moderating variables as a continuous variable. We decided to adopt both methods to arrive at a comprehensive picture. We can take moderating variables as categorical and continuous variables both as both of these variables are measured on a continuous scale. First, moderation was checked using a multi-group method. For this, the social ideal self and self-consciousness were converted into categorical variables. This was done by creating a new variable for both social ideal self and self-consciousness. New variables were created in SPSS by ranking the existing responses as first or second depending on the score on these two variables. Rank one was given to those respondents who have larger than average scores on social ideal self and self-consciousness. Those having lower than average scores on these two constructs were given the second rank. The first moderation effect of social ideal self was checked using a multi-group method. The relationship between masstige and brand happiness was tested twice, with a low social ideal self group and high social ideal self group. Groups were picked up from the ranking which was done on social ideal self. Thereafter, the difference in significance of the relationship was checked for the significant difference using regression weights of both groups and their critical ratios. To check the moderation, a trimmed hybrid model in AMOS was built and effects for masstige and brand happiness were checked for their significance (model fit for the trimmed model: chi-square significance: 0.00, CMIN/DF: 2.80, CFI: 0.92, RMSEA: 0.04). Checks for significant group effects revealed that for low social ideal self users, the relationship between masstige and brand happiness is significant while it is not the case for high social ideal self. Overall, the difference between the relationship between low and high social ideal self is not significant. This depicts that social ideal self is not moderating the relationship between masstige and brand happiness.

This finding is not supporting the second hypothesis (H2). A similar analysis for self-consciousness revealed opposite results. This means that self-consciousness is moderating the relationship between masstige and brand happiness (see Table 3).

To further understand the moderation effect of self-consciousness, standardized regression weights of the relationship (Masstige → Brand Happiness) were looked at, when self-consciousness was low and high. Regression weight in case of low self-consciousness was 0.32 and for high self-consciousness was 0.22. This depicts that self-consciousness dampens the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. This signifies that as users become more conscious about themselves, they are able to draw less happiness from the brand they are using. To get a comprehensive picture of the moderation effects, in the second phase, we checked the moderation effects using interaction effects. To check the moderation, we looked at the significance of three relationships for one moderating variable. For example, to check whether social ideal self moderates the relationship between masstige and brand happiness, we checked the significance of 1) Masstige → Brand Happiness, 2) Social Ideal Self → Brand Happiness, and 3) Masstige x Social Ideal Self (Interaction) → Brand Happiness. Masstige x Social Ideal Self is checking the interaction effects. We did this analysis on standardized values of the three variables under study for social ideal self-moderation.

To check these effects, we used the hybrid model. After adding the variables of interaction effects, the model fit for the model was not impacted (chi-square significance: 0.00, CMIN/DF: 2.23, CFI: 0.90, RMSEA: 0.04).

Results revealed that there is a significant relationship between 1) Masstige → Brand Happiness, and 2) Social Ideal Self → Brand Happiness. The relationship between self-consciousness and brand happiness is not significant. In addition, none of the effects of the interactions were significant. Interesting to note that social ideal self individually is leading to brand happiness, but its interaction is not significant. This reveals that none of the moderating variables taken in the study are moderating the relationship between masstige and brand happiness (see Table 4).

To arrive at the final conclusion about the moderation effect of ideal social self and self-consciousness on the relationship between masstige and brand happiness, we looked at the results of moderation analysis from two phases in aggregation. The aggregated results are shown in Table 5.

The aggregate results show that out of the two analysis techniques used to check moderation, the social ideal self is clearly depicted as a variable that does not have a moderation effect. For self-consciousness, the results in the case of group differences are significant and in case of interaction effects, it is not significant. As self-consciousness is found to be a moderating variable in group differences moderation analysis only, we looked at the interaction graph for self-consciousness in moderation analysis using interaction effects (Fig. 2).

Though the interaction effects are not statistically significant, since one analysis depicts it significant, we decided to look at the interaction plot to take a final call on moderation of self-consciousness. The interaction effect plot is plotted taking the unstandardized regression weights for masstige (independent variable), moderator (self-consciousness) and interaction (masstige x self-consciousness). The interaction plot depicts that as masstige increases, brand happiness is increasing for the low value of self-consciousness. The same is the case for the high value of

**Table 3**  
Moderation analysis - group differences table.

For Relationship Masstige- > Brand Happiness						
Moderating Variables	Significance for Relationship for Low Value of Moderating Variable <sup>1</sup>	Significance for Relationship for High Value of Moderating Variable	Is There Significant Difference in Relationship Among Two Groups	Moderation Exist	Standardized Regression Weights for Relationship if Moderation Exists	
					For Low Value of Moderating Variable	For High Value of Moderating Variable
Social Ideal Self	Significant (0.01)	Non-Significant (0.07)	No	No	NA	NA
Self	Significant (0.00)	Significant (0.00)	Yes	Yes	0.32	0.22
-Consciousness						

self-consciousness. It is clearly seen that the low self-consciousness and high self-consciousness lines are almost intersecting at a low value of masstige. If we stretch the low self-consciousness (blue line) and high self-consciousness (orange line) backward, they are definitely going to intersect and that would lead to interaction (Fig. 2). Considering this along with the significant results of self-consciousness as moderating variables in group differences moderation analysis, we conclude that self-consciousness is moderating the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. Standardized regression weights for low (0.32) and high (0.22) self-consciousness reveals that self-consciousness as a moderator is dampening the positive relationship between masstige and brand happiness. This is not in support with the third hypothesis (H3). Snapshots of the above analysis, findings, and their implications are depicted in Table 6.

## 5. Discussion

This study addresses the forgotten perspective of consumer behavior – consumer happiness. Study depicts that brands can make consumers happy. It therefore makes strong support to the argument that situations and circumstances can affect happiness of consumer (Etkin and Mogilner, 2016; Zhong and Mitchell, 2013). Placing the findings of this study in the literature, the current study contributes in de-confusing the mixed claims relating to this relationship. It is because earlier researches about consumption and happiness have given mixed results (Laisawat et al., 2012). The debate of products, consumption and materialism bringing happiness for consumer or not is not new. Many studies have favored the notion (Helm et al., 2019; Ahuvia, 2002; Segev et al., 2015; Aksoy et al., 2015; Duan, 2020; Netemeyer et al., 2018; Suzuki et al., 2019; Chaplin, 2009) and many are against it (Drennan et al., 2011; Pera and Viglia, 2015; Laisawat et al., 2012; Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002). This study is in support to those results which proposes that there is possibility of drawing happiness from such purchases which are experiential (Bastos and Brucks, 2017; Mayer et al., 2020), affective (Pera and Viglia, 2015; Hwang and Lyu, 2015) and symbolic (Kim, 2010). Making consumers happy, marketers may be rewarded with loyalty and word of mouth (El et al., 2013).

At micro level, among iPhone, Samsung, and Huawei, only iPhone is perceived as masstige brand in Serbia. Apple as a brand has earlier also reported to bring satisfaction (Cockrill, 2008) and in turn happiness to consumer. This is supporting the earlier literature propagating iPhone as a masstige brand (Paul, 2018). The mass prestige to iPhone may be coming from ideal, independent design-thinking (Chang et al., 2013; Saardchom, 2014) and its ability to give huge importance to its concept (Brown, 2006), in comparison to Samsung and other brands. In other countries like Taiwan, Apple is also found to be efficient and won the loyalty of consumers (Chen and Ann, 2016). iPhone has even enjoyed the loyalty of jailbreakers (those who use the iPhone but uses unauthorized software on iPhone to run third-party apps which Apple does not allow to be used) (Lee and Soon, 2017). Despite being the only brand in the study to be called a masstige brand in Serbia, consumers are buying the iPhone the least because of low discretionary income. Serbia being a low/middle income (average income is only 350 euros) and price-conscious country, might be considering the iPhone as expensive (the most basic version of the cheapest new iPhone is \$ 749) and hence opting to buy android phones. This shows that Serbians are not “obsessed” for the iPhone but they consider it as a mass prestige brand. While the experience of happiness from iPhone usage has been reported in the media world over (Telegraph, 2011; Guardian, 2014), the present study provides an empirical base to this report. It has already been reported that the iPhone’s use may be attributed to hedonic and experiential outcomes (Arruda-Filho et al., 2010; J.M. Arruda-Filho and Lennon, 2011). The present study fills up the gap that it is because the iPhone is a masstige brand, it is making its users enjoy experiential outcomes like happiness. Combining the above findings with the evidence that experiences lead to happiness in consumers (Nicolao et al.,

**Table 4**

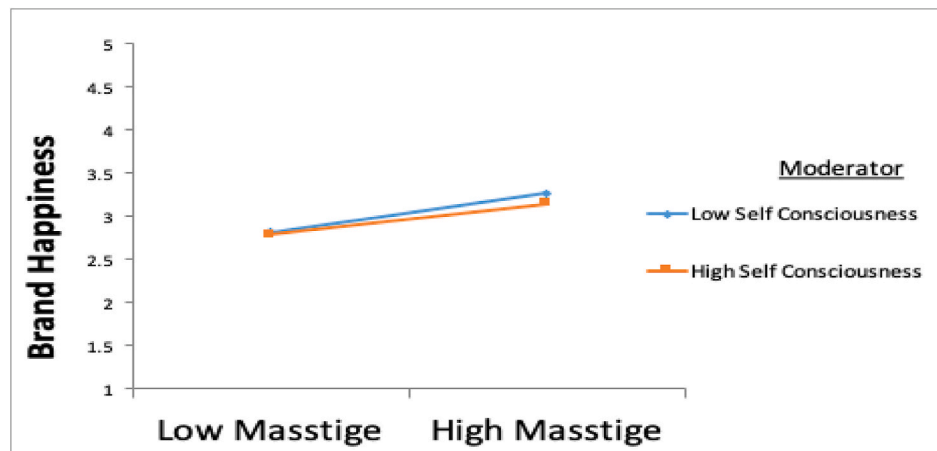
Moderation analysis – interaction effects.

Moderating Variable	Relationship	Significance		Moderation Exists
		P-Value	Significant?	
Social Ideal Self	Masstige- > Brand Happiness	0.01	Yes	No
	Social Ideal Self- > Brand Happiness	0.00	Yes	
Self-Consciousness	Masstige x Social Ideal Self- > Brand Happiness	0.37	No	No
	Masstige- > Brand Happiness	0.01	Yes	
	Self-Consciousness- > Brand Happiness	0.43	No	
	Masstige x Self Consciousness- > Brand Happiness	0.46	No	

**Table 5**

Aggregate moderation effects table.

Moderating Variable	Relationship	Moderation Analysis		Moderation Exists
		Group Differences	Interaction Effects	
Social Ideal Self	Masstige- > Brand Happiness	No	No	No
Self-Consciousness		Yes	No	Yes

**Fig. 2.** Interaction plot for self-consciousness.

2009), it becomes evident for marketers to generate favorable experiences in the context of the brand encounter. It can be concluded that the mass prestige of the brand, has the potential to make its users happy. As masstige is a mass phenomenon, marketers can adopt a masstige strategy to make their consumers happy.

Findings indicate that those who are more concerned about how they are being perceived and those who anthropomorphize their personality through brands are found to be deriving happiness due to brand consumption. This is perhaps the first empirical evidence of such a relationship. This result is advancing the earlier understanding where it was inferred that consumers were in the process of finding convergence between how they would like to be seen as, and how they can use brands to achieve that and therefore feel happy. The importance of self-congruity directly or indirectly has been constantly highlighted by scholars. Here are some examples: self-congruity is an important dimension of relationship which consumers share with brands (Albert et al., 2008); consumption of brand is an inevitable mirror of social self (Liao and Wang, 2009), etc. Therefore, the results supports the scattered argument that components of self have a role to play between purchase and happiness (Duan, 2020). Current literature is not very vocal about the moderating role of components of self. This study fills up this less explored area.

No conclusive evidence of the impact of one's social ideal self on the relationship between mass prestige brands and the happiness they generate was found in this study. What if someone looks up to a brand to attain their ideal self or not, he/she shall still draw happiness as a result

of the usage of a masstige brand. It is interesting to note that the iPhone has the highest score for masstige, social ideal self, and brand happiness. iPhone users are surely happier because they have iPhone, but these users are not the ones who would like to use iPhones to project who they are socially. Can we say that in Serbia, the iPhone is not perceived as something special? People know that the iPhone is the most expensive brand; yet it is popular among young people in Serbia. Yet, why is it not considered an option to achieve social ideal self? One possible explanation could be that despite being expensive, communication regarding the iPhone in Serbia is stressing on functional benefits. We cannot even find commercials for the Serbian market, only texts about product benefits. Premium price points iPhone towards luxury, yet it is positioned on functional benefits, which drags the iPhone towards the category of masstige brands. This could be why the social ideal self is important for brand happiness in general, but not recognized as a moderating variable as the social ideal self is connected to the symbolic values of brands.

This study found self-consciousness to be dampening the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. Self-consciousness is not leading to brand happiness. The results are in support of those studies where self-consciousness is found to be negatively affecting happiness (Argyle and Lu, 1990; Xu, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi and Wong, 2014). It connotes that happiness induced by iPhone's usage is less for those whose self-consciousness is high and vice versa. For a masstige brand user, being self-conscious would negatively affect the happiness one is drawing from a brand in Serbia. Self-consciousness has been increasing



**Table 6**  
Summary table of analysis, findings, and implications.

Variable	Findings	Implications in the Context of This Study	Managerial Implications
Masstige	Lead to Brand Happiness	Apple's iPhone has established itself as a masstige brand, so possession and usage of the iPhone make its users happy. iPhone users in Serbia are feeling happy because of owning of iPhone (brand happiness score of iPhone is maximum).	The higher the mass prestige of a brand, the higher the potential to make its users happy. As masstige is a mass phenomenon, marketers can adopt a masstige strategy to make their consumers happy.
Social Ideal Self	Do not positively moderate the relationship (Masstige → Brand Happiness)	For iPhone users, its mass prestige is making them happy as iPhone users are having the highest score in brand happiness. This happiness effect is not impacted by the social ideal self of a consumer in Serbia.	The social ideal self does not have any impact on the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. Irrespective of the social ideal self, masstige will result in happiness for consumers.
Self-Consciousness	It negatively moderates the relationship (Masstige → Brand Happiness)	Only the iPhone is a masstige brand. Apple iPhone users have the highest self-consciousness score. Apple iPhone users in Serbia who are extra conscious about themselves are drawing less happiness from iPhone usage in comparison to those who do not give importance to their consciousness.	Self-consciousness is dampening the positive relationship between masstige and brand happiness. The more one is conscious about himself, the less happiness he will be able to draw due to the usage of a masstige brand.
Brand Happiness	Apple's users have maximum perceived happiness followed by Huawei and Samsung.	Apple iPhone users in Serbia are the happiest people because of their consumption of the masstige brand. Samsung and Huawei are not masstige brands. Users of Samsung and Huawei are not certain whether they are happy because of owning the mobile phone.	Brands can be used to make consumers happy. Marketers should attempt to adopt a masstige strategy for brands. This would alternatively make their consumers happy.

for consumers worldwide (Belk and Pollay, 1985). There is evidence that it is good for a marketer to have high consciousness (Bushman, 1993; Nan and Heo, 2007). But current results depict a counter picture to that. It, therefore, requires more empirical evidence.

In this study, brand happiness is found to be influenced by mass prestige of a brand positively. It corroborates the findings of prior studies that brands can make consumers happy (Woodside et al., 2008; Bianchi et al., 2014). We can say that adopting a masstige strategy is an important alternative for marketers to make consumers happy. Samsung and Huawei users are not having a considerable score on brand happiness, nor are they a masstige brand. Contrary to this, the iPhone has not only been perceived as a masstige brand but also a brand that results in happiness for its users. A low score for Samsung on brand happiness can also be explained through the opinion of Serbians. Many consumers in Serbia own two to three phones. People in Serbia are not treating mobile phone brands as “lifestyle things” and Samsung is not an exception. Close scrutiny of the brand happiness scale reveals that the score for some items is relatively high (glad, relaxed and comfortable - greater than 3.2) and for some items is much lower (lively, energetic, proud, superior - less than 3). The first set of items represents functional attributes and the second one symbolic attributes/benefits/values. This depicts that people in Serbia are looking at mobile phones as more of a functional product rather than a symbolic one. This could be one reason that only the iPhone has qualified as a masstige brand. Even looking further, the iPhone has the highest score among all three brands on functional attributes of brand happiness (glad - 3.71, relaxed - 3.44, comfortable - 3.62). Having scored highest on functional attributes is contrary to masstige image. The answer lies in the scores of symbolic attributes. It is only the iPhone that has scored more than 3 on symbolic attributes. Samsung and Huawei both have less than 3 on all those symbolic variables. This explains why the iPhone is the only masstige brand and gives happiness to its users. iPhone is functional and symbolic both whereas Samsung and Huawei are functional only mobile brands in Serbia.

## 6. Conclusion

Studies connecting the usage of brand and happiness are not many. This study affirms that the usage of masstige brands by consumers may make them happy. This can be seen as theoretical extension of masstige theory. The relationship between prestige brands and happiness can be explained through simple fulfillment of need which in turn may make consumers happy. It is depicted that only iPhone is a masstige brand among Samsung, iPhone, and Huawei. It is also established that those who look at brands to attain their social ideal self are better targets for

masstige brands as these people would derive happiness from brand usage. Because one is sensitive towards social ideal self, this does not impact the relationship between prestige associated with brands and happiness derived from its usage. On the contrary, self-consciousness is dampening the relationship between masstige and brand-induced happiness. Marketers have to attempt to create their brand as a masstige brand. This would solve two problems for a marketer: A) Doing so would give symbolic value to the brand; B) It would make users of such brands attain happiness. Marketers do not need to concentrate on those consumers who use brands to attain their social ideal self to make them happy because of a brand. Brand induced happiness is independent of the social ideal self and reduced by self-consciousness.

The best efforts have been undertaken to have a robust study. However, there are some limitations that can be addressed in future studies. The current study specifically addresses the impact of brands consumption on happiness. This relationship can be influenced by many other factors. For example, individuals' general happiness can strongly influence the choice specific happiness. We have studies which are putting happiness first and gauges its influence on product and services perceptions (Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Lawson, 2012; Laisawat et al., 2012; White and Yu, 2019). Happy people tend to perceive services better (Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011) and expected to involving more in repurchase (Septianto et al., 2019). Future research in this area may include this aspect when studying choice specific happiness of consumers.

Another aspect to keep in mind is the fact that the current study was conducted using data from consumers in Serbia, as small emerging country in Europe. It would be interesting to conduct similar studies with a sample composed of residents in countries with a similar level of development (emerging countries), in different regions in the world and compare these results with a sample composed of residents of developed European countries. Such a study would overcome cultural and economic differences, and provide answers to some important questions, such as whether brand perception as masstige depends on levels of country development, especially average income and cultural differences. Second, this study did not include the possible impact of advertising and other promotional activities on brand perception as masstige and influence of such kind of perception on happiness. Advertising (in a particular country) may have a moderating effect on the perception of the brand as masstige and consequently, happiness. For example, Samsung in Serbia often uses price promotions to attract consumers, while the promotion of more expensive (lifestyle) models is less intensive. Lifestyle-focused advertising usually shows the achievement of higher values, such as happiness. Specifically, although iPhone, Samsung and Huawei are global brands, the focus of their promotional activities may



vary between countries, especially between developed and developing countries.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102318>.

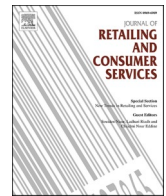
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# Intrinsic motivation of luxury consumers in an emerging market

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## ABSTRACT

Consumers no longer consider luxury as an absolute goal. Even though previous studies have primarily linked luxury with consumers' extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivational factors have seen few studies. As a result of this gap, this study attempts to investigate the intrinsic factors that influence consumers' experiences with luxury brands. By using self-determination theory, this paper aims to assess the personal 'self' factors of luxury consumers' enriching experiences. An offline questionnaire from 316 luxury consumers was used to collect data for the study. AMOS SEM v 22 was then used to analyse the data. Our findings indicate that luxury consumers have shifted to luxury for 'self,' and are driven by intrinsic factors. As luxury relates to consumers' self-fulfilment, it creates an intrinsic and substantive experience for customers that assists them in their search for self-growth. The study contributes to the literature concerning personal self and enriching experiences through luxury consumption and creates an opportunity to examine the impact of consumers' happiness, which was discovered to be a critical indicator of enriched luxury experience and word of mouth, resulting in a boosting of the personal self.

## 1. Introduction

Luxury is a constantly changing notion with its meaning evolving with consumers taste and likings. Based on consumers' urge to move up Maslow's pyramid, the luxury needs of consumers have gone up from 'esteem' needs to the highest level of 'self-actualization' needs. This new luxury is totally personal and experiential, and this experience is based on consumers' personal values, desires and goals (Loureiro et al., 2020). Prior research on the topic of luxury consumption has focused on understanding the effects of extrinsic motivation (Shao et al., 2019; Truong and McColl, 2011; Kim et al., 2020) and impressive exterior (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; Hennigs et al., 2013; Henning and Kilian, 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2009; Dhaliwal et al., 2020). Studies in the past (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Berger and Ward, 2010) have highlighted that the most significant myth pertaining to luxury consumption is the fact that products are bought for public display and social status. However, researchers (Peng et al., 2020; Truong and McColl, 2011) have argued that more than ever, today's consumers purchase luxury for experience and self-indulgence. Our research considers this and aims to provide a framework to help luxury marketers address consumers' intrinsic desires that enrich their luxury consumption experience. Regarding luxury consumption, little has been researched as to what aspects leads to intrinsic motivation (Truong and McColl (2011)). Therefore, we try to

address this gap by developing a framework to measure the impact of some intrinsic motivation factors on luxury consumer behaviour.

Intrinsic motivation implies fulfilling an action due to its intrinsic pleasure rather than separable outcome, i.e., indulging in a behaviour for happiness and experience (Ryan and Deci, 2007). Intrinsically motivated consumers tend to carry out an action because of their internal desire (Berlyne, 1966) and personal 'self.' Wilcox et al. (2009) states that luxury consumers are motivated by a need to show who they are as opposed to what they appear to be. Ahuvia (2005) highlights that consumers use their consumption behaviour to reflect 'self-expression,' and self-gifting also enhances one's self-worth (Mick and Demoss, 1990). Shao et al. (2020) opines that luxury consumers are becoming inconspicuous which has changed the luxury market. Moreover, luxury products purchased for self-directed pleasure (Tsai, 2005), self-determined experience (Snell et al. 1995) and personal pleasure (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999) are pursued by consumers looking for personal goals (Tsai, 2005). Hence, the research hypotheses address the effects of intrinsic motivational factors in enriching the luxury experience.

Correspondingly, Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) states that intrinsic motivation leads to subjective happiness then extrinsic motivation. We further examined if consumers the enriched luxury experience garnered through personal motivational factors leads to subjective

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happiness. Consequently, an enriching luxury experience is linked with positive word of mouth, as this strengthens the individual 'self' (Karjala-luoto et al., 2016).

The findings from the current study reveal that firstly, today's consumer seeks for luxury consumption to enhance their 'self' through an improved luxury experience. As significant attention has been paid to create a luxury experience, intrinsically oriented purchases play a significant role in reflecting this experience. Secondly, while few studies examine the influence of intrinsic motivations, self-determination theory is used to identify these factors. Thirdly, this study advances the theoretical literature on self-directed luxury consumption and provides practical insights into the individual aspect of luxury.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section, the theoretical framework is developed and presented, followed by hypothesis development. The section following this outlines the research methodology used and presents the results. Finally, the implications are discussed, and limitations and directions for future research are set out prior to the concluding remarks.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1. Self-determination theory (SDT)

SDT has been widely reported and developed in consumer motivation research work and many consumer behaviour studies relating to luxury consumption have used this theoretical framework (Shao et al., 2019; Ki and Kim, 2016; Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012). Guided by self-determination theory (SDT), this study derives intrinsic motivation constructs from SDT, a macro human motivation theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory suggests that humans are motivated by three common and intrinsic psychological desires in order to evolve and change: their experience of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Gilal et al., 2018). SDT is based on the notion that human behaviour is self-determined and develops because of their personal experience and perception (Ryan and Deci, 2008). Consequently, attaining a state of happiness reflects an individual's determination to fulfil those needs (Truong and McColl, 2011). Furthermore, the theory states that a close relationship exists between consumers' psychological needs and the pursuit of life goals (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996), which can be classified as intrinsic goals (such as intrinsic rewards and benefits) for

internal "autonomous" reasons. Intrinsic consumers engage in activities because of inherent factors like self-fulfilment and personal enjoyment. Past researchers have widely used SDT in consumer motivation studies specifically in the context of luxury consumption (Shao et al., 2019; Ki and Kim, 2016; Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012; Truong and McColl, 2011).

The current study, based on three intrinsic factors, builds on the framework derived from the tenets of self-determination theory: autonomy (hedonism, self-gratification), competence (vanity, self-gift giving) and relatedness (self-identity). Based on the role of these constructs in reflecting luxury consumer experience we propose a conceptual model for our study (See Fig. 1).

Autonomy is imperative for self-motivation and refers to the ability to contribute to a task. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy is the cognitive notion of self and is related to experience and behaviour inclusive with one's feeling of self. In this context, autonomy is closely linked to consumers' ability to personalise themselves. As consumers' inner experience is essential, the factors of hedonism and self-gratification in enriching luxury experience are examined.

Competence refers to the psychological and intrinsic experience that motivates consumers to work towards a desirable outcome (Deci and Ryan, 2000). It is the need to experience the behaviour as an integral function and includes an effectiveness related outcome and successfully engaging in activities. Therefore, vanity and self-gift-giving are studied as indicators for competence.

Relatedness is connected to the necessity to develop a strong emotional connection and attachment with others or to be a member of a group (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-identity defines an individual's personality in a social context (Husic and Cicic, 2009), hence self-identity is an indicator for relatedness in this study.

### 2.2. Hypotheses development

#### 2.2.1. Consumer luxury experience

Today, companies are placing experience at the centre of their business models. As consumer experience is comprehensive, it includes wide facets of brands and marketing strategies (Verhoef et al., 2009). Experiences happen when consumers engagement with the brands results into emotional behaviour that link them personally and memorably with the brand (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Atwal and Williams (2017),

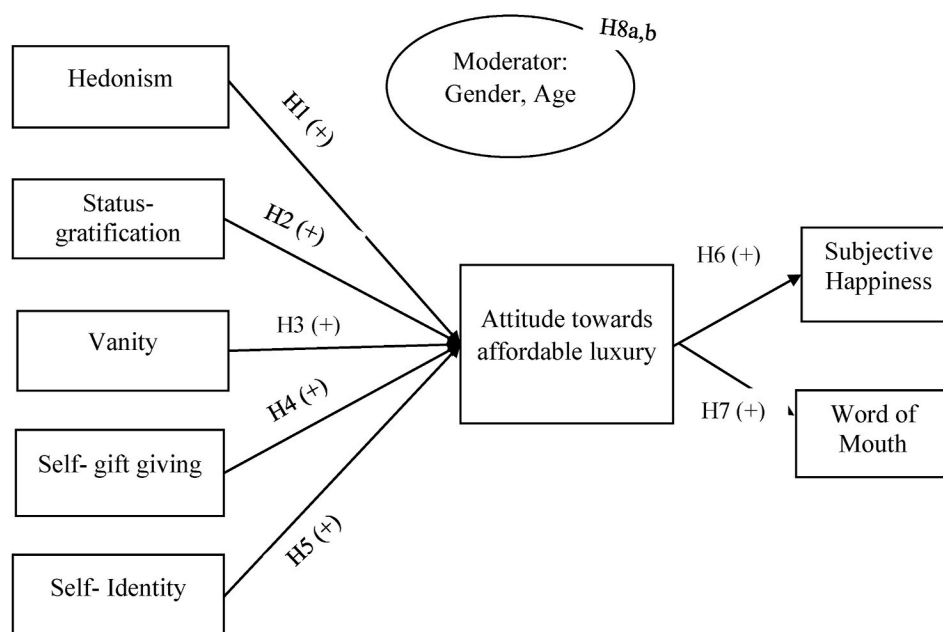


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

opines that in luxury marketing, experience is everything. Though some studies in the past (Stylidis et al., 2016) have demonstrated that for a rich luxury experience, consumers give importance to functionality and quality of the products, others have emphasised the importance of experience-oriented approach, as essential for enticing luxury consumers (Bastos, 2019; Kumar and Gilovich, 2016). These consumers experience focuses on functional as well as emotional cues and is assessed based on the “pleasure” they reap from such consumption (Atwal and Williams, 2017). In addition, experience is also seen as a competitive advantage enabling the luxury companies to distinguish its offerings and to build a strong connection with its consumers. Moreover, by creating strong emotions the luxury marketers communicate with the consumers resulting in consumer experience that goes beyond pleasant and satisfying luxury experience (Tynan et al., 2010). Thus, experience-based luxury consumption centres around customers preferences rooted in the sense of consumerism and aims to satisfy internal and external needs of luxury consumers. Furthermore, knowing these needs of consumers would help the marketers in delivering a memorable and pleasant experience that will enhance consumers self and values reflected by the brands.

### 2.2.2. Consumer intrinsic motivation

With the changing taste of luxury consumers, the prominence of self-consumption (Tsai, 2005) that evokes consumers’ emotional aspect has emerged. Consumption of luxury goods is essential for individuals to pursue their desires and aspirations (Truong et al., 2010) that are driven by their intrinsic goals (Moraes et al., 2015) and self-directed love for themselves. Researchers (Truong and McColl, 2011; Dhaliwal et al., 2020) believe that a strong link exists between consumers’ cognitive desires and their quest to fulfil their personal desires. According to Kasser and Ryan (1996), individuals’ intrinsic desires are reflected through their psychological empowerment, self-determination, self-esteem, and well-being, as the perception of self encompasses how an individual think about themselves (LA. Gil et al., 2012).

Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009) defined luxury based on four latent variables, namely, financial value, functional value, individual value and social value. Vickers and Renand (2003) defined luxury “as the symbols of personal and social identity, i.e. their principle values are psychological, and their consumption is dependent upon personal, social and individual cues.” Though luxury is mostly defined as a symbol of ostentatiousness (Amatulli and Guido, 2011), opulence (Han et al., 2010), conspicuousness (Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Wiedmann et al., 2007, 2009), sumptuousness (Miller and Mills, 2012) and consumers trying to imitate their significant others (Dholakia and Talukdar, 2004), not every luxury purchase is an attempt to flaunt an individual’s wealth and status. Some consumers are seeking intrinsic benefits (Truong and McColl, 2011; Truong et al., 2010) through the concept of self (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). As nowadays, consumers’ concept of luxury revolves more around the individual than society. Our study focuses on Danziger (2005) argument that consumption of luxury is no more related to the desire for prestige, but it focuses on the desire for self-indulgence and experience. Individuals approach luxury as a gateway to pleasure, emotions, and desires, therefore studying the psychological (luxury for self) facet of luxury is gaining attention. These customers’ self-centric evaluation (Rokeach, 1973) is based on their feelings, inner thoughts, and emotions (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

Furthermore, shopping is an act which is more female dominated though males also play a significant role (Laroche et al., 2000). Retail literature (Roxas and Stoneback, 2004) has also exhibited the existence of gender difference in consumer behaviour. Male and female consumers have shown disparities in their beliefs (Teller and Thomson, 2012) with respect to their shopping experience (Hart et al., 2007). For example, Gilal et al. (2020) exhibits females and young girls have shown higher intrinsic motivation for buying luxury goods, as, every other girl in their 20s in Japan own a Louis Vuitton bag (Paul, 2015). Moreover, when it

comes to age, prior (Yeoman, 2011; Schade et al., 2016) have shown that difference persist between young and old customers behaviour.

Researchers (Truong and McColl, 2011) have opined that limited work has been done to examine what variables are significant for consumers’ self-directed pleasure towards luxury consumption. These consumers purchase luxury goods to treat themselves, with hardly any aspirations of showing off their wealth or signalling their status (Sil-verstein and Fiske, 2005). Researchers (Wiedmann et al., 2009; Paul, 2015, 2019) have called for more studies to analyse consumers’ self-directed consumption behaviour. Hence, the following hypothesis discuss the impact of motivational antecedents on consumers luxury experience. Table 1 shows the intrinsic motivation literature related to luxury consumption.

### 2.2.3. Hedonism and enriching luxury experience

Many luxury definitions have highlighted characteristics such as pleasure (Kapferer, 1997) beauty, and comfort as critical intrinsic attributes related to enjoyment and satisfaction resulting from the consumption experience (Babin et al., 1994). Previous literature on the topic of luxury has indicated a link between the luxury experience and hedonism fulfilling consumers’ desires and dreams (Husic and Cicic, 2009). Hedonism is connected to intrinsic benefit, and emotional response addresses indulgent facets of luxury brands and consumer consumption (Canejo et al., 2018; Wiedmann et al., 2009; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic consumption is “consumer behaviour that relates to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product use.”

Researchers (Paul, 2019; Kumar et al., 2020; Bahri-Ammari et al., 2020) have reported an increase in the number of consumers buying

**Table 1**  
Intrinsic motivation research.

Author	Variables	Type of Paper	Findings
Shao et al. (2019)	Goal attainment, purchase luxury, need for uniqueness, self-monitoring	Empirical	Extrinsically motivated respondents showed a greater preference for the luxury product, intrinsically motivated consumers prefer inconspicuous consumption.
Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2014)	Gifting, Self-Gifting motivation and behaviour	Empirical	The findings also imply that luxury holds a self-orientated aspect; luxury brands are not only purchased for socially orientated reasons but also for reasons related to oneself.
Truong and McColl (2011)	Intrinsic, Self-Esteem, Quality, Conspicuous, Self-Directed	Empirical	The results show that consumers who are primarily intrinsically motivated tend to purchase luxury products for superior quality and self-directed pleasure. And self-esteem relates strongly to self-directed pleasure
Truong (2010)	Intrinsic, Extrinsic, Quality, Conspicuous, Self-Directed	Empirical	Extrinsic consumers buy luxury for conspicuousness and quality and intrinsic consumers are more positive towards self-directed pleasure and quality.

luxury out of the hedonic, aesthetic and symbolic experience aimed at acquiring self-benefits. Consumers buying for a self-directed experience (Snell et al. 1995) are concerned with being able to recognize their inner-self and undergoing a pleasant experience (Dubois and Laurent 1996) with the brand, as well as matching their personal preferences to their consumption image (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Hedonic consumption comprises distinct aspects of consumers' hedonic purchasing behaviour, predominantly focusing on non-tangible gains (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). It is synonymous with enforcement, personal rewards (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010), consumers' excitement and emotional attachment (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). These characteristics have been described as essential and leads to life enrichment (Wiedmann et al., 2009) and personal-self luxury experiences (Wiedmann et al., 2009). As emotional value is an integral part of luxury consumption and hedonic consumers admire luxury experience, so we posit.

**H1.** Hedonism leads to an enriched luxury experience.

#### 2.2.4. Self-gratification and enriching luxury experience

Amatulli and Guido (2011) observe that people purchase luxury goods as these particular products carry "self-gratification" attributes. Self-gratification is defined as the art of rewarding oneself, particularly in terms of the fulfilment of one's desires. According to researchers (Wang et al., 2005), consumers desire self-gratification so that they can pursue a feeling of achievement and experience what they consider to be superior pleasures in life. Dubois and Laurent (1994) found that consumers desire luxury products to fulfil the promise of pleasure. Vigneron and Johnson (2004) state that consumers enjoy luxury brands because they offer sensual pleasure and gratification. Through luxury, individuals satisfy their leisure needs and self-gratification desires, hence enhancing the appeal for luxury consumption (Yeoman, 2011). Tsai (2005) demonstrated that while pursuing self-directed pleasure and personal satisfaction, consumers are concerned with sensual and cognitive self-gratification. The willingness to feel at ease through luxurious goods supports the ability to express one's individuality. Moreover, consumers rationalise luxury consumption with self-gratification. Teimourpour and Hanzae (2011) state that consumers who focus on their happiness and pleasure are more prone to buy luxury goods for personal gratification.

The customer experience can include consumers' emotional response arising from the consumption of luxury brands (Schmitt, 2010). Nonetheless, the experiential dimension of luxury brands appeals to the individual's personal gratification generated through luxury consumption that comprises the customer experience (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). Therefore, we posit:

**H2.** Self-Gratification leads to an enriched luxury experience.

#### 2.2.5. Self-gift giving and enriching luxury experience

Self-gifting is a trend that has grown over the last few years. Today, the consumer can be characterised as more self-centred and predominantly self-oriented in their consumption patterns, and gifting gifts to themselves (self-gift giving), has been identified as an expression of this social trend (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). According to the theory of self-gifting, gifting to oneself is a self-directed behaviour and is defined as "personally symbolic self-communication through special indulgences that tend to be premeditated and highly context bound" (Mick and DeMoss, 1990; pp-328). Self-gifting emphasises consumers' intrinsic behaviour and how consumers motivate themselves to buy products for themselves. While numerous researchers have studied the concept of self-gift giving (Mortimer et al., 2015), further research is necessary to explain self-gifting in the framework of consumers' personal self, such as accomplishments, holidays or indulgence (Mick and DeMoss, 1990).

In terms of gift-giving, consumers treat themselves with luxury brands as they expect a high-value, emotional and personalised experience from these consumptions. According to Kim et al. (2011),

consumers' undertaking self-gift-giving is linked to their desire to purchase luxury products. Self-gifting is also crucial as it includes a specialised and cognitive enriched experience (Luomala, 1998) that occurs because of luxury consumption. Although consumers luxury "self-gifting" has garnered little interest from researchers (Kim et al., 2011), treating oneself luxuriously directs consumers towards individual self (Amatulli and Guido, 2011). Self-gifting creates an emotional response that is self-oriented, and researchers state that doing this strengthens self-admiration and increases sensory experience, so, we put forward the following hypothesis:

**H3.** Self-gift giving leads to an enriched luxury experience.

#### 2.2.6. Consumer vanity and enriching luxury experience

Prior studies have emphasised on the impact of consumer vanity as one of the reasons why consumers purchase luxury brands (Netemeyer et al., 1995). Netemeyer et al. (1995) defined vanity as "concern for and/or view of, one's physical appearance and personal achievements" (pp. 612) driving consumer consumption behaviour. According to Abdala and Rossi (2008), vanity is viewed as an excessive feeling of self-esteem, often linked to display of physical appearance, extravagance, and extreme confidence in self-success. Consumers with a greater sense of vanity consume luxury products as these brands symbolise elegance, aesthetics, sophistication, and perfection (Park et al., 2008). Netemeyer et al. (1995) further argued that consumers try to equate their opinions about themselves depending on outward appearances and images they are subjected to, which affects their self-concept. Moreover, physical appearance is also considered as a key to pleasure and the prosperity of life and ostentatiousness (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), thus influencing an individual's behaviour. Researchers (Park et al., 2008) have also associated vanity with luxury product consumption, as consumers are inclined to spend on high-end products to satisfy their insatiable hunger for luxury products. This boosts their self-esteem and creates a positive image for the brand.

Moreover, the luxury customer experience is evolving, instilling a sense of pride in self, evoked by emotions, which leads to a greater connection with luxury products. These consumers are forming their identity through integration with brand characteristics (Paul, 2015). Comprehending consumer vanity in regard to the luxury experience is essential, as luxury consumers associate their consumption with their image and appearance (Husic and Cicic, 2009), resulting in self-love. To strengthen vanity and self-esteem by consuming luxury products and to understand the thoughts, feelings and behavioural experiences of consumers, we posit:

**H4.** Consumer vanity helps to enrich the luxury experience.

#### 2.2.7. Self-identity and enriching luxury experience

Self-identity is an internal facet of an individual's apprehension. It corresponds to the individual's confidence, self-image, self-regard, and self-satisfaction (Jamal and Goode, 2001), wherein an individual idealises these traits to fulfil their personal needs (Conner and Armitage, 1998). Self-identity motivation relies on one's internal self rather than the external self (LA Gil et al., 2012). It also defines an individual's personality to distinguish themselves from others (Husic and Cicic, 2009). Thus, by choosing products and brands that reflect and display the self-image, an individual builds their self-identity (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

As an expression of one's personality and values, luxury product consumption satisfies the desire to be unique and to connect and establish consumers' self-identities (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). As consumers engage in luxury consumption to enhance self-image (Chaudhuri et al., 2011), Rise et al. (2010), in their study, opines that self-identity is a powerful and influential indicator of consumers' purchase behaviour. Luxury brands also allow consumers to communicate their personality symbolically through their consumption behaviour (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Rise et al. (2010) found that the idea of



self-identity demonstrates how individuals are unaffected by attitude or societal comparison. Furthermore, luxury consumers choose self-identity facet to evaluate the presumed standards of harmony amidst their self-image and luxury products. Stets and Burke (2000) state that individuals are often tempted to behave in accordance to their values of individuality and identity. Their willingness to pursue these activities is determined by “self-expression,” which contributes to building self-identity. Moreover, to enhance their self-confidence, consumers rely on internal cues to integrate the symbolic meaning of luxury consumption to their identity (Wiedmann et al., 2009).

In pursuit of happiness and contentment, consumers use luxury brands to create their own identities (Wiedmann et al., 2007) and by undertaking an enjoyable experience, they enable self-enrichment. According to Loureiro and de Araújo (2014), a true luxury consumption experience is significant and meaningful if the experience contributes to improving, internalising and justifying consumers' self-identity. Therefore, we put forward:

**H5.** Self-identity helps in enriching the luxury experience.

#### 2.2.8. Enriched luxury experience and subjective happiness

The consumer experience is the intrinsic and personal response of the consumers. A positive consumer experience means that customers are happy with what they have consumed. Luxury marketers sell a pleasurable, joyous and happy experience to their customers. As consumers happiness arises from experience associated with the ownership and possession of material consumption (Bastos, 2019; Kumar and Gilovich, 2016), the experiential aspect of luxury consumption highlights consumer internal drive to fulfil their emotional and psychological values (Jhamb et al., 2020). For luxury consumers, a critical factor in generating affection towards their luxury consumption is to create a memorable experience that elicits joy. Gaining ownership of luxury products enhances consumers' self-confidence and promotes happiness and pleasure (Fionda and Moore, 2009). Subjective happiness is defined as an emotional response to “events as well as cognitive judgements of satisfaction and fulfilment,” (Diener et al., 2009, pp. 63) and consumers' positive emotions (Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012). Moreover, researchers find it synonymous with a pleasurable experience, attaining a feeling of satisfaction (Etkin, 2016; Diener et al., 2009), experiencing feelings of life fulfilment (Hofmann et al., 2014) and a sensation of reward (Mukhopadhyay and Johar, 2009). Several studies have indicated that individuals appear to be happy if they acquire more things than their significant others have (Caporale et al., 2009). As ‘self’ luxury consumers purchase luxury for themselves, the experience of consumption may make consumers happy (Dittmar 2008). Hence, we posit:

**H6.** Enriched Luxury Experience is a contributor to consumers' subjective happiness.

#### 2.2.9. Enriched luxury experience and word of mouth (WOM)

The best strategy in marketing is word of mouth (WOM) promotion of the products and services by consumers referring their experience to their reference groups. “Word of mouth” (WOM) relates to “informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organisation or a service” (Walker, 2001, pp. 63). Researchers (De Angelis et al., 2012) have stated that consumers use their consumption experience to both express themselves and satisfy their emotional desires. The experience influences consumer purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009), and the significance of experiential facets of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) promote consumers word of mouth (Berger, 2014).

Sirgy (1982) outlines that WOM strengthens the individual ‘self’, as consumers while speaking to others, illustrate details that have affected and influenced them. According to Berger (2014), customers participate in WOM behaviour while expressing excitement and new experiences (Lovett et al., 2013). Luxury brands are viewed as ‘producers of experiences,’ and a memorable luxury experience is strongly linked with

positive word of mouth (Batat, 2019). This relationship between luxury experience and word-of-mouth behaviour has offered some empirical evidence, although it is currently insufficient (Godey et al., 2016; Berger, 2014). According to Wojnicki and Godes (2011), consumers' experience leads to WOM, resulting in the enhancement of personal self. As the luxury experience contributes to enhancing consumers' hedonic and emotional experience, creating meaning for luxury consumers resulting from feelings of comfort and happiness and pleasant emotions communicate a positive word of mouth effect. Therefore, we posit:

**H7.** Enriched Luxury experience results in positive word-of-mouth behaviour.

#### 2.2.10. Role of gender and age

While analysing the intrinsic motivation factors for consumers, the researchers also explored the moderating effects of age and gender. Understanding gender and age differences from a marketing viewpoint is crucial, as these are the most popular aspects of segmentation of markets (Mitchell and Walsh, 2004) and are also listed as main moderators in consumer research (Hwang et al., 2019; Govind et al., 2020). For example, past studies (Stokburger and Teichmann, 2013; Semaan et al., 2019) have indicated that females react differently from their male counterparts, when it comes luxury. Furthermore, Schade et al. (2016) in their study on luxury brands found the influence of different age groups on consumer behaviour. Hence, examining if gender and age differences can discern the impact of consumers intrinsic motivation on their enriched experience becomes essential. We proposed:

**H8a.** The positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and experience is stronger for females.

**H8b.** The positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and experience is stronger for young consumers.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1. Sample and data collection

A quantitative online survey methodology was implemented to assess the real time luxury consumers intrinsic motivation responses. Before sharing the questionnaire, it was pilot tested by using 48 doctoral level students to ascertain and redress any concerns. For face validity, the questionnaire was also shared with three academicians teaching in luxury area and two managers working in luxury sector to comment on the questionnaire's readability and clarity, which exhibited no concerns.

For pre-validation and further clarity for the authors, the questionnaire was shared with 40 respondents (real time luxury consumers and frequent buyers of luxury goods) from New Delhi. These respondents were asked few open-ended questions along with the questionnaire items. Questions like “Do you possess luxury products?”, “Do you purchase luxury goods for conspicuous reasons or in-conspicuous reasons”, “What are the in - conspicuous reasons that motivate you to purchase luxury products”, “Experience with the personal luxury products consumption”.

Indian luxury market is chosen for this study as this market is rapidly growing and has shown a huge potential, with most dynamic, challenging, untapped and competitive market worldwide. The final data was collected from luxury consumers in India, using snowball sampling method. 700 potential respondents were contacted, and data was collected over a period of three months (October 15-January 15, 2020) yielding a response rate of approximately 45 per cent with 345 complete responses. The respondents minimum age limit was 25 years based on the assumption that 25 years old would be a college graduate with sufficient purchasing power and previous luxury experience (Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2019). Out of 316 respondents 132 were males and 184 females. 39% (126) respondents were below 35 years and 61% (190) were above 35 years with 47% respondents income below 1 million per



year and 53% respondents were earning more than 1 million per annum. 58% of respondents reported purchasing luxury 4 times or less in last 6 months and 42% respondents reporting more than 4 times.

The data was then screened for incomplete responses and outliers. Because of incompleteness and unengaged responses, 39 responses were eliminated, thus retaining a final sample of 316 useable questionnaire fit for final study, in accordance with Bagozzi and Yi's (2012) structural equation modelling (SEM) guidelines.

### 3.2. Measures

All constructs were measured using well established pre-existing scales with a few alterations made to fit the wording to the context of our study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section comprises the demographic profile of the respondents, and the second section provided the study's construct. The items were measured on a 5-Point Likert Scale, with 1 representing 'Strongly Disagree' up to 5 representing 'Strongly Agree.' Appendix 1 exhibits the measures used.

### 3.3. Data analysis and results

Anderson and Gerbing (1988) stated a two-step strategy for evaluating the structural equation model. The first step calculated the appropriateness of the measurement model (CFA), and the second step develops and analyse the structural equation model (SEM). These steps are reliable indicators of the measures that prevent the interaction between the measurement model and structural model. AMOS v. 22 was used to analyse the data.

Then, to find the presence of (dis)similarities, we divided the study data into two groups. (a) male and female; (b) young ( $\leq 35$  years), old ( $> 35$  years). 35 years was taken as a median age because according to the report (Pew Research Centre, 2019) those between 24 and 38 are considered as young millennials.

### 3.4. Measurement model, reliability and validity

The confirmatory analysis model fit indices indicate a good fit with  $\chi^2/df = 1.882$ , CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.86, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.05 and SRMR = 0.05 (Hair et al., 2010).

To measure the model for internal consistency and composite reliability, the psychometric values of the instrument were analysed (Cronbach's alpha, convergent and discriminant validity). Standardised item loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha values (see Table 2) exceeded the recommended threshold values of 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), indicating that all the elements in the study are expressed through their own items (Gefen et al., 2000).

Discriminant validity is a function of how variables differ statistically (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). The results also show that for every construct, square root of AVE is greater than its corresponding correlation, reflecting good discriminant validity for the scale (Boudreau et al., 2001; Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (see correlation Table 3).

The data was tested for common method bias using Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). With the unrotated factor solution, the single factor accounted for 33.58% of variance, indicating no significant common method bias in this data. Moreover, we used common latent factor (CLF) analysis to compare the regression weights of the constructs with and without CLF (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The variations in the regression weights were reported to be relatively low i.e. less than 0.5, therefore no CMB issues were reported.

### 3.5. Structural model and hypothesis testing

To test the hypotheses suggested, SEM (maximum likelihood estimation) was used. As indicated by the results of the model fit  $\chi^2/df = 1.881$ , CFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.85, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.06;

**Table 2**

Reliability and validity of the constructs.

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	AVE
Hedonism	HED1	0.69	0.88	0.88	0.60
	HED2	0.82			
	HED3	0.79			
	HED4	0.81			
	HED5	0.80			
Self- Gratification	SGR1	0.82	0.90	0.91	0.71
	SGR2	0.86			
	SGR3	0.80			
	SGR4	0.83			
Vanity	VAN1	0.68	0.93	0.93	0.59
	VAN2	0.67			
	VAN3	0.61			
	VAN4	0.70			
	VAN5	0.80			
	VAN6	0.76			
	VAN7	0.84			
	VAN8	0.82			
	VAN9	0.83			
Self-Gift Giving	SGG1	0.79	0.91	0.91	0.74
	SGG2	0.82			
	SGG3	0.88			
	SGG4	0.85			
Self- Identity	SID1	0.80	0.85	0.84	0.65
	SID2	0.69			
	SID3	0.76			
Luxury Experience	LEX1	0.67	0.90	0.91	0.71
	LEX2	0.73			
	LEX3	0.67			
	LEX4	0.68			
Subjective Happiness	SHA1	0.80	0.83	0.83	0.62
	SHA2	0.81			
	SHA3	0.82			
Word of Mouth	WOM1	0.88	0.87	0.87	0.70
	WOM2	0.86			
	WOM3	0.87			

the data exhibits a good fit (Hair et al., 2010).

With respect to testing of the hypothesis (see Table 4), the results show that all the intrinsic motivational dimensions, positively impact customers' enriched luxury experience. As shown in Table 4, H1 that posits hedonism leads to enriched luxury experience was supported ( $\beta = 0.24^*$ ); H2 that predicts self-gratification to impact enriched luxury experience was supported ( $\beta = 0.22^*$ ); H3 self-gift giving ( $\beta = 0.10$ ) has also been an indicator of enriched luxury experience; H4 predicts vanity to enrich luxury experience was also supported ( $\beta = 0.41^*$ ) and H5 self-identity ( $\beta = 0.39^*$ ) also enriched luxury experience of consumers. Further H6 and H7 luxury experience has a positive impact on subjective happiness ( $\beta = 0.27$ ;  $t = 5.04$ ) and word of mouth ( $\beta = 0.13$ ;  $t = 2.78$ ) were also supported.

The  $R^2$  values for subjective happiness is 0.46 and for WOM is 0.39 indicating that 46% consumers experience with luxury products resulted in subjective happiness and 39% of consumers reported positive word of mouth.

### 3.6. Comparison of demographics (gender and age)

A multi-group SEM based analysis (Table 5) was then implemented to test the moderating impact of customer gender and age (Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2019). Firstly, we tested data for invariance (configural, metric and scalar) and then, we examine the path-coefficient across

**Table 3**  
Correlation matrix.

	VAN	HED	SGG	LEX	SGR	WOM	SHA	SID
VAN	0.772							
HED	0.333***	0.776						
SGG	0.385***	0.309***	0.861					
LEX	0.660***	0.548***	0.477***	0.848				
SGR	0.429***	0.323***	0.279***	0.579***	0.848			
WOM	0.179**	0.180**	0.221***	0.150*	0.140*	0.841		
SHA	0.308***	0.285***	0.484***	0.287***	0.282***	0.400***	0.788	
SID	0.490***	0.497***	0.518***	0.702***	0.485***	0.197**	0.309***	0.806

(Note: VAN= Vanity, HED= Hedonism, SGG= Self Gift Giving, LEX = Luxury Experience, SGR= Self Gratification, WOM= Word of Mouth, SHA= Subjective Happiness, SID= Self Identity. \*Correlation significance at 0.01 level; N = 316).

**Table 4**  
Hypothesis testing results.

Hypotheses	$\beta$	t-values	Results
H1: Hedonism – Luxury Experience	0.24	4.178	Supported
H2: Self-Gratification – Luxury Experience	0.22	4.415	Supported
H3: Vanity – Luxury Experience	0.41	6.525	Supported
H4: Self-Gifting – Luxury Experience	0.10	2.036	Supported
H5: Self-Identity – Luxury Experience	0.39	4.789	Supported
H6: Luxury Experience – Subjective Happiness	0.27	5.048	Supported
H7: Luxury Experience – Word of Mouth	0.13	2.788	Supported

**Table 5**  
Moderation.

Hypotheses	Male (N = 132)	Female (N = 184)	$\chi^2$ Difference	Result
	$\beta$ (t-value)	$\beta$ (t-value)		
H8a: Intrinsic Motivation → Enriched Luxury Experience	0.29 (3.38)	0.40 (5.63)	4.112	Supported
Hypotheses	Young (N = 126)	Old (N = 190)	$\chi^2$ Difference	Result
	$\beta$ (t-value)	$\beta$ (t-value)		
H8b: Intrinsic Motivation → Enriched Luxury Experience	0.36 (4.08)	0.21 (3.62)	2.883	Supported

sub-groups. The results show a significant difference exist between both the genders confirming H8a i.e. females ( $\beta = 0.40$ ;  $t = 5.63$ ) are more intrinsically motivated than males ( $\beta = 0.29$ ;  $t = 3.38$ ) when it comes to luxury. Furthermore, as millennials consider intrinsic motivation to guide their luxury experience, so our results show stronger impact young consumers ( $\beta = 0.36$ ;  $t = 4.08$ ) than older ones ( $\beta = 0.21$ ;  $t = 3.62$ ).

## 4. Discussion and implications

### 4.1. General discussion

The extant literature emphasises the importance of ‘experience’ in luxury consumption (Atwal and Williams, 2017; Pozharliev et al., 2015; Loureiro and de Araújo, 2014). Consumers’ passion for indulgence and pleasure is changing the luxury industry from its ‘old model’ to a highly individualistic one aimed at consumers who desire luxury for personal self and experience (Eckhardt et al., 2015). Therefore, building on self-determination theory, this study presents a conceptual model explaining the intrinsic factors enhancing the luxury experience and consequently leading to happiness and positive word of mouth. The results of our study highlight the attributes of internal motivation driving the luxury experience (de Kerviler and Rodriguez, 2019; Atwal and Willimas, 2017). The results further support happiness (Prentice

and Loureiro, 2018; Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012) and word of mouth (Klein et al., 2016) as an outcome of the enriched luxury experience, thereby building on the results of past research. Furthermore, the role of demographics was also explored to give a deeper insight into a customer and how their individual differences might impact their intrinsic motivation. As our results support all the hypothesis, the following section provides a theoretical and practical synthesis of this study’s findings.

### 4.2. Theoretical implications

Researchers have lately shown interest in studying the role of intrinsic motivation in luxury consumption. Self-determination theory has provided the basis for various studies relating to luxury consumption (Shao et al., 2019; Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012; Truong and McColl, 2011). Building our research model on this, the analysis reported several aspects in reference to luxury consumers’ personal factors in internal value fulfilment. The major contributions of this research are as follows. In particular, our findings assert the importance of intrinsic motivation factors (Wong and Ahuvia, 2008) in boosting luxury experience (Truong and McColl, 2011) and confirming our gradual contribution aligned with past studies.

Firstly, our study contributes to bringing together intrinsic motivation, enriched luxury experience, subjective happiness and WOM in a single model that produces valuable inputs. As intrinsic motivation is considered to be the self-determined aspect of behavioural control and is characterised as indulging in enjoyment and pleasure obtained from such behaviour. The study shows that ‘self’ is a vital concept that explains how people perceive themselves, as individual’s self is synonymous with their possessions (which represent their identity). This is linked to the person’s desire to achieve satisfaction through luxury possessions representing their intrinsic drivers (like, pride, sense of accomplishment, pleasure, fun, gratification, self-fulfilment, rewards). Prior studies have focused on the external or extrinsic factors of luxury consumption. However, this is the first study establishing the impact of self (personal value) on the luxury experience.

Secondly, our findings expand current results based on the exiting literature. Indian consumers, like their Western and developed-country counterparts (Roux et al., 2017; Shukla, 2012), are evolving. They enjoy luxury and search for pleasure, self-indulgence and personal experience gained through luxury consumption. Combining feelings of pride and fusing the emotions related to reward and channelling physical needs encapsulates their luxury experience. Our findings indicate a link between vanity and experience. The fact that consumers seek to recreate their self-image through material possessions is also well established in the relevant literature (Sedikides et al., 2007). In line with previous studies, our study suggests that people seeking physical attractiveness and personal achievement are more inclined to buy luxury products. We also found that self-identity expectations, i.e. the profound notion of who consumers are is consistent with consumer spending on luxury products to shape their self-identity and reflecting their self by rewarding them with the luxurious experience (Wang and Griskevicius, 2014). Moreover, fulfilling personal desires can lead to self-gratification.

Consumers seeking luxury experience are found to be more concerned with personal ambitions and cognitive self-gratification. Hedonism gratifies their presence of inner self and focuses on emotional fulfilment, as well as plays a crucial role in shaping their experience.

In addition, our findings indicate that luxury brands have a self-oriented perspective, and consumers purchase these brands for self-related reasons. The results also indicate that consumers who believe luxury products are attractive, desirable and worthy enough to be owned, purchase these products as gifts for themselves. Furthermore, consumers feel that luxury products fulfil their tastes and expectations, and can sustain and improve self-worth, therefore gifting themselves with luxury predicts self-pleasure.

Thirdly, the outcome variables of our study (subjective happiness and WOM) confirm significant effect. Our results replicated the past research (Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003) that outlines that positive experience ultimately induces more considerable variations in happiness. Our findings also suggest that maximum happiness is achieved when our purchase experience turns out to be good. Furthermore, word of mouth is guided by enriched luxury experience. Many authors have recognised the importance of WOM in the past (Septianto and Chiew, 2018; Babić Rosario et al., 2016). The study adds to the contemporary awareness of the success of experience in stimulating WOM. The study also emphasised the importance of developing a pleasurable experience while attempting to trigger consumer consumption behaviour (Schmitt, 2010), leading to WOM. Furthermore, consumers participate in WOM behaviour while expressing excitement or sharing new experiences about their consumption, resulting in boosting the personal self.

Finally, we identified age and gender as key moderators of intrinsic motivation. For females, intrinsic motivation to enrich luxury experience was stronger. This could be due to the fact that females are more receptive (Stokburger and Teichmann, 2013) and consider shopping as a leisure activity. For them, self-directed pleasure is very important for these consumers. Furthermore, younger customers are more inclined towards intrinsic motivation to enrich their luxury experience than older consumers. This could be due to the fact that young consumers are self-oriented and tend to focus on individual pleasure.

#### 4.3. Managerial implications

Luxury brand consumers seek authentic, transformative, distinctive, symbolic products or services (Loureiro et al., 2020). The luxury marketing model has been focused on the proposition that luxury goods are consumed for extrinsic factors like exclusivity, conspicuousness and prestige. With very few attempts made to lure intrinsically driven buyers, these consumers are not only increasing in number but are reluctant to engage in ostentatious and flashy luxury (Grouzet et al., 2005). Luxury brands should not overlook the impact of intrinsic factors of consumer behaviour. Hence, advertising luxury products based on extrinsic aspects will fail to capture the increasing market of intrinsic consumers. Therefore, luxury marketers need to be aware of the significance of implicit cues in the creation and promotion of luxury products and so ought to design their promotional campaigns by targeting this particular customer segment. For example, marketing firms could grasp the concept of “celebrations” or “rewards” or “goal achievement” in their marketing plans.

These days, luxury marketers are attempting to establish a strong connection and relationship with consumers (Jhamb et al., 2020). As the luxury consumer market is driven by the feelings expressed through the enhancement of self through luxury consumption, marketers should focus on the hedonic feelings, desire, love, zeal and attachment that drive consumers' luxury consumption. Marketers must consciously monitor the experience of consumers (Verhoef et al., 2009) as well. Moreover, knowledge of self-driven behaviour would help marketers to enhance their strategies by analysing the fit between intrinsic behaviour and consumer experience.

In order to enrich luxury experience for consumers (male vs female or younger vs old), marketers should focus their campaigns and policies on the attributes various customer groups expect from luxury consumption. Hence, in this new environment, marketers, could use these demographic results and split their overall market based on demographics. For example, Ralph Lauren is the most popular luxury brand to introduce exclusive brands based on age group.

As brands clamour to differentiate themselves, it is essential for luxury marketers to understand their audience. Indian peoples' lifestyles and preferences have evolved from austerity to total self-indulgence. Nowadays, they are unapologetic about their lavish expenditure on luxury products. The unrestricted senses of pleasure, self-indulgence, need for self-gifting, and escapism has been part of these consumers' luxury equation. For them, luxury is not simply a product; it is a lifestyle, one that defines the pampered buying experience. Hence, luxury houses have to focus on the wave of new luxury as a means of branding.

#### 5. Limitations and directions for future research

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the data was collected from New Delhi, India, limiting the generalizability of the study. Future studies can utilise a more representative sample to add more applicability to the findings. These findings could vary if other cities or countries were considered, as prior researchers have found that consumers luxury consumption is influenced by culture and social dimension (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012; Shukla and Purani, 2011; Paul 2015, 2019). Hence it would be interesting to apply and use the current framework in different cultures to understand if consumers' personal luxury factors observed in this study are shared across cultural context. Another limitation is that we were able to capture only stated choices. It might be different from the revealed respondent's choices. Second, qualitative research using interviews could show different results in capturing consumers intrinsic factors, as qualitative studies can give a simplistic insight into the current unpredictable business environment in the luxury sector. Moreover, consumers can openly discuss their views and motivational factors in detail.

Third, it would be useful to link luxury experience with extrinsic motivational factors and take into consideration luxury consumers' expectations, as luxury is considered as conspicuous consumption and extrinsic motivations can enhance the consumer experience. Moreover, many aspirational consumers are purchasing masstige/affordable luxury products (Paul, 2019). This implies that many opportunities exist to carry out studies exploring consumers' intrinsic motivation that will give new insights to luxury marketing.

Furthermore, the present research model could be supported by certain other factors like self-expression, self-awareness, self-love, personal empowerment, and self-esteem that could provide valuable prospects for greater understanding of intrinsic consumer values. Moreover, researchers could use SOR theory for future analysis (Islam et al., 2020). Finally, our study examined luxury consumer behaviour with regards to personal luxury products. Other researchers can also study it in context with other luxury products like cars, cosmetics (Shahid et al., 2018), jewellery, etc.

#### 6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study contributes to the literature on luxury consumption. Firstly, in theoretical terms, this study advances our knowledge on the concept of SDT theory by observing it through luxury consumers' intrinsic motivation. The study also explores intrinsic factors influencing consumers' experience with luxury brands, an area that remains highly unexplored (Truong and McColl, 2011). Secondly, the results indicate how luxury consumers participate in the consumption of luxury products, leveraging three intrinsic factors of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The study highlights how today's consumers purchase for experience and self-indulgence, thus changing the

luxury industry from its 'old model' to an individualistic model (Eckhardt et al., 2015). Thirdly, the current study emphasises the importance of implicit cues by proposing intrinsically driven factors that could add

value and provide managers with a framework for designing their competitive strategies.

## Appendix 1. Construct Items and Corresponding Sources

Items	Authors
<b>Hedonism</b>	Vigneron and Johnson (2004)
HED1 Luxury brands are one of the sources for my own pleasure	
HED2 I can enjoy luxury brands entirely on my own terms	
HED3 Purchasing luxury brands provides deeper meaning in my life	
HED4 Self-actualization is an important motivator for my luxury consumption	
HED5 Luxury consumption enhances the quality of my life	
<b>Self-Gratification</b>	Wiedmann et al. (2009); Smith and Colgate (2007)
SGR1 I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical	
SGR2 I am a person who enjoys life regardless of what is going on and getting the most out of everything.	
SGR3 I buy luxury products for self-indulgence	
SGR4 I buy luxury good for the pure enjoyment of it	
<b>Vanity</b>	Netemeyer et al. (1995)
VAN1 The way I look is extremely important to me	
VAN2 People notice how attractive I am	
VAN3 Looking my best is worth the effort	
VAN4 It is important that I always look good	
VAN5 Professionally, I am a very successful person	
VAN6 I am an accomplished person	
VAN7 Achieving greater success is important to me	
VAN8 I am a good example of professional success	
VAN9 Professional achievements are an obsession with me	
<b>Self-Gift Giving</b>	Wiedmann et al. (2009)
SGG1 Purchasing of luxury products can be seen as giving me gifts to celebrate an occasion that I believe is significant to me	
SGG2 On the whole, I may regard luxury products as gifts I buy for treating myself	
SGG3 When in a bad mood, I may buy luxury products as self-given gifts for alleviating the emotional burden	
SGG4 Reward for hard work or that I feel I have earned or am entitled to is an important motivator for my luxury consumption	
<b>Self-Identity</b>	Wiedmann et al. (2009)
SID1 I never buy a luxury brand inconsistent with the characteristics with which I describe myself	
SID2 The luxury brands I buy must match what and who I really am	
SID3 My choice of luxury brands depends on whether they reflect how I see myself but not how others see me	
<b>Luxury Experience</b>	Bustamante and Rubio (2017); Candus (2015); Pijls et al. (2017)
LEX1 The whole experience of luxury consumption interest me and attracts my attention	
LEX2 The whole experience of luxury consumption is happy, optimistic and amazing.	
LEX3 I feel confident with luxury products because of their reputation.	
LEX4 Overall the experience of luxury goods consumption is pleasant	
<b>Subjective Happiness</b>	Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1997)
SHA1 In general, I consider myself a very happy person	
SHA2 Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself to be happier	
SHA3 I am a person who enjoys life regardless of what is going on and getting the most out of everything	
<b>Word of Mouth</b>	Zeithamlet al. (1996)
WOM1 I intend to say positive things about luxury products to other people	
WOM2 I intend to recommend luxury products to someone who seeks my advice	
WOM3 I intend to encourage friends and relatives to buy luxury products	

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# Mass prestige, brand happiness and brand evangelism among consumers

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## ABSTRACT

Grounded on the Masstige theory, this study examines the direct and indirect impact of Mass Prestige of a Brand (MPB), Brand Perception (BP), and Propensity to Pay the Premium (PPP) on Brand Evangelism (BE) via Brand Happiness (BH) as a mediator. Moreover, the moderating role of Self-pleasing Experience (SPE) between Masstige and BH and the interactive effect of Product Beliefs (PB) with BH to check its impact on BE was assessed. Two independent studies using cross-sectional and time-lagged approaches were conducted among cosmetics and clothing brand consumers. Results supported all the hypothesized paths with minor differences in impact size for both studies reflecting MBP, BP, and PPP as important predictors of BE through the underlying mechanism of BH. Likewise, results reveal that SPE acts as a catalyst to enhance BH in consumers, and this happiness further interacts with PB to motivate consumers to evangelize others to buy/use prestigious brands.

## 1. Introduction

Brands influence consumers' lives worldwide in distinctive ways. Hence the importance of brand management has become multifold (Štreimikienė & Ahmed, 2021). In contrast, there exists a gap in branding theory and practice to embrace consumers' thinking patterns in the contemporary world (Von Wallpach et al., 2017). A massive middle class with a substantial market potential for brands has emerged due to continuous economic growth (Beinhocker, Farrell, & Zainulbhai, 2007; Kharas & Gertz, 2010). In the meantime, the concept of new luxury emerged, and various eccentric modes of marketing luxury products have been invented, promising consumers a superior experience, engagement, and status (Baber et al., 2020; Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015; Kumar & Paul, 2018). This new luxury represents the availability, affordability, and marketing of the luxury brands in the mass market, focusing on the middle class. The main motive of this transformation is to create Mass Prestige (Masstige) (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020) for the brand.

The “Masstige” was brought into the mainstream of research by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) and is a key strategy based on the phenomenal rise of middle-class consumers who desire luxury products. Moreover, Paul (2015) redefined Masstige as a market penetration strategy for medium and large enterprises. Paul (2018) developed the masstige theory in terms of the marketing mix, which can be further

presented as mass Prestige of a brand (product, promotion, place strategies), brand perception, and propensity to pay the premium (price). Kim et al. (2019) demonstrated the evolution of masstige brands as a rejoinder to the necessity of making luxury brands available to the mass market. Consequently, masstige marketing can be conceptualized as a phenomenon in which expensive or premium products are marketed to many consumers by engendering Mass Prestige (Baber et al., 2020). The process of building a prestigious brand from an ordinary brand can also be called masstige marketing. Moreover, considering the dearth of studies on Masstige (Kumar et al., 2020) and the potential to contribute towards masstige theory, context, and methods, Kumar, Paul, and Starčević (2021) called for research to explore the Masstige in various product categories and geographical regions. Hence, the current study attempts to examine the direct and indirect association of Masstige, i.e., mass Prestige of a brand (MPB), brand perceptions (BP), and propensity to pay the premium (PPP) with brand evangelism (BE) via an underlying mechanism of brand happiness (BH).

Most people invest time, energy, and money to live a happy life (Van Boven, 2005). Conversely, from an organizational perspective, happy customers evaluate the brand experience positively and spread that positivity among others (Peters et al., 2010). Therefore, marketers and psychologists are attracted to the construct of brand happiness (Kumar et al., 2021). Moreover, Kumar et al. (2021) explored happiness in the consumer-brand encounter context and suggested that brand happiness

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needs further investigation. Besides, the literature lacks evidence of how happiness created by the masstige brands results in positive outcomes like brand evangelism (BE). Brand evangelism is the act of spreading positive opinions about a brand and persuading and convincing others to engage with that brand (Matzler, Pichler, & Hemetsberger, 2007). Moreover, Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) asserted that brand evangelism is an emotion-focused coping strategy that motivates a consumer to persuade others to become a brand user of his/her choice. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the current study is the first attempt to understand the relationship between Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP) and brand happiness, resulting in brand evangelism on the grounds of the masstige theory (Kumar et al., 2021; Paul, 2018).

Moreover, scholars demonstrated the significance of self-pleasing experience (SPE) for buying and consuming luxury brands (Jain & Mishra, 2020; Tsai, 2005). Durgee and Colarelli O'Connor (1995) asserted that consumers' pleasure in using the products leads to positive outcomes. Considering the importance of SPE in consumers' choice of a product, Khan and Rahman (2016) depicted a continuous need to improve firms' offerings to remain consumers' prime choice. Simultaneously, this study advances the body of literature by examining the interactive effect of SPE with MPB, BP, and PPP to augment the BH among consumers. Furthermore, regardless of the immense importance of the consumers' evaluative judgments about a brand's products (Mainolfi, 2020), research lacks evidence of how product beliefs (PB) impact brand evangelism. Consumers' cognitive beliefs about reliability, design, quality, and craftsmanship are known as product beliefs (Orbaiz & Papadopoulos, 2003). Hence, to bridge the literature gap, the coupled effect of PB with BH to boost BE has been assessed in the current study.

The objectives of the current study are multifold as it aims to; (i) empirically examine the impact of Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP) on BH and BE, (ii) examine the impact of BH on BE, (iii) examine the mediatory role of BH in between the Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP) and BE, (iv) investigate the interactive effect of self-pleasing experience with Masstige (MBP, BP, and PPP) to enhance BH among the consumers, and (v) investigate the moderating role of PB in between BH and BE.

## 2. Literature review, theoretical foundation, and framework

The theoretical framework of the current study is established in the masstige theory proposed by Paul (2015; 2018). This theory highlighted the concept that luxury brands' market share can be increased by targeting the middle-income group without compromising the quality while keeping the price constant (Paul, 2018). Generally, masstige brands are considered quality packed with affordability and available to a wide range of price-conscious consumers (Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021). Past research significantly contributed to determining the human psychology and role of cognitive development in motivating the consumer to purchase luxury brands (Bembenutty, Schunk, & Dibeneditto, 2021). In contrast, the current study focused on the role of Masstige in creating and enhancing brand happiness among consumers to make them evangelizers of that brand. Moreover, the hypothesized paths are discussed in detail as follows.

### 2.1. Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP), brand evangelism and brand happiness

The mass prestige of a brand with consumers' perception of high quality and trading up for a reasonable premium is characterized as Masstige (Kumar et al., 2020; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Kumar et al. (2020) elaborated that product innovation, supportive placement, diligent promotional strategies, and premium price establish Masstige. The main aim of the Masstige strategy is to reach the middle class who are able and willing to pay premium prices for prestigious brands (Paul, 2015). Paul (2015) introduced a 'Masstige mean score scale' (MMSS) for measuring the MPB, BP, and PPP for prestigious brands. The main motive of the MMSS was to facilitate marketers to evaluate the

usefulness of their marketing mix strategies in diverse geographical locations and economic backgrounds (Baber et al., 2020). Moreover, Paul (2018) developed the masstige theory based on the 4 Ps, categorized the Masstige as MPB, BP, and PPP, and called for focusing on the Masstige strategy to explore its positive outcomes. Therefore, the current study investigates brand evangelism as a positive outcome of Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP). Matzler et al. (2007, p. 27) defined brand evangelism as "a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to convince or persuade others to get engaged with the same brand." Moreover, Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2013) asserted that spontaneous liking of a brand drives consumers to go beyond just sharing good words about it among friends and family. The literature further reveals that consumers passionate about a brand are more likely to engage in brand evangelism (Matzler et al., 2007; Swimberghe, Astakhova, & Wooldridge, 2014). Whereas the current study proposes that positive feelings associated with the use of masstige brands engage consumers in brand evangelism. Hence it is hypothesized that;

**H1: Masstige, i.e., a) mass prestige of a brand, b) brand perception, and c) propensity to pay the premium positively drive consumers' brand evangelism.**

Happiness is an emotional state comprised of satisfaction, joy, fulfillment, and contentment (Diener, 2000). Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018, p. 102) conceptualized brand happiness as "a consumer's greatest emotional fulfillment, a moment-based experience of pleasant high and low arousal emotions, induced at different brand contact points (e.g., via purchase, consumption, advertisements)." Moreover, the impact of various demographic, social, circumstantial, and self-related variables on happiness has been explored previously (Agrawal et al., 2011; Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009; Breslin et al., 2013; Robertson, 2016; Rodríguez-Pose & Von Berlepsch, 2014). However, despite considerable evidence regarding predictors of happiness, few scholars examined brand-induced happiness (Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009; Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017; Kumar et al., 2021; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Whereas Kumar et al. (2021) extended the brand happiness research, taking the Masstige as an essential predictor of brand happiness. The masstige strategy enables masses to attain prestige via downward extension by appropriately mixing perception, product, price, promotion, and place factors (Paul, 2018). Hence, making Masstige available for the masses compared to luxury, which facilitates few (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Thus, happiness is not confined to those who can afford the luxury; instead, the affordability and consumption of masstige brands can also lead to happiness in consumers (Kumar et al., 2021). Moreover, although research indicates the consumption of prestigious products, i. e., cruises (Hwang & Han, 2014), motorbikes (Kruger, 2018), and mobile phones (Kumar et al., 2021), leads to brand happiness among the consumers; however, still it needs to be explored further (Kumar et al., 2021). Thus, extending the prior knowledge of brand-induced happiness and masstige theory, we proposed that;

**H2: Masstige, i.e., a) mass prestige of a brand, b) brand perception and c) propensity to pay the premium positively influence consumers' brand happiness.**

Brand evangelism is an emotion-focused proselytizing behavior based on which consumers try to convince others to use their favorite brands (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Based on its persuasive missionary component, brand evangelism is an extreme form of word of mouth as it goes beyond just talking about one's favorite brand (Becerra & Badri-narayanan, 2013; Matzler et al., 2007). The pleasure associated with brand happiness motivates consumers to share the brand information with others (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Hence, consumers recommend the brand to others while embellishing and expressing the brand's pleasurable experience (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Gabbott, Tsarenko, & Mok, 2011). Likewise, Zhong and Moon (2020) asserted



that brand-induced moments of happiness encourage consumers to convince others to get involved with the brand to enjoy those happy moments. Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013) further explained that such proselytizing behaviors enable consumers to defend their “self” and decide to purchase/use the brand. This can further be elaborated based on the exchange theory (Adams, 1965), which postulates that consumers promote the brand to return something to the brand in exchange for emotional benefits they received (Gelbrich, 2011). In this study, the emotional benefit is the brand happiness that consumers want to re-experience by establishing subsequent contact with the brand. Hence, based on the understanding that happy people tend to be more communicative and depict pro-social behaviors (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2014), it is hypothesized that;

**H3: Brand happiness is positively associated with brand evangelism.**

## 2.2. Brand happiness as a mediator

Happiness has been conceptualized as an individual's emotional state arising from the situation-based experience of varying intensity; hence, it is induced by purchases, consumption, and events (Schuchert-Guler, Eisend, & Lutters, 2001). Fu and Wang (2020) demonstrated that experiential value induces brand happiness and leads to behavioral intentions among individuals. Besides, Zhong and Moon (2020) reported that brand happiness functions as a mediator between satisfaction and loyalty. Likewise, Eckhaus (2018) demonstrated the underlying mechanism of brand happiness between the association of fashion involvement and purchase intentions. At the same time, the current study advances the body of literature in the area of masstige marketing. It proposes that brand happiness serves as a mediator between Masstige (MBP, BP, and PPP) and brand evangelism. Literature shows that mass prestige and perception of a brand make consumers happy (Hwang & Han, 2014; Kruger, 2018; Kumar et al., 2021; Loureiro & da Cunha, 2017). Besides, financial sacrifice makes consumers re-experience or prolong the brand happiness (Anselmsson, Bondesson, & Johansson, 2014) and tend to pay premium prices for preferred brands (Evan-schitzky et al., 2012). Hence, it can be related to the prestigious brands that consumers are willing to pay premium prices for the excitement and happiness of using masstige brands. Research also shows that brand-induced happiness leads consumers to advocate the brand to others (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018); therefore, they try to convince others to buy/use it (Matzler et al., 2007). Thus, based on the masstige theory that advocates the Masstige as a source of happiness for middle-class consumers, it is proposed that;

**H4: Brand happiness mediates the association of Masstige, i.e., a) mass prestige of a brand, b) brand perception and c) propensity to pay the premium with brand evangelism.**

## 2.3. Self-pleasing experience as a moderator

Self-pleasing experience represents the enjoyment and entertainment of using a brand (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Most consumers confer additional significance to the pleasurable experience of consumption (Mansoor & Paul, 2022; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Past literature reveals a significant association between self-pleasing experience and loyalty (Loureiro & da Cunha, 2017; Pantano & Priporas, 2016). Whereas, Khan and Rahman (2016) depicted that a repetition of pleasing experience with online services enhances e-trust among users. Scholars also highlighted the desire for a self-pleasing experience behind luxury consumption (Jain & Mishra, 2020). Besides, Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) demonstrated that consumers prefer non-ownership models for excitement and pleasure for using a product rather than just having it. In addition, the pleasant feelings that develop in consumers after using a brand portray the emotional fulfillment and

happiness that brands provide to consumers in the form of a pleasing experience (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Moreover, Kumar et al. (2021) found a positive association between Masstige and brand happiness. This association can be further explained in light of self-pleasing experiences; therefore, hypothesis 5 is derived as follows;

**H5: Self-pleasing experience moderates the association of Masstige, i.e., a) mass prestige of a brand, b) brand perception and c) propensity to pay the premium with brand happiness such that the associations are stronger in case of the higher level of self-pleasing experience.**

## 2.4. Product beliefs as a moderator

Product beliefs express consumers' cognitive beliefs about a product's characteristics, such as quality, reliability, craftsmanship, and design (Orbaiz & Papadopoulos, 2003). Various informational sources like advertisements, product exposure, use of the product, social media, word of mouth, etc., shape the consumers' product beliefs (Carter & Maher, 2014). Literature shows that consumers' buying choices are positively influenced by the qualities and features associated with the products (Aiello et al., 2009; Salazar-Ordóñez et al., 2018). Moreover, Aiello et al. (2009) demonstrated that high product quality beliefs compel consumers to buy luxury goods. Likewise, Mainolfi (2020) also reported the positive outcomes of consumers' positive beliefs about products. Besides, research indicates that brand happiness results in positive outcomes like positive word of mouth and brand evangelism (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Based on the positive outcomes of PB, this study advances the existing body of literature and proposes that;

**H6: Product beliefs moderates the relationship of brand happiness with brand evangelism such that the relationship is stronger in the case of the positive product beliefs.**

Fig. 1 represents the theoretical framework of the study based on the theory and detailed literature review.

## 3. Research methodology

This research has investigated the impact of Masstige (MBP, BP, and PPP) on BE via BH as a mediator. Also, the moderating role of SPE in between the association of Masstige (MBP, BP, and PPP) and BH was assessed. Moreover, the interactive effect of PB to enhance the BE among the consumers was investigated. To achieve the research objectives, the researchers conducted two independent studies. Study 1 was conducted among the consumers of cosmetics brands, following a cross-sectional, snowball sampling technique, whereas Study 2 was conducted among the consumers of clothing brands. In Study 2, a time-lagged research design with a mall intercepts survey technique was used.

### 3.1. Measures

A structured questionnaire consisting of 33 items was designed (See Appendix A) to measure the constructs of the study. Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP) was measured with the scale developed by Paul (2015, 2019) with 5-items, 2-items, and 3-items for MPB, BP, and PPP, respectively. Brand happiness was measured with a 12-items scale adapted from Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018). Brand evangelism was measured using a 4-items scale adapted from Matzler et al. (2007). The self-pleasing experience was measured with a 4-items scale adapted from Jain and Mishra (2020). Finally, to measure product beliefs, a 4-items scale was adapted from Mainolfi (2020). The scoring instruction provided by the original authors was followed to measure all the scale items.

## 4. Study 1

Study 1 was conducted among the consumers of cosmetics brands,

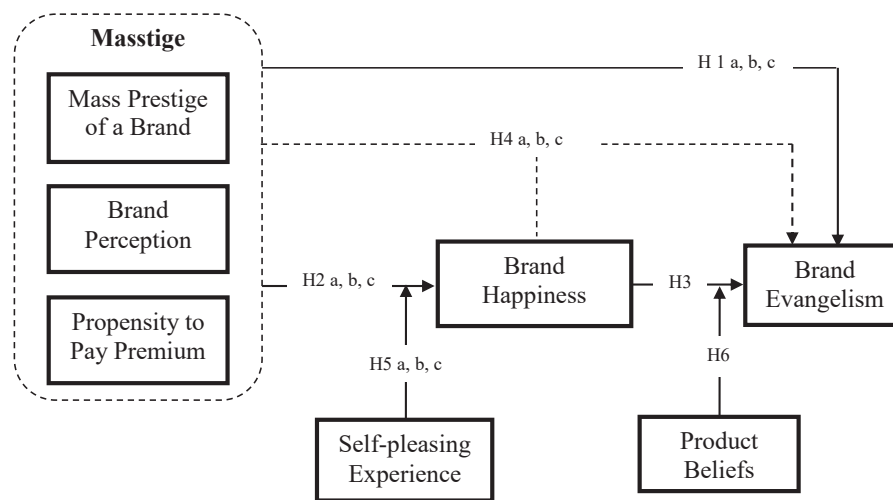


Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study.

following a cross-sectional.

#### 4.1. Participants and procedures

In Study 1, a self-administered Google survey was disseminated among South Asian real-time consumers of cosmetics brands. Various digital media channels, including WhatsApp, Facebook, email, Twitter, Instagram, etc., were used to disperse the survey questionnaire among the consumers. Many scholars have previously used this technique to assess consumer behaviors while collecting data utilizing various digital channels (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015; Krishen et al., 2016; Shahid & Paul, 2021). The survey questionnaire comprised three parts. Part 1 consists of a note explaining the purpose of the survey, seeking the respondents' consent, and ensuring the anonymity of their responses. Part 2 consists of questions about the respondents' demographic information and a request to think about the brand/brands of cosmetics they have bought/used. Finally, Part 3 consists of 33 items related to the study constructs. The authors further requested that the participants forward the survey to their contacts, thus generating a snowball effect. This data collection process started on December 15, 2020, and till March 15, 2021, the authors received 910 responses. They were further scrutinized for outliers and unengaged responses, and subsequently, 34 responses were excluded from the further analysis resulting in a final data set of 876 responses.

#### 4.2. Respondents profile

The respondents' demographic characteristics depict that 37.8% of respondents were male, and 62.2% were female. 43.5 percent of the respondents were 18–30 years old, 31.2% were 31–40 years old, 17.5% were 40–50 years old, and 7.8% were above 50. 27.7 percent of respondents were graduates, 44.6% were undergraduate, and 27.7% were postgraduates and highly qualified. In addition, 43.8% of the respondents were married, whereas 56.2% were unmarried. 27.4% of the respondents were students, 26.7% were employed, 33.6% were self-employed, 12.3% were others. The income level of the respondents was as follows, 31.5% (PKR 10 K–30), 39.1% (PKR 31 K–50 K), 14.4% (PKR 51 K–75 K), 10.3% (PKR 76 K–100 K), and 4.7% (PKR 101 K and above).

#### 4.3. Data analysis and results

##### 4.3.1. Measurement model

SmartPLS was used for analysis purposes, applying measurement and structural models. The initial screening of the variables and model

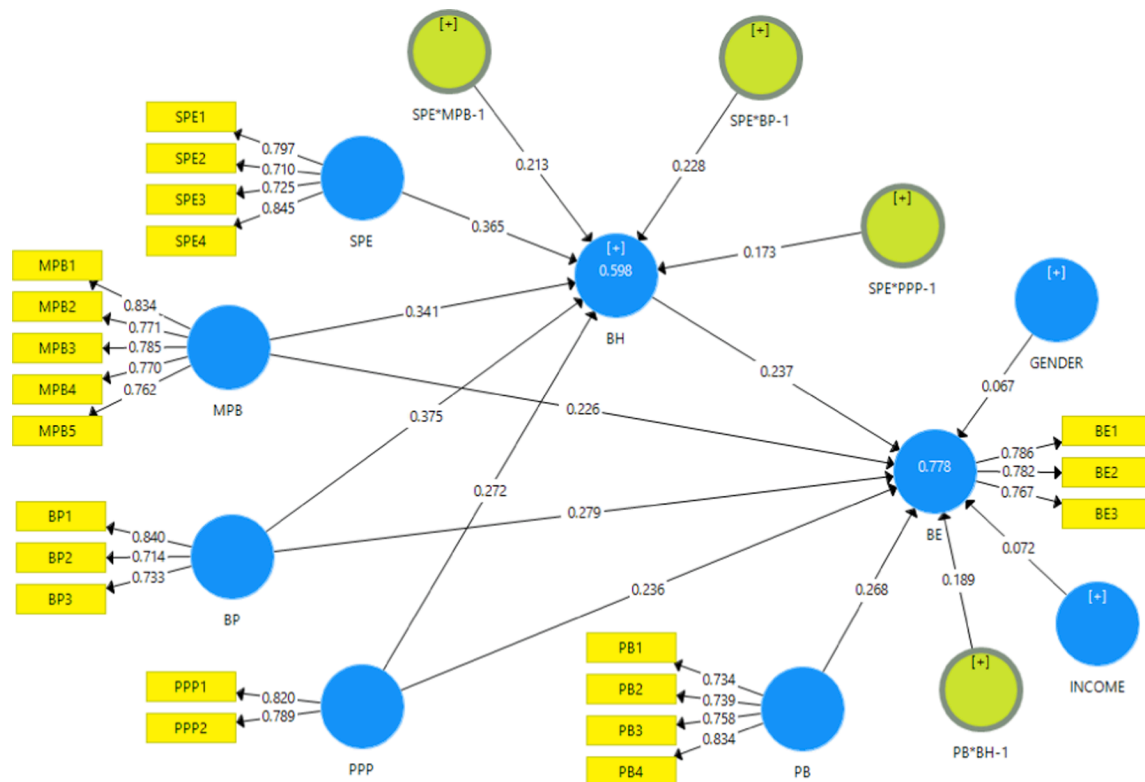
testing revealed the positive impact of respondents' gender and education on the dependent variable; therefore, both demographic variables were controlled during further analysis. First, to assess the reliability of the measures, "Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (CA)" and "composite reliability (CR)" were calculated by applying the measurement model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The results revealed that CA and CR for all the study constructs were above 0.7, meeting the minimum reliability criteria (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2017). Then, to establish the convergent validity of the constructs, factor loadings of the measure and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Results showed that all the factor loading of the study constructs was above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Fig. 2), and AVE was above 0.50 (Henseler et al., 2015; Mansoor & Paul, 2021). A detailed summary of validity and reliability measures is given in Table 1. Furthermore, to establish the discriminant validity of the measures, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were checked. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that the square root of the AVEs of each construct should be greater than the construct's highest correlation with any other construct in the studied model. Table 1 shows the square root of AVEs and correlations of all constructs, greater than the diagonal correlation values, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. In addition, according to the guidelines provided by Henseler et al. (2015), the HTMT ratio of the constructs should be less than 0.90 to avoid multicollinearity issues. The study results (Table 1) depict all the values of HTMT below 0.9, thus establishing the discriminant validity of the study constructs.

**4.3.1.1. Structural model hypothesis testing.** The structural model was assessed for collinearity issues before testing the hypothesized paths. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance are the frequently used indicators to assess the collinearity of the formative indicators (Hair et al., 2019). Past research indicates that each predictor constructs VIF value should be lower than 03, and tolerance value should be higher than 0.20 (Becker et al., 2015). For Study 1, all the observed VIF were below 2.4, and tolerance values were above 0.67. Moreover, the structural model was used to assess the significance of the hypothesized paths (Sarstedt et al., 2017). The bootstrapping technique was employed using 500 sub-samples (Henseler et al., 2015; Mansoor, 2021). Moreover,  $\beta$ -coefficient,  $t$ -value, and  $p$ -values were calculated to confirm the results. Likewise, to observe the changes in the dependent construct and determine the overall model fitness, the Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) was used. The  $R^2$  values depict that 77.8% of the brand evangelism showed by the respondents is due to independent, mediating, and moderating variables of the current study (Fig. 2). These results show a good fit for the model. The results (Table 3) revealed a significant and positive association of MPB ( $\beta = 0.226^{**}$ ,  $t = 4.283$ ), BP ( $\beta = 0.279^{***}$ ,  $t$

**Table 1**  
Convergent and Discriminant Validity (Study 1).

Var.	CA	CR	AVE	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>MBP</b>	0.787	0.889	0.616	<b>0.784</b>						
<b>BP</b>	0.791	0.807	0.584	0.578	<b>0.764</b>					
<b>PPP</b>	0.743	0.786	0.647	0.532	0.476	<b>0.804</b>				
<b>BH</b>	0.827	0.938	0.557	0.495	0.489	0.522	<b>0.746</b>			
<b>BE</b>	0.805	0.822	0.606	0.504	0.458	0.507	0.472	<b>0.778</b>		
<b>SPE</b>	0.756	0.854	0.595	0.621	0.407	0.461	0.444	0.393	<b>0.771</b>	
<b>PB</b>	0.754	0.851	0.589	0.445	0.397	0.483	0.548	0.436	0.518	<b>0.767</b>

**Note:** CA = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. The diagonal elements (in bold) are the square roots of the AVEs. Below the diagonal elements are the HTMT values."



**Fig. 2.** Full Measurement Model (Study 1).

= 5.440), *PPP* ( $\beta = 0.236^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.791$ ) and *BH* ( $\beta = 0.237^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.800$ ) with *BE*. Likewise, a positive and significant association of *MPB* ( $\beta = 0.341^{***}$ ,  $t = 6.791$ ), *BP* ( $\beta = 0.375^{***}$ ,  $t = 7.367$ ), and *PPP* ( $\beta = 0.272^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.358$ ) with *BH* was found. Thus, the study results fully supported H1a, b, c; H2 a, b, c; and H3. The results also supported H4 a, b and c. An indirect and positive impact of *MPB* ( $\beta = 0.201^{**}$ ,  $t = 4.021$ ), *BP* ( $\beta = 0.218^{**}$ ,  $t = 4.214$ ), and *PPP* ( $\beta = 0.252^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.123$ ) with *BE* in the presence of *BH* as a mediator was proved by the results.

Moreover, to assess the moderating effect of *SPE* between the association of *MBP*, *BP*, and *PPP* with *BH*, interaction terms between the moderator, i.e., *SPE* and predictor variables, i.e., *MBP*, *BP*, and *PPP*, were created using the product indicator approach in PLS-SEM to examine their impact on *BH* among the cosmetics brands' consumers. The results show the significant effect of interaction terms *SPE\*MBP-1*, *SPE\*BP-1*, and *SPE\*PPP-1* on *BH* (Table 3). In addition, the  $R^2$  for the main effect of the predictors on *BH* was ( $R^2 = 0.391$ ), whereas its  $R^2$  with interaction effects was ( $R^2 = 0.598$ ). The change in  $R^2$  depicts an increase in the explanatory power of *BH* by 20.7%. Likewise, to assess the moderating effect of *PB* between the association of *BH* with *BE*, an interaction term between the moderator, i.e., *PB* and *BH*, were created to

examine its impact on *BE* among the cosmetics brands' consumers. The results show the significant effect of interaction terms, *PB\*BH-1*, on *BE* (Table 3). In addition, the  $R^2$  for the main effect of the predictor and mediating constructs on *BE* was ( $R^2 = 0.613$ ), whereas its  $R^2$  by adding interaction term was ( $R^2 = 0.778$ ). Thus, the change in  $R^2$  depicts an increase in the explanatory power of *BE* by 16.5%. Moreover, Fig. 5 represents the full structural model of the study. The interaction effects are explained through the following moderation graphs.

Fig. 3 a, b, and c depict an enhanced level of brand happiness among consumers of cosmetics brands due to the interactive effect of *SPE\*MBP-1*, *SPE\*BP-1*, and *SPE\*PPP-1*. Besides, the line labeled for higher values of *SPE* has a steeper gradient than the line labeled for lower values of *SPE* for all three moderating effects. Thus, consumers enjoy more brand happiness when the self-pleasing experience for using cosmetics brands interacts with the Masstige (*MBP*, *BP*, and *PPP*). Thus, hypotheses H5 a, b, and c for Study 1 was supported.

Fig. 4 shows an increased level of brand evangelism among the cosmetics brands consumers due to the interactive effect of *PB\*BH-1*. The line labeled for positive *PB* has a steeper gradient than the line labeled for negative *PB*. This represents that when consumers are happy

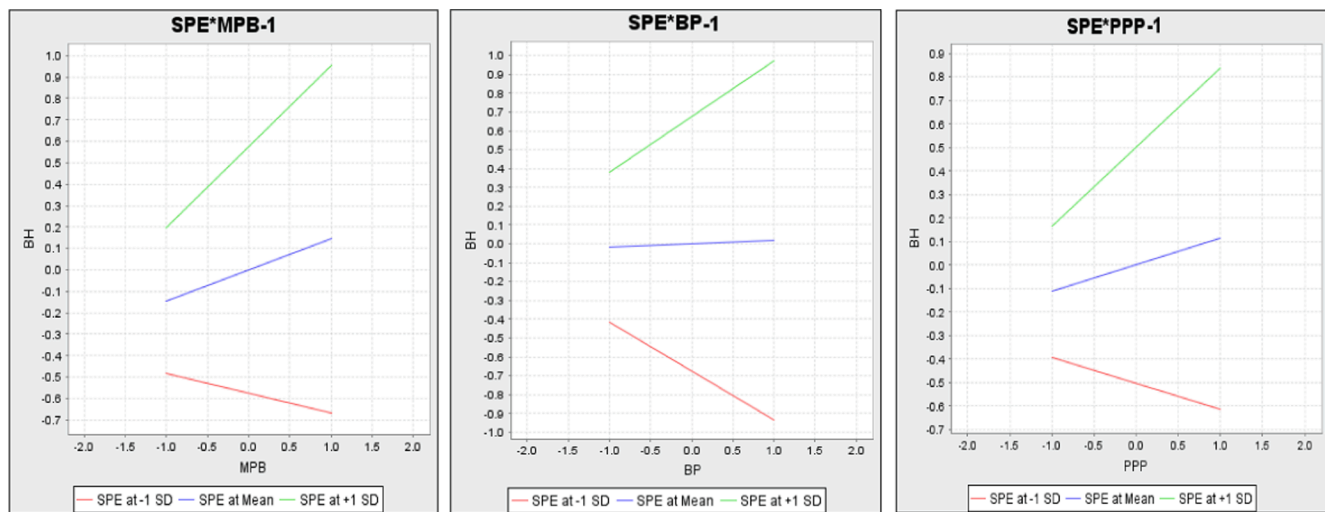


Fig. 3. a, b, c. Interaction plots for the moderating effects of SPE (Study 1).

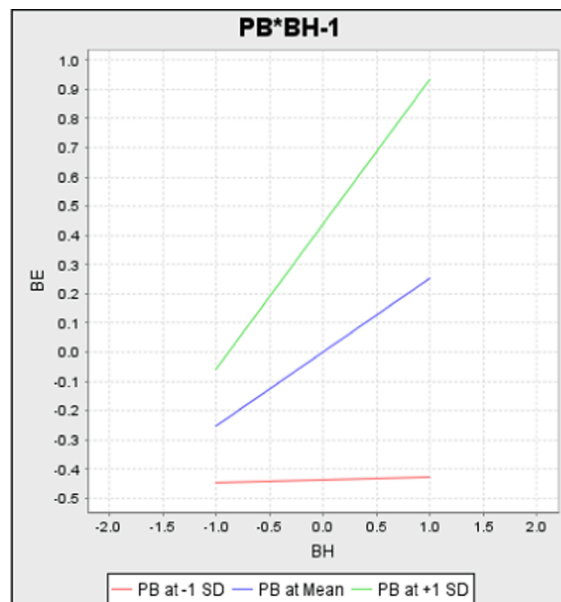


Fig. 4. Interaction plots for the moderating effects of PB (Study 1).

buying/using prestigious brands with positive beliefs about their quality and uniqueness, they are more engaged in brand evangelism. Hence, they want to persuade their close ones to buy/use the same brand to enjoy the same happiness. Thus, hypothesis H6 for Study 1 was also supported.

#### 4.4. Brief discussion

Study 1 results present the positive impact of MBP, BP, and PPP on BH and BE, depicting that Masstige plays an essential role in making consumers happy and motivating them to evangelize others to buy such brands. Results also showed that brand happiness mediated the association of Masstige with BE. Hence it is inferred that MPB, BP, and PPP bring joy among the consumers based on the self-fulfillment of being a user of a Masstige brand. Moreover, the individuals who reported a higher level of BH also reported a higher BE level, thus proving the BH as an underlying mechanism between Masstige and BE. In addition, results revealed the significance of SPE to augment brand happiness among the consumers. Hence marketers should focus on making the consumers'

experiences pleasant when encountering prestigious brands. Furthermore, results showed that consumers' positive beliefs about prestigious brands make consumers spread happiness from consuming such brands. This can be done in the form of convincing others to buy/use the same brand.

#### 5. Study 2

Study 2 used a time-lagged research design by applying the mall intercept survey technique (Leong et al., 2020; Noor, Mansoor, & Rab-bani, 2021).

##### 5.1. Participants and procedures

A multistage random sampling technique was used to collect primary data from the respondents visiting the shopping malls (i.e., The Giga Mall, The City Shopping Mall, The Centaurus Mall, and The Safa Gold Mall) in the twin cities, i.e., Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. During this process, the customers visiting the shopping malls were stopped, and their voluntary participation in the study was requested. The purpose of the survey was explained, and anonymity was ensured to them. If selected respondents were reluctant to participate in the survey, the subsequent possible respondents were approached. Also, strict adherence to COVID-19 precautionary measures was ensured while interacting with respondents. Based on the participants' willingness to participate in the time-lagged survey, they were guided about the entire survey procedure, including obtaining information at two different times. The data collection process started on October 15, 2020. Those who showed a willingness to participate were invited to the research facility located in the mall to fill out the questionnaire. The contact information of all the qualified respondents was recorded and saved by the authors to contact them again in 5 months to answer the remaining part of the survey.

Before handling the questionnaire, respondents were asked to think about the brand/brands of clothing they bought/used. The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part 1 consisted of questions related to the respondents' demographic information. Part 2 consisted of 26 items related to the five study constructs, i.e., Masstige (MPB, BP, and PPP), brand happiness, and self-pleasing experience. Following this procedure, in 3 months, the authors successfully collected 835 responses from all selected locations at the end of the Time 1 survey on January 15, 2021. After 6 weeks of completing the Time 1 survey, the authors contacted all respondents who participated in the Time 1 survey on March 1, 2021. They were requested to complete the remaining part of the



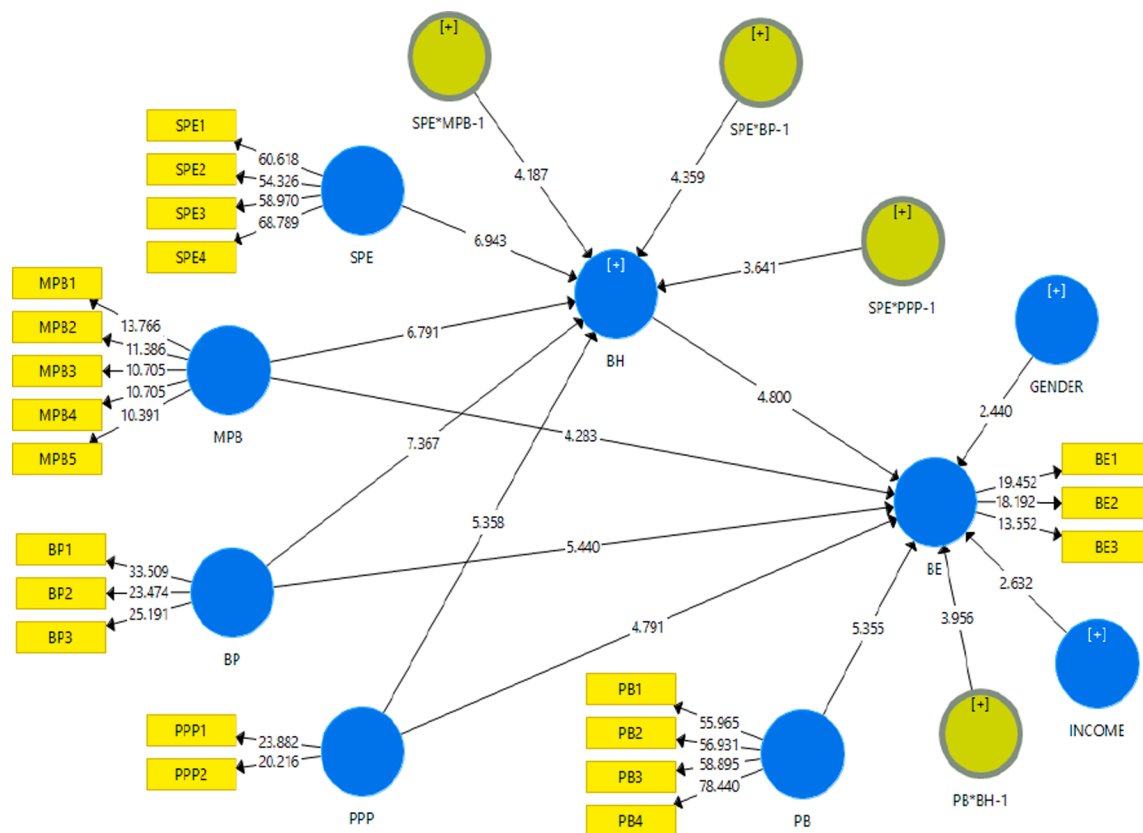


Fig. 5. Full Structural Model (Study 1).

survey comprising items of product beliefs and brand evangelism. Upon initial contact, it was realized that 153 respondents were out of communication due to multiple reasons. In the Time 2 survey, 682 respondents participated in a Google survey via email or WhatsApp as per their feasibility until May 05, 2021. Out of 682 questionnaires, the authors received 619 questionnaires back. All the responses were scrutinized further, and after careful screening, 18 questionnaires were found with unengaged patterns and 24 with missing values, which were excluded from further analysis. Therefore, the authors left with 577 useable paired questionnaires filled at Time 1 and Time 2 by the same respondents, generating a final response rate of 69.10%.

## 5.2. Respondents profile

The respondents' demographic characteristics depict that 41.6% of respondents were male, and 59.4% were female. 40.6 percent of the respondents were 18–30 years old, 29.8% were 31–40 years old, 19.4% were 40–50 years old, and 10.2% were above 50. In addition, 25.2 percent of the respondents were undergraduates, 45.4% were graduates, and 29.4% were postgraduates and highly qualified. Moreover, 47.3% of the respondents were married, whereas 52.7% were unmarried. 20.6% of the respondents were students, 29.4% were employed, 35.2% were self-employed, 14.7% were others. The income level of the respondents was as follows, 34.2% (10 K PKR–30 K PKR), 34.6% (31 K PKR–50 K PKR), 16.2% (51 K PKR–75 K PKR), 9.3% (76 K PKR–100 K PKR) and 5.7% (101 K PKR and above).

## 5.3. Data analysis and results

### 5.3.1. Measurement model

Like the Study 1 results, in Study 2, the respondents' gender and education significantly impacted the dependent variable; therefore, both demographic variables were controlled during further analysis.

Moreover, as reported in Table 2, the results reflect that CA and CR for all study constructs were above 0.7, meeting the minimum reliability criteria (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Furthermore, results showed that all the factor loading of the study constructs was above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Fig. 6), and AVE was above 0.50 (Henseler et al., 2015). Moreover, Table 2 shows the square root of AVEs are greater than the diagonal correlation values, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. Furthermore, the study results (Table 2) depict all the values of HTMT below 0.9, thus establishing the discriminant validity of the study constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

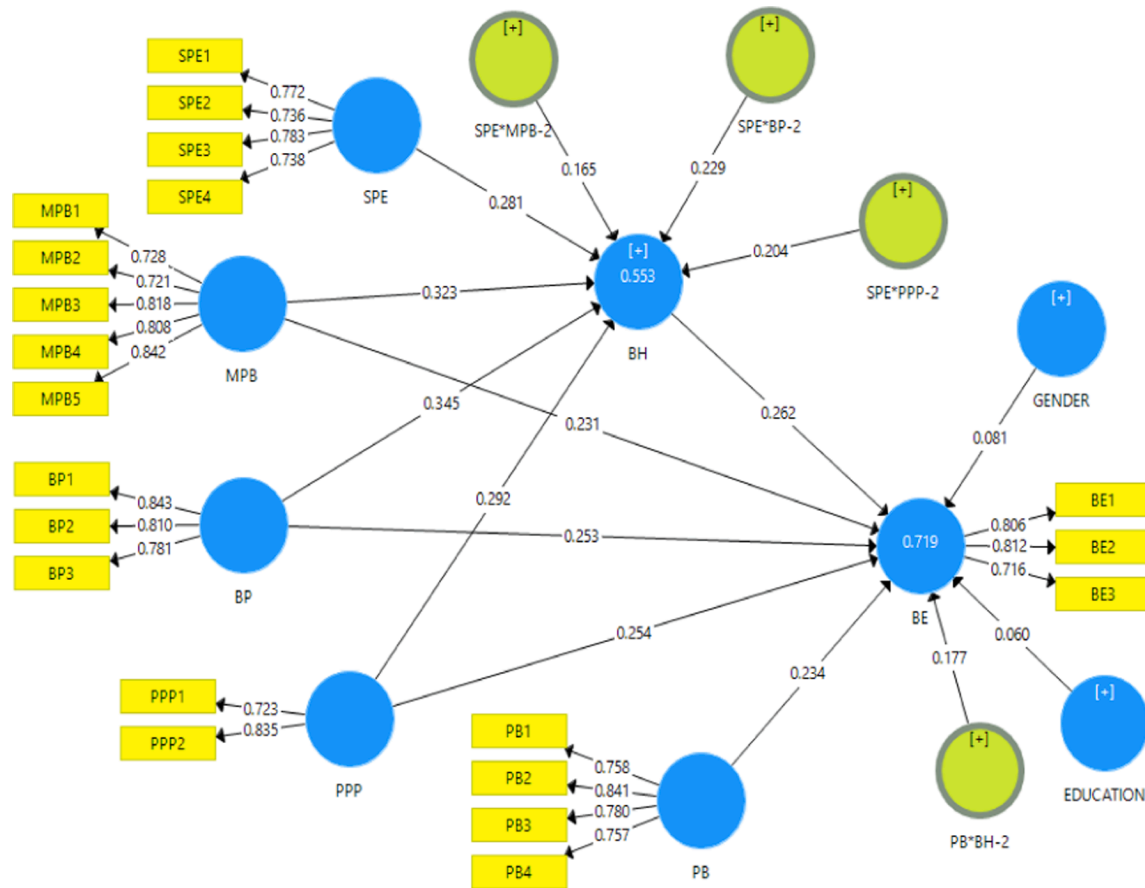
### 5.3.2. Structural model hypothesis testing

Results revealed that for Study 2, all the observed VIF were below 2.2, and tolerance values were above 0.61, indicating no collinearity issues. Moreover, in Study 2, the  $R^2$  values of the dependent variable show that 56.2% of the brand evangelism displayed by the respondents is due to independent, mediating, and moderating variables of the current study (Fig. 6). These results show a good fit for the model. The results (Table 3) revealed a significant and positive association of MPB ( $\beta = 0.231^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.736$ ), BP ( $\beta = 0.253^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.036$ ), PPP ( $\beta = 0.254^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.056$ ) and BH ( $\beta = 0.262^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.279$ ) with BE. Likewise, a positive and significant association of MPB ( $\beta = 0.323^{***}$ ,  $t = 6.408$ ), BP ( $\beta = 0.345^{***}$ ,  $t = 6.805$ ), and PPP ( $\beta = 0.298^{***}$ ,  $t = 6.180$ ) with BH was found. Thus, the study results fully supported H1a, b, c; H2 a, b, c; and H3. The results also supported H4 a, b and c. An indirect and positive impact of MPB ( $\beta = 0.225^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.575$ ), BP ( $\beta = 0.221^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.487$ ), and PPP ( $\beta = 0.240^{***}$ ,  $t = 4.922$ ) with BE in the presence of BH as a mediator was proved by the results. The results show the significant impact of interaction terms SPE\*MBP-2, SPE\*BP-2, and SPE\*PPP-2 on BH (Table 3). In addition, the change in  $R^2$  of BH depicts an increase in the explanatory power of BH by 19.3%. Likewise, the results show the significant effect of interaction terms, PB\*BH-2, on BE (Table 3). The change in  $R^2$  depicts an increase in the explanatory power of BE by

**Table 2**  
Convergent and Discriminant Validity (Study 2).

Var.	CA	CR	AVE	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>MBP</b>	0.771	0.887	0.614	<b>0.783</b>						
<b>BP</b>	0.762	0.853	0.559	0.491	<b>0.747</b>					
<b>PPP</b>	0.789	0.757	0.610	0.503	0.521	<b>0.781</b>				
<b>BH</b>	0.820	0.935	0.545	0.483	0.441	0.490	<b>0.738</b>			
<b>BE</b>	0.795	0.823	0.608	0.476	0.411	0.397	0.428	<b>0.779</b>		
<b>SPE</b>	0.813	0.864	0.616	0.500	0.507	0.390	0.470	0.443	<b>0.784</b>	
<b>PB</b>	0.817	0.866	0.618	0.542	0.480	0.476	0.503	0.451	0.496	<b>0.786</b>

**Note:** “CA = Cronbach’s Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. The diagonal elements (in bold) are the square roots of the AVEs. Below the diagonal elements are the HTMT values.”



**Fig. 6.** Full Measurement Model (Study 2).

15.7%. Fig. 9 represents the full structural model of the study. The interaction effects are explained through the following moderation graphs.

Fig. 7a, b, and c depict an enhanced level of brand happiness among the consumers of clothing brands due to the interactive effect of  $SPE \times MBP-2$ ,  $SPE \times BP-2$ , and  $SPE \times PPP-2$ . The line labeled for higher values of *SPE* has a steeper gradient than the line labeled for lower values of *SPE* for all three moderating effects. This shows that consumers of garment brands become happier when their experience of buying/using Masstige is pleasant. Hence, more *SPE* results in more happiness among the consumers of prestigious garment brands. Thus, hypotheses H5 a, b, and c for Study 2 were supported.

Fig. 8 shows an increased level of brand evangelism among the clothing brands' consumers due to the interactive effect of  $PB \times BH-2$ . The line labeled for positive *PB* has a steeper gradient than the line labeled for negative *PB*. This depicts that positive product beliefs among the

consumers of prestigious garment brands transmit their happiness into brand evangelism with more intensity. Hence, they get motivated to convince their friends, family, peers, etc., to opt for their favorite brands to enjoy the same level of happiness. Thus, hypothesis H6 for Study 2 was also supported.

#### 5.4. Brief discussion

Like Study 1, all the hypothesized links of Study 2 are also supported by the results. Moreover, there are minor differences in the results of Study 1 and Study 2. These differences may result from respondents being consumers of different brand categories or the modes of data collection. However, the differences are not significant enough to affect the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the consistency of the results depicts the importance of Masstige to derive brand happiness among the consumers to make them brand evangelizers ultimately.



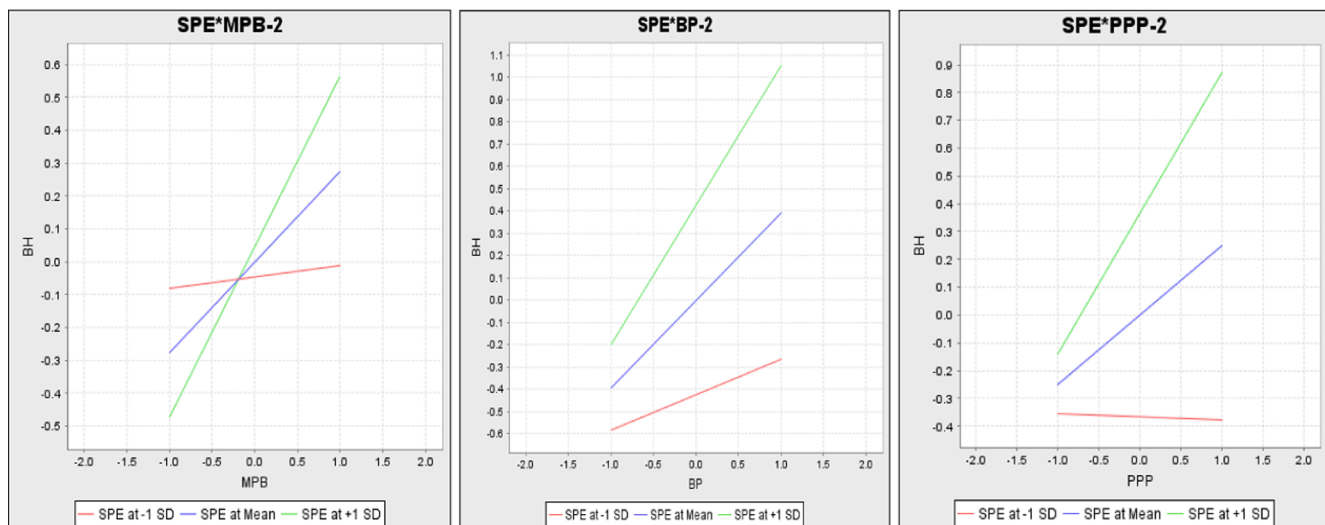


Fig. 7. bc Interaction plots for the moderating effects of SPE (Study 2).

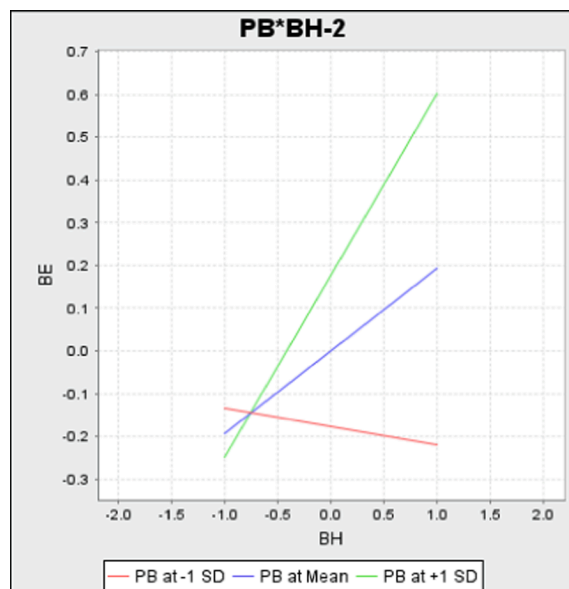


Fig. 8. Interaction plots for the moderating effects of PB (Study 2).

## 6. General discussion

The positive impact of MBP, BP, and PPP on BE, as depicted by the study results, can be associated with consumers' desire to achieve inner satisfaction to represent themselves as part of such prestigious brands (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2014). Hence a sense of association with the masstige brands motivates consumers to convince their contacts to buy/use such brands. The results also revealed a positive association of the mass prestige of a brand with consumers' brand happiness. These results contribute to the previous studies' findings that high positioned brands are the source of consumers' happiness (Woodside et al., 2008; Bianchi et al., 2014). Similar to the findings of Kumar et al. (2021), it can be stated that marketers should adopt a masstige strategy to make consumers happy. The consumers who exemplify their personality through prestigious brands and are conscious about how others perceive them tend to drive happiness due to the consumption of prestigious brands. In addition, the positive association of brand perception with brand happiness reflects that the more concerned consumers are about the uniqueness and quality of the brands, they derive more happiness in the

consumption of masstige brands. These findings can be related to the statement of Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) that the brand itself does not provoke happiness among consumers; instead, consumers' perception and interpretation of the brand characteristics make them happy. Thus, when consumers link the brand's excitement, quality, and high standards with themselves, they are more willing to pay higher prices and feel happy buying/using such brands.

Moreover, this study supports the mediatory role of the BH in between the MPB, BP, and PPP with BE. In the current study, happiness has been studied as the consumers' emotional state comprised of satisfaction, joy, fulfillment, and contentment (Diener, 2000), which shows that masstige makes consumers happy and further makes them evangelize the same brand. The results are further supported by Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017), who suggested that consumers want to stay connected with the brands, making them happy. Therefore, they tend to persuade their loved ones to opt for such brands to enjoy the same level of happiness. Moreover, the results proved the moderating role of self-pleasing experience between the association of Masstige and brand happiness. These findings can be related to the arguments of Kumar et al. (2021) and Paul (2019). They depicted that consumers associate their experience with the brands' mass prestige and quality, which in turn affect their happiness and satisfaction. At the same time, the current study results revealed that when the pleasant experience of using Masstige brands is coupled with consumers' perception of a brand, their level of happiness increases based on the feelings of looking unique and trendy. Finally, the results support the moderating role of PB between BH and BE. These findings suggest that when the consumers' brand happiness combines with their belief in products' superiority in terms of quality and performance, they eventually evangelize others to buy/use such brands more intensely.

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

The current research contributes to the theory and body of literature in multiple ways. First, it tried to bridge the gap regarding two important and least explored areas; Masstige and Brand happiness. Although, brands in the emerging economies are applying Masstige strategies to cater to a large-scale middle-class consumer by providing the mass Prestige and a sense of accomplishment for using premium-priced brands. However, Masstige is still the least explored area, and available literature is insufficient to explain the phenomenon completely (Kumar et al., 2020). Therefore, this study examined the impact of MPH, BP, and PPP, on BH and BE among the consumers of cosmetics and clothing brands. Since data has been collected from the consumers who

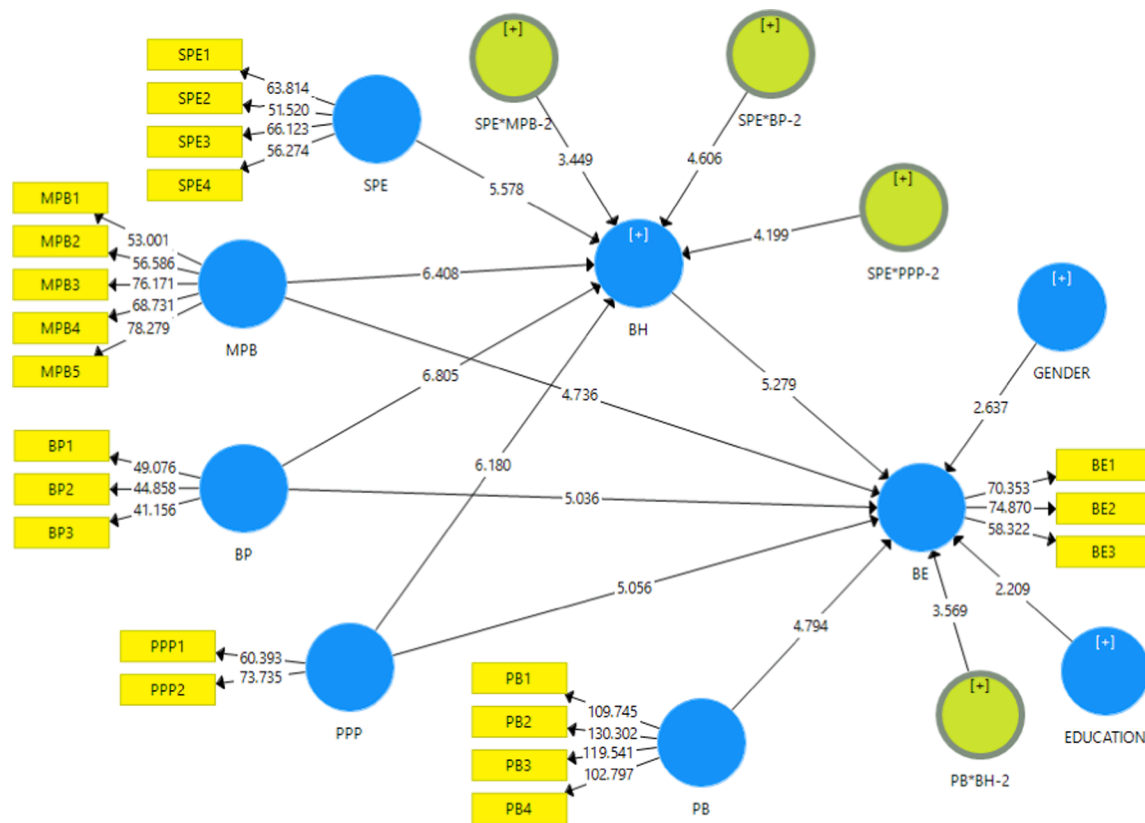


Fig. 9. Full Structural Model (Study 2).

**Table 3**  
Hypothesized Results for Study 1 and Study 2.

Hypothesized Paths			Study 1			Study 2		
			Std. $\beta$	t-Value	Supported	Std. $\beta$	t-Value	Supported
H1	a	MPB $\rightarrow$ BE	0.226**	4.283	Yes	0.231***	4.736	Yes
	b	BP $\rightarrow$ BE	0.279***	5.440	Yes	0.253***	5.036	Yes
	c	PPP $\rightarrow$ BE	0.236***	4.791	Yes	0.254***	5.056	Yes
H2	a	MPB $\rightarrow$ BH	0.341***	6.791	Yes	0.323***	6.408	Yes
	b	BP $\rightarrow$ BH	0.375***	7.367	Yes	0.345***	6.805	Yes
	c	PPP $\rightarrow$ BH	0.272***	5.358	Yes	0.298***	6.180	Yes
H3		BH $\rightarrow$ BE	0.237***	4.800	Yes	0.262***	5.279	Yes
H4	a	MPH $\rightarrow$ BH $\rightarrow$ BE	0.201**	4.021	Yes	0.225**	4.575	Yes
	b	BP $\rightarrow$ BH $\rightarrow$ BE	0.218**	4.214	Yes	0.221**	4.487	Yes
	c	PPP $\rightarrow$ BH $\rightarrow$ BE	0.252***	5.123	Yes	0.240***	4.922	Yes
H5	a	SPE*MBP $\rightarrow$ BH	0.213**	4.187	Yes	0.165**	3.449	Yes
	b	SPE*BP $\rightarrow$ BH	0.228***	4.359	Yes	0.229***	4.606	Yes
	c	SPE*PPP $\rightarrow$ BH	0.173**	3.641	Yes	0.204**	4.199	Yes
H6		PB*BH $\rightarrow$ BE	0.189**	3.956	Yes	0.177**	3.569	Yes

**Note:** \*\*\*coefficients are significant at  $\alpha = 0.000$  and \*\*coefficients are significant at  $\alpha \geq 0.01$ .

actually buy and use brands in this research, the brand perceptions recorded by the consumers are actual perceptions that emerged after using prestigious brands. Also, the respondents being consumers, paid premium prices for the prestigious brands. Therefore, it reflects that happiness depicted by consumers is not based on their imagination to buy a brand in the future; instead, it is aroused after using prestigious brands. In addition, the concept of brand happiness is regarded as a new promising area of practice and research based on its influenceable and measurable characteristics (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Hence it has an immense potential to evaluate a brand's strategic objectives and metrics while differentiating it from others. However, there are contradictory findings regarding the association between consumption and happiness (Laisawat et al., 2012). For instance, the scholars like (Duan, 2020; Netemeyer et al., 2018; Suzuki, Hamamura, & Takemura, 2019)

supported the association of consumption and happiness whereas, others, i.e., (Drennan, Brown, & Mort, 2011; Laisawat et al., 2012) negated the association. However, in a recent study conducted among laptop users, Kumar et al. (2021) reflected that consuming prestigious brands makes consumers happy. Therefore, the current study extends the existing literature and contributes to the theory by examining the underlying mechanism of brand happiness to transmit the MPB, BP, and PPP in positive consumer behavior like brand evangelism.

## 6.2. Practical implications

Thus marketers can utilize this notion to make consumers happy to evangelize the brand to others, making the brand more successful; as evangelism is not just to spread positive words about a brand but also to

convince/persuade others to buy/use that brand (Becerra & Badrinayan, 2013). This construct is of immense importance and must be given due consideration by marketers to increase their market share. The moderating role of self-pleasing experience between Masstige and brand happiness brings valuable insights for scholars and marketers. The results showed that the brands whose experience makes consumers happy achieve a competitive edge over another brand as consumers not only advocate the brand to others (Loureiro & da Cunha, 2017) but also convince others to buy/use the brand. Marketers also consider pleasing experience as a significant vehicle to communicate the prestige of a brand (Choi et al., 2017). Thus, based on the research findings and evidence in the literature, which reflect that positive experiences derive happiness in consumers (Nicolao et al., 2009), marketers need to create pleasing experiences while consumers encounter Masstige brands. Furthermore, they should adopt the Masstige strategy as a mass phenomenon to make many consumers happy. For this, they can focus on the product's attributes, i.e., rarity, unique features, appealing designs, available for masses with premium prices, quality, etc. Besides, the research shows that among other features, uniqueness is of immense importance. Based on the theory of mass prestige (masstige) for brand management, the way consumers relate to being part of the unique brands has been explained previously concerning American versus Asian laptop brands (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Therefore, marketers should focus on the uniqueness attribute and try to bring new and innovative features in cosmetics and designs in clothing to make consumers feel privileged being among the leaders to use such brands. Finally, marketers can promote positive product beliefs among consumers by achieving high quality. The results prove these product beliefs as a potential source of prompting happy consumers to promote the brand to their family, friends, and peers by persuading them to buy/use it.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research directions

Along with many significances, the current study has limitations that future research should consider. The current study was conducted among the consumers of all the existing cosmetics and clothing brands in South Asia without any distinction of foreign or local brands. There are many foreign cosmetic and clothing brands in the sub-continent, including India and Pakistan, that people prefer to buy/use over the local brands. Therefore, in the future, comparative studies can be conducted to check the predictive differences of Masstige among local and foreign brands. Also, how this Masstige brings happiness to consumers and how they depict brand evangelism differently for the local and foreign brands should be assessed. Moreover, research shows that the emerging economies have much more potential to explore masstige brand strategies. This is because many prestigious products (e.g.,

cosmetics, clothing, perfumes, televisions, smartphones, laptops, cars, etc.) are thought to be expensive yet attainable for the middle class (Kumar & Paul, 2018). In connection to that, in-depth studies can reveal the unexplored facts behind perceiving a brand as Masstige, especially in emerging economies. Furthermore, future studies can explore the association of Masstige with brand love being an important construct in brand management to achieve a competitive edge. Finally, future research can consider examining organizational variables such as advertising and brand credibility between Masstige and brand happiness, love, evangelism, etc., to identify valuable insights for the marketers to devise their promotional activities accordingly.

## 7. Conclusion

Considering the dearth of literature on Masstige (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2019) and following the immense importance of middle-class consumers in a sharing economy, Kumar et al. (2021) called for research to explore the Masstige. Therefore, the current study examined the direct and indirect association of MPB, BP, PPP with BE via the mediatory role of BH. Moreover, the moderating role of SPE in between Masstige and BH was assessed. In addition, the interactive effect of PB with BH to enhance BE was investigated. Two studies were conducted among the users of two different brand categories (cosmetics and clothing), and two different data collection methods and sampling techniques were applied to achieve the study objectives. Our findings of both studies revealed the significant impact of MPB, BP, PPP on consumers BH and BE with minor differences in impact sizes. Thus, the findings depict the importance of Masstige brands in deriving happiness among consumers and making them brand evangelizers. Moreover, the moderating role of SPE was proved to reflect the importance of consumers' pleasant consumption experiences for prestigious brands to increase happiness. Likewise, study results revealed that positive product beliefs act as a catalyst to transmit the consumers' brand happiness to their brand evangelism.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Mahnaz Mansoor:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft. **Justin Paul:** Writing – review & editing, Validation.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix

### Appendix A. . Measures of the study

Constructs	Items
Mass Prestige of a Brand	MPB1: I would buy this brand because of its prestige. MPB2: I believe that individuals in my country, state, or district perceive this brand as prestigious MPB3: I consider this brand a top-of-mind brand in my country, state, or district. MPB4: I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives.
Brand Perception	MPB5: I like this brand because of its prestige. BP1: I believe this brand meets international standards. BP2: I believe this brand is known for high quality. BP3: Nothing is more exciting than this brand.
The Propensity to Pay the Premium	PPP1: I love to buy this brand regardless of price. PPP2: I tend to pay a premium for this brand as a status symbol.
Brand Happiness	BH1: I feel glad buying/using this brand. BH2: I feel cheerful buying/using this brand. BH3: I feel joyful buying/using this brand.

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Constructs	Items
	BH4: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel lively.
	BH5: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel peppy.
	BH6: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel vigorous.
	BH7: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel proud.
	BH8: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel superior.
	BH9: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel Worthy.
	BH10: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel relaxed.
	BH11: I feel myself at ease buying/ using this brand.
	BH12: Buying/ using this brand makes me feel comfortable.
Brand Evangelism	BE1: I have proselytized several of my friends to this brand.
	BE2: I try to convince as many people as possible to buy this brand.
	BE3: I feel the need to tell everybody that this is the most appealing brand.
Self-pleasing Experience	SPE1: Using this brand support my desire to have many experiences in life.
	SPE2: Using this brand enhances my mood.
	SPE3: Using this brand gives me a lot of pleasure.
	SPE4: I feel using this brand enjoyable.
Product Beliefs	PB1: I believe this brand provides exclusive products
	PB2: I believe this brand provides an elegant style
	PB3: I believe this is a fashionable brand
	PB4: I believe this brand provides high-quality products

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# Masstige scale: An alternative to measure brand equity

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## Abstract

Masstige marketing is a strategic word for market penetration for premium but reachable products based on brand equity, trying to develop brand awareness, likability, affection and attachment. Hence, masstige scale may allow firms to measure brand equity to derive insights into the popularity of their brands. However, there is no empirical evidence available to test whether these scales are related measures of brand equity and, at the same time, independent measures, respectively. This study investigates whether the masstige scale and multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale measure the same constructs. A total of 493 participants evaluated four different athletic shoe brands. The multi-trait, multimethod and confirmatory factor analyses suggested that the masstige scale may be a viable alternative to consumer-based brand equity and masstige value. We discuss the implications and provide directions for future research derived from our findings.

## KEYWORDS

brand equity, mass prestige, masstige marketing, masstige scale, MTMM

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, brand equity has gained ground and caught research interest in the context of brand management literature. Brand equity has been studied extensively in various industries using different dimensional measures (Herr, 1994; Keller, 2001; Shocker, 1993; Washburn & Plank, 2002; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Aaker defines brand equity as a collection of assets associated with a brand's name and symbol that contribute to the value a product/service gives the customer (Aaker, 1996). A consumer perceives brand equity as the 'value-added' to a product by connecting it with a brand name. Though this 'value-added' is determined by several factors, the 'core' factors are the key determinants of brand purchase intent and behaviour. Aaker's core brand equity elements include a brand's 'perceived quality', 'perceived value for the cost', 'uniqueness' and a brand's 'willingness to pay a price premium' (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Because of high levels of 'positive customer-based brand equity', brands could charge premium pricing. The ideas of brand equity and mass prestige can explain the extra premium prices that luxury brands charge (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018).

Exclusivity and rarity have always been the most critical traits for premium and luxury brands (Zhan & He, 2012). Despite their rarity,

brands have realized that they need to proliferate to remain competitive and go where the customers and markets are (Kapferer & Bastien, 2013). Recent studies questioned the rarity principle of premium and luxury brands due to the bandwagon effect (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Paul, 2019), which creates mass prestige (masstige). Therefore, there are opportunities for unique future studies in brand equity and masstige. Over the years, premium brands have been observed to cater to niche markets, focusing on rarity as the primary messaging and promotional construct (Kim et al., 2019; Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2018). However, it soon emerged that rarity could not be the sole criterion, and there was a need for brands to extend beyond their comfort zones to go where the market is in order to sustain itself (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, 2013; Zhan & He, 2012).

Modern consumers are more aspirational and willing to invest in exclusive brands to achieve a sense of identity (Diallo et al., 2020; Heo & Hyun, 2015; Siew et al., 2018). This means marketers must make their brand entry point more flexible to cater to a broader market. Accordingly, it has come to light that brands have been stretching their price spectrum downwards to cater to a broader market without compromising the image of luxury they represent (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2018, 2019). Lassar et al. (1995) finds that brand



equity influences consumer loyalty and their willingness to pay a premium price for the brand. Highly positive brand equity can command a premium price, which is well explained by the masstige marketing phenomenon (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018).

Kotler et al. (2017) defines brand equity as 'the added value endowed to products and services with consumers'. Masstige marketing, a combination of the terms 'mass' and 'prestige', is self-explanatory, signifying 'prestige for the masses' (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), which is a marketing term akin to better 'brand perception and brand equity' (Paul, 2018). In marketing terms, it means a downward extension of the brand. With masstige, premium brands become attainable to the masses without compromising the essential qualities they represent (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018). Masstige is a marketing strategy targeted at the maximum possible customers instead of sticking to 'premium' customers. It helps brands break through the gilded cages to serve a more inclusive market. Interestingly, even with mass promotions, brands continue to enjoy the same brand equity; in other words, there is no compromise to their premium tag. These products are priced between the middle and premium range (Kim et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2008). Masstige theory is grounded in the equation  $\text{price} = f(\text{masstige})$  and  $\text{masstige} = f(\text{product, promotion and place})$  strategies (Paul, 2018). This implies that a brand can charge a premium price if the managers employ the best possible product, promotion and place strategies.

As income increases and consumers become more aspirational and more amenable to shell out extra for premium products, it makes sense for brands to meet them mid-way for a win-win situation, serving them with products that are more reasonably priced (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Heo & Hyun, 2015; Siew et al., 2018). With masstige, brands are no longer limited to serving a niche upper-affluent market. Instead, they can tap an additional revenue source by serving the aspirational mass-market consumers. Masstige brands are relatively more competitively priced while offering exclusivity to mass consumers (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018, 2019).

In this evolving scenario, the emerging Masstige model now includes brand equity as one of its dimensions of measurement. According to the model, brand equity can also be operationalized using masstige marketing (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018, 2019). From the discussion, it becomes clear that masstige marketing is a means for brands to tap new markets without compromising their premium tag and putting off the upper-affluent market that was their sole source of revenue (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2018, 2019).

Based on the literature, masstige marketing is a strategic word for market penetration for premium but reachable products based on brand equity, trying to develop brand awareness, likability, affection and attachment and masstige is seen as a formidable alternative to brand equity in the marketing world (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2018, 2019). In their study, Kumar and Paul (2018) defined brand equity in terms of mass prestige and popularity, and they used 'brand equity measurement' to record the theoretical emergence of mass prestige. However, there is little empirical evidence available to test the masstige value and brand equity are related measures of brand equity and, at the same time, independent measures, respectively. Paul

(2018) explains the link between perceived brand equity, country of origin and mass prestige value. Park et al. (2022) study shows that the dimensions of masstige consumption value, brand equity and buy intention are linked. This study's main objective is to investigate whether both instruments (masstige scale and multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale) measure the same constructs. This can be assessed by applying a multi-trait, multimethod (MTMM) framework by validating both scales' convergent and discriminant validity. The underlying premise behind MTMM analysis is that theoretically connected test scores measuring the same or similar traits should be practically associated, while theoretically unrelated test scores measuring distinct constructs should be empirically unrelated (Koch et al., 2017). The first statement refers to the degree of 'convergent validity' among the measures; the second refers to the degree of 'discriminant validity'. MTMM measurement designs are frequently analysed with confirmatory factor models (CFA-MTMM models). The CFA-MTMM models offer numerous advantages (Bagozzi & Yi, 1993). CFA-MTMM models enable '(1) separating unsystematic measurement error variance from systematic trait or method influences, (2) relating latent trait or method variables to other external variables in order to explain trait or method effects and (3) testing specific assumptions about the measurement model'. Many researchers have used the MTMM framework in organizational behaviour (Demerouti et al., 2003; Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005), psychology (Miller et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2008) and public health fields (Bauldry et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2008; Langer et al., 2010) and this is one of the first studies that use the marketing field's MTMM framework. The second part of this study aims to determine the mass prestige value associated with best-selling athletic shoe brands in an emerging market like India.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The Section 2 explains the literature reviews on masstige theory, consumer-based brand equity and its constructs. The following section deals with the research methodology followed by the results. Finally, study implications were discussed under the Section 4, followed by the study's limitations and future scope.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Instruments for the measurement of brand equity and mass prestige

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed 10 items and a Multidimensional Brand Equity (MBE) scale comprising of three theoretically defined constructs, namely, (1) brand awareness/associations, (2) perceived quality and (3) brand loyalty. They also developed a separate multiple-item construct to measure the overall brand equity. On the other hand, Paul (2015) developed mass prestige (masstige) mean score scale with 10 items to measure the effectiveness of masstige marketing based on masstige value, with the individual score ranging from 10 to 70. The scale is called the masstige scale and has three subscales, namely, (1) brand knowledge and prestige, (2) perceived quality

and (3) excitement and status (Paul, 2019). A higher score indicates that a particular brand has a higher masstige value. To use this scale, data must be collected from consumers or potential consumers about selected brands (different brands or the same brand in other geographies). Then, the mean value can be used to compare which brand has a better masstige value (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2015, 2018, 2019). To the best of our knowledge, the masstige scale is the only scale available to measure the brand's masstige value and has been used to measure the brand value of various products such as automobiles (Paul, 2018), laptop brands (Kumar & Paul, 2018), mobile payment services (Singh, 2022) and mobile phones (Baber et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021).

Many authors have defined brand equity in different forms. Keller (1993) defined it as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.' According to Herr (1994), brand equity is 'a set of assets linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's consumers.' While the definition may vary, brand equity ideally includes four dimensions: brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations (Aaker, 1993; Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). These dimensions can be used to explore and define marketing and consumer behaviour and conduct further brand equity research.

## 2.2 | The link between masstige and brand equity dimensions

Brand awareness is the degree to which consumers exhibit familiarity with a brand in terms of its products and services and also their perceptions about the quality of these offerings (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Herr, 1994; Keller, 1993, 2001; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Brand association is the deep-rooted positive perceptions about the brand. These perceptions are relatable and aspirational for the consumers. Brand awareness is the degree to which consumers are familiar with a brand regarding its products and services and their perceptions of its quality (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Keller, 1993, 2001). Brand association is the deep-rooted positive perceptions about the brand. These perceptions are relatable and aspirational for the consumers (French & Smith, 2013; Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Kumar and Paul (2018) emphasized that brand knowledge and awareness are essential to brand equity on the masstige scale. Brand knowledge comprises two parts: brand awareness (recognition and recall of the brand) and brand image (strength, favorability and uniqueness). 'A brand node in memory to which a variety of associations are linked' is one way to describe brand knowledge (Keller, 1993, p. 3). The more well-known a brand is, the more likely it will come to mind. The person then remembers everything they know about the brand, its characteristics and benefits, and the sensory pleasure of using it (Keller, 1993; Roy & Chau, 2011; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Luxury brands aim to have this be closely linked with prestige, high-quality and enjoyable experiences (Siu et al., 2016). When a brand has strong and positive associations,

it is easy to remember its high-quality and luxurious features and benefits, which makes the consumer happy to use the product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2013). Consumers are more likely to feel strongly about a brand when they know more about it and have some positive, strong, and unique knowledge about it in their minds (Kumar et al., 2020). So, for luxury brands, a consumer's positive feelings, like pleasure and happiness, should be linked to how much they know about the brand (combining brand associations and awareness) (Siu et al., 2016). Hence, the brand knowledge dimensions of the masstige scale and brand awareness dimensions of the brand equity scale are the same.

Perceived quality is critical in brand equity frameworks (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and the masstige scale (Kumar & Paul, 2018). According to one widely accepted definition, perceived quality is the customer's assessment of a brand's overall excellence, esteem, or superiority (concerning its intended purposes) relative to the alternative brand (s) (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Perceptions of quality as a component of brand value contribute to brand equity and distinguish a brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Perceived quality differs from objective quality in that it is more related to an attitudinal assessment of a brand—a worldwide emotive appraisal of its performance relative to other brands (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Netemeyer et al., 2004). In the cognitive process of brand evaluation, the perceived greater quality of a premium brand promotes the sense of self (Fuchs et al., 2013). Perceiving the high quality of a luxury brand can provide consumers with a satisfying experience and cause them to acknowledge the brand's high uniqueness and superiority (Siu et al., 2016). Because it has been linked to willingness to pay a price premium, brand purchase intent, and brand choice, perceived quality is considered a core/primary brand equity construct. Perceived quality can also be a proxy for other aspects of brand equity, valid across product categories (Aaker, 1996; Netemeyer et al., 2004). The perceived quality of the masstige brand provides them with a great sense of pleasure and increases brand equity.

The introduction of masstige brands has sparked consumer interest in luxury brands (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). According to research, one of the most distinguishing features of luxury goods is that they allow consumers to express and enhance their identity (status) and ideal personality (excitement) by acquiring and consuming them (Sung et al., 2015). A brand's personality (dimensions of brand personality include excitement and status) is an essential component of the brand's equity and loyalty (Keller, 1993). It is related to the value a customer attributes to the brand. Masstige products are 'premium yet affordable', luxury or premium products with price tags that fall between mid-market and super-premium. The premium price is a function of mass prestige (Kumar et al., 2020), one of the most powerful indicators of brand loyalty, and the most appropriate summary measure of overall brand equity (Aaker, 1996). The more positive the association, the greater the opportunity for brands to charge a premium for their products (Paul, 2018, 2019). Another aspect to consider is the sense of status associated with a brand. The status depends on factors such as life experiences and the knowledge and

awareness of competing brands (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Roy & Chau, 2011; Truong et al., 2008). A consumer perceives brand status depending on its exclusivity, technical superiority, price and how selectively it is available (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2009). A brand can symbolize style, wealth and prestige. A high-status brand will automatically symbolize superior quality, exclusive price, snob appeal and the perception of luxury and exclusivity (Goldsmith et al., 2012; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Roy & Chau, 2011; Shahid & Paul, 2021). Accordingly, the cost of the product in such cases also includes the symbolic benefit it offers. Brand prestige refers to a brand's high status in terms of positioning, making consumers feel like they belong to a higher upper class through increasing 'social value and social self-concept' (Hwang & Han, 2014). Consumers are willing to pay higher prices to gain a reputation, which signifies social status (El-Adly & Abu ELSamen, 2018; Hwang & Han, 2014). The significance of prestige as a brand equity asset is derived from its essential outcomes (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). According to previous studies, brand prestige is crucial to brand recognition, loyalty, trust and satisfaction (El-Adly & Abu ELSamen, 2018; Hwang & Han, 2014; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). As a result, when a brand represents high prestige status and makes customers proud of their decision, it shows a distinguished standing, boosting brand equity (El-Adly & Abu ELSamen, 2018).

Brand loyalty, one component of brand equity, can be defined as a consumer's attitudinal attachment to a brand (Aaker, 1996; Dick & Basu, 1994). Brand loyalty is defined as 'the degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand' (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). According to the 'self-enhancement theory', people are motivated to boost their sense of personal worth and self-esteem by seeking information or approaching their goals. The loyal usage of luxury products is a means of self-enhancement (Siu et al., 2016). Luxury brand customers are more likely to perceive them as providing superior quality and to receive emotional rewards (excitement and status) from utilizing them (Pappu et al., 2005). An increase in self-esteem may explain the emotional rewards. Excitement and status created by the masstige brand lead to increased brand loyalty (Kumar et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2015).

Paul's (2019) study shows that masstige brands can build brand equity by being well-known, liked, loved and attached to the brand, and his work reconceptualized the Masstige Scale as a different way to measure the value of a brand; similar arguments were found in masstige literature (Baber et al., 2020; Singh, 2022). His multidimensional masstige scale for masstige brands includes brand knowledge (Keller, 1993; Paul, 2019), perceived quality (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 1993), and excitement constructs (Siu et al., 2016; Zeithaml et al., 1996). In their study on the masstige value of smartphones in the Indian market, Baber et al. (2020) found that the masstige scale measures the brand perception of masstige, perceived quality and willingness to pay a price premium, and they concluded that the Apple iPhone has strong brand equity in the Indian market. Based on the information above, we can say that the masstige value measured by the masstige scale is also the brand equity of masstige brands.

### 3 | METHODS

Country of origin is a crucial informational cue for the consumer, influencing purchase decisions and playing a significant part in establishing brand equity (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Mohd Yasin et al., 2007). If masstige is considered one of the relative measures of brand equity, then it is prudent to emphasize the effect of the brand nation of origin on masstige (Kumar & Paul, 2018). According to Vohra and Gupta's (2017) study, Indian consumers prefer foreign brands, which relates substantially to 'materialistic value'. It emphasized 'Reputation' as a factor related to materialism and propensity towards foreign companies. Numerous studies indicate that Indian consumers like international brands over domestic brands (Mukherjee & Sundararajan, 2012; Vohra & Gupta, 2017); thus, the effect of country of origin on brand equity and masstige studies is extensive and profound. Consequently, the mass prestige value connected with brands from various countries of origin varies significantly (Kumar & Paul, 2018).

In this study, we selected four athletic shoe brands, namely, (1) Nike, (2) Adidas, (3) Reebok and (4) Puma. The basis of selection was that they are India's best-selling athletic shoe brands (BestShoe99, 2021; Richter, 2020). Reebok is a British American brand which has been a subsidiary of the German-based brand Adidas since 2005. The country of origin for Nike and Puma are the United States of America and Germany, respectively. To fulfil the objective, we used the overall brand equity constructs of the MBE scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and the masstige scale (Paul, 2019). Both measures (masstige scale and MBE) are measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Both scales were validated and well-received in academia and free from potential sources of common method biases recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). This research on brand equity differs from others in that it is based on consumers instead of students. We also asked for a few demographic details of respondents, such as age, gender, family income, educational qualification and occupation.

The research collects data through an online survey and uses snowball sampling. In line with existing research, we use Google forms to collect data (Kumar & Paul, 2018). The study's purpose was explained to the participants. Then, respondents were selected through professional social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and the primary investigator's professional networks. We also requested that the participants share the link with their peers for extended reach. The respondents answered the survey anonymously and received no incentives for participating. We maintained confidentiality and anonymity in this research. We surveyed various places in India. On the masstige scale and the MBE scale, respondents were asked to rate all four brands of athletic shoes. We chose respondents based on the fact that they owned one of the brands of athletic shoes used in this study. In total, we received 493 responses.

### 4 | RESULTS

The participants' age ranged from 18 to 52 years, with an average age of 28.87 years. Of the total respondents, 64.7% were male, whereas

35.3% were female; 50.1% held a bachelor's degree, 42.8% held a master's degree and only 7.1% of respondents had a school-level qualification. More than half of the respondents were students (52.7%), 23.1% salaried, 10.3% self-employed and 13.8% unemployed. 24.7% of the respondents earned more than Indian Rupees (INR) 1,00,000, 22.1% earned between INR30,000–INR49,999 and 19.9% earned between INR50,000–INR74,999 on a monthly basis. Only 15.4% of respondents had their earnings between INR75,000–INR99,999. Among the four brands, Nike has the highest market share (33.5%), followed by Adidas (26.2%), Reebok (23.7%) and Puma (16.6%).

We used the structural equation modelling technique (SEM) with the maximum likelihood estimation method for this study. This includes the IBM SPSS AMOS 25 software and a variety of model fit adequacy measures such as the Chi square value ( $\chi^2$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with 90% confidence intervals, goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and normed fit index (NFI) as recommended (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Rigdon, 1997). The cut-off value for the model good fits were  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ; GFI > 0.95; NFI > 0.95; CFI > 0.95; RMSEA < 0.08. As recommended by Byrne (2013), ' $\chi^2/df$ , Akaike's information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) were employed to statistically compare the nested models to judge evidence of convergent and discriminant validity'. Lower  $\chi^2/df$ , AIC and BIC values indicate a better fitting model; also,  $\chi^2$  differences ( $\Delta\chi^2$ ), CFI differences ( $\Delta CFI$ ) and differences in RMSEA ( $\Delta RMSEA$ ) were used to compare the goodness of fit of the models.

This analysis included several stages of investigation. First, we tested the factor structures of both scales (masstige scale and MBE scale) using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Based on the scale structure proposed by the Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Paul (2019), we tested the three-factor model for both scales and found that the model fit adequacy measures showed a good model fit for the masstige scale ( $\chi^2 = 89.526$ ;  $df = 32$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.798$ ; GFI = 0.966; CFI = 0.984; NFI = 0.975; RMSEA = 0.060; AIC = 135.526; BIC = 232.138) and MBE scale ( $\chi^2 = 120.12$ ;  $df = 32$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 3.754$ ; GFI = 0.951; CFI = 0.972; NFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.075; AIC = 166.12; BIC = 262.731).

Cronbach alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) were used to check the internal consistency. The masstige scale and MBE scales' internal consistency

were acceptable since all Cronbach's  $\alpha$  scores were over .7. The construct validity was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was estimated using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). CR > 0.7 and AVE > 0.5 indicated acceptable convergent validity levels (Hair et al., 2014). Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 explains the validity and reliability measures of the masstige scale and MBE scale and shows no validity and reliability concerns. However, the inter-construct relations were higher between the masstige scale constructs and the MBE construct; we tested the unidimensional model where all items were loaded onto one factor. The model fit measure showed that the three-factor model was superior and yielded better results than the one-factor model for both scales; the results are displayed in Table 2. These results were confirmed by  $\chi^2/df$ , GFI, CFI, NFI, RMSEA, AIC and BIC values presented in Table 2.  $\chi^2/df$ , AIC and BIC values were lower for the three-factor models of the masstige scale and MBE scales than unidimensional masstige scale and MBE scales.

The MTMM model was used to evaluate construct validity. It involves comparing the various nested models. We followed the MTMM framework suggested by Campbell and Fiske (1959), which has been widely used in research (Brown, 2015; Koch et al., 2017). The MTMM tests the masstige scale against MBE to assure that its measurement characteristics competently account for unique traits (brand knowledge, perceived quality, excitement, status) and different methods. Demerouti et al. (2003) and Halbesleben and Demerouti (2005) used CFA to conduct the MTMM analysis (two methods and three traits) instead of comparing the correlation coefficient for validity estimation. Our study used the correlated method models developed and tested MTMM by comparing the nested models. We followed the four types of nested models proposed by Koch et al. (2017): 'correlated traits/correlated methods (CTCM), no traits/correlated methods (NTCM), perfectly correlated traits/freely correlated method (PCTCM) and freely correlated traits/uncorrelated methods (CTUM)'. CTCM was considered the base model among these models, and the other three models were compared against it. Figure 1 shows the visual representation of the MTMM model. Convergent and discriminant validity at the matrix level can be achieved through these four model comparisons (Byrne, 2013). To

**TABLE 1** Validity and reliability measures

Constructs	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	$\alpha$
1. Brand knowledge and prestige (MS)	0.917	0.689	0.658	<b>0.830</b>			.915
2. Excitement and status (MS)	0.868	0.687	0.566	0.731**	<b>0.829</b>		.857
3. Perceived quality (MS)	0.845	0.731	0.658	0.811**	0.752**	<b>0.855</b>	.843
1. Brand awareness and associations (CBBE)	0.908	0.664	0.566	<b>0.815</b>			.906
2. Brand loyalty (CBBE)	0.858	0.668	0.638	0.740**	<b>0.817</b>		.856
3. Perceived quality (CBBE)	0.799	0.665	0.638	0.753**	0.799**	<b>0.815</b>	.797

Note: The square root of AVE is shown as bold at diagonal.

Abbreviations:  $\alpha$ , Cronbach's alpha; AVE, average variance extracted; CBBE, consumer-based brand equity scale; CR, composite reliability; MS, masstige scale; MSV, maximum shared variance.

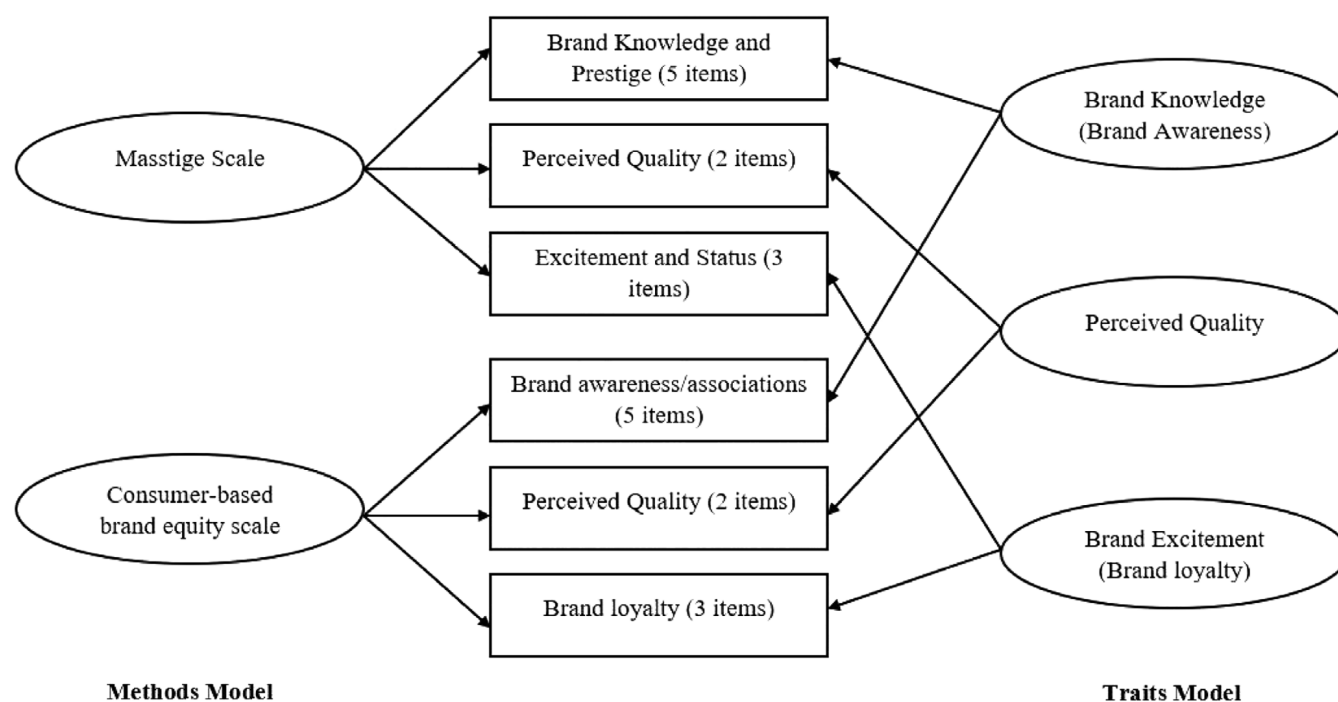
\*\* $p < .01$ .



**TABLE 2** Nested models and model comparison

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	NFI	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	90% CI
<b>Unidimensional model (masstige scale)</b>	<b>480.672</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>13.733</b>	<b>0.819</b>	<b>0.873</b>	<b>0.865</b>	<b>520.672</b>	<b>604.682</b>	<b>0.161</b>	<b>0.148–0.174</b>
Proposed three-factor model (masstige scale)	89.526	32	2.798	0.966	0.984	0.975	135.526	232.138	0.060	0.046–0.075
Unidimensional model (CBBE scale)	483.053	35	13.802	0.795	0.859	0.850	523.053	607.063	0.161	0.149–0.174
Proposed three-factor model (CBBE scale)	120.12	32	3.754	0.951	0.972	0.963	166.12	262.731	0.075	0.061–0.089
Model 1: Correlated traits/correlated methods	337.088	146	2.309	0.935	0.973	0.953	465.088	733.921	0.052	0.044–0.059
Model 2: No traits/correlated methods	1079.541	169	6.388	0.789	0.870	0.850	1161.541	1333.762	0.105	0.099–0.111
Model 3: Perfectly correlated traits/freely correlated method	722.694	149	4.850	0.849	0.918	0.899	844.694	1100.925	0.088	0.082–0.095
Model 4: Freely correlated traits/uncorrelated methods	729.905	150	4.866	0.917	0.847	0.898	849.905	1101.936	0.089	0.082–0.095

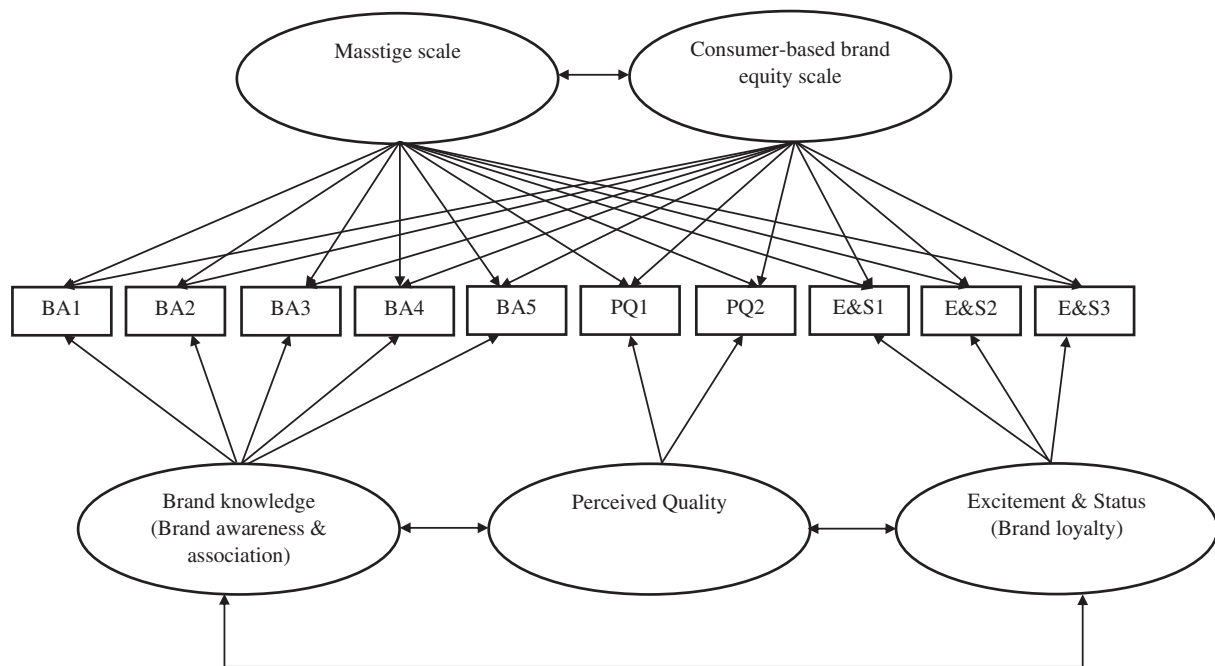
Abbreviations:  $\chi^2$ , Chi square value; AIC, Akaike's information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion; CFI, comparative fit index; GFI, goodness of fit; NFI, normed fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

**FIGURE 1** MTMM framework

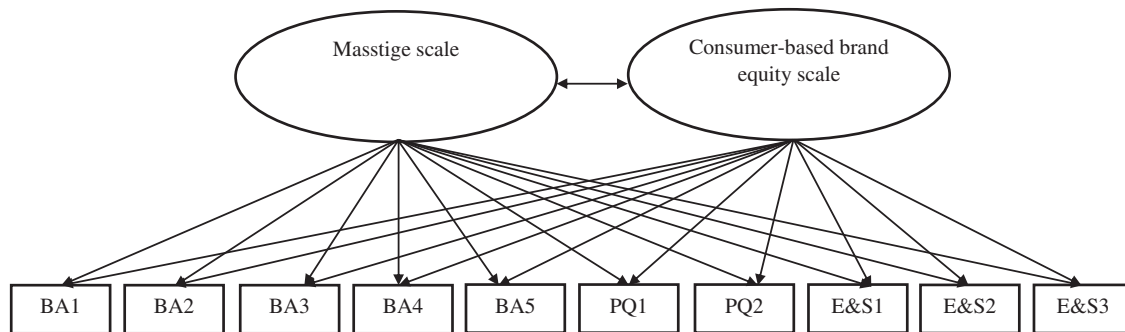
test convergent validity, the CTCM model was tested against the NTCM model; and the CTCM model was tested against PCTCM and CTUM to test the discriminant validity.

Model 1 was constructed by considering method factors (masstige scale and MBE) and trait factors (brand knowledge or brand awareness, perceived quality; excitement and status or brand loyalty) as the latent variables. These were measured through the observed scores and not directly. In this model, method factors were allowed to

be freely correlated with each other; also, trait factors were freely correlated. Model 1, CTCM the hypothesized baseline model, shows adequate model fit ( $\chi^2 = 337.088$ ;  $df = 146$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.309$ ;  $GFI = 0.935$ ;  $CFI = 0.973$ ;  $NFI = 0.953$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.052$ ;  $AIC = 465.088$ ;  $BIC = 733.921$ ). The path diagram of this model is presented in Figure 2. The difference between content and instrument seems to be substantial. The second hypothesized model, the NTCM model, is identical to Model 1 (CTCM), and no trait factors are included—only



**FIGURE 2** The correlated traits/correlated methods model (CTCM)



**FIGURE 3** No traits/correlated methods (NTCM)

the corrected method factors are included. The path diagram of this model is presented in Figure 3. Brown (2015) argues, 'comparison of NTCM and CTCM models provides a statistical evaluation of whether effects associated with the different traits emerge'. The third model was hypothesized as the PCTCM model. This model is also identical to Model 1 (CTCM), and the three traits are perfectly correlated (i.e., equal to 1); two methods are freely estimated in Model 3, and PCTCM is shown in Figure 4. The final model was hypothesized as the CTUM MTMM model. This model is similar to Model 1, with the only difference being the absence of correlations in the method factors presented in Figure 5. The model fit measures for all four MTMM models are given in Table 2. Finally, the goodness of fit for the NTCM, PCTCM and CTUM models was compared with the CTCM model.

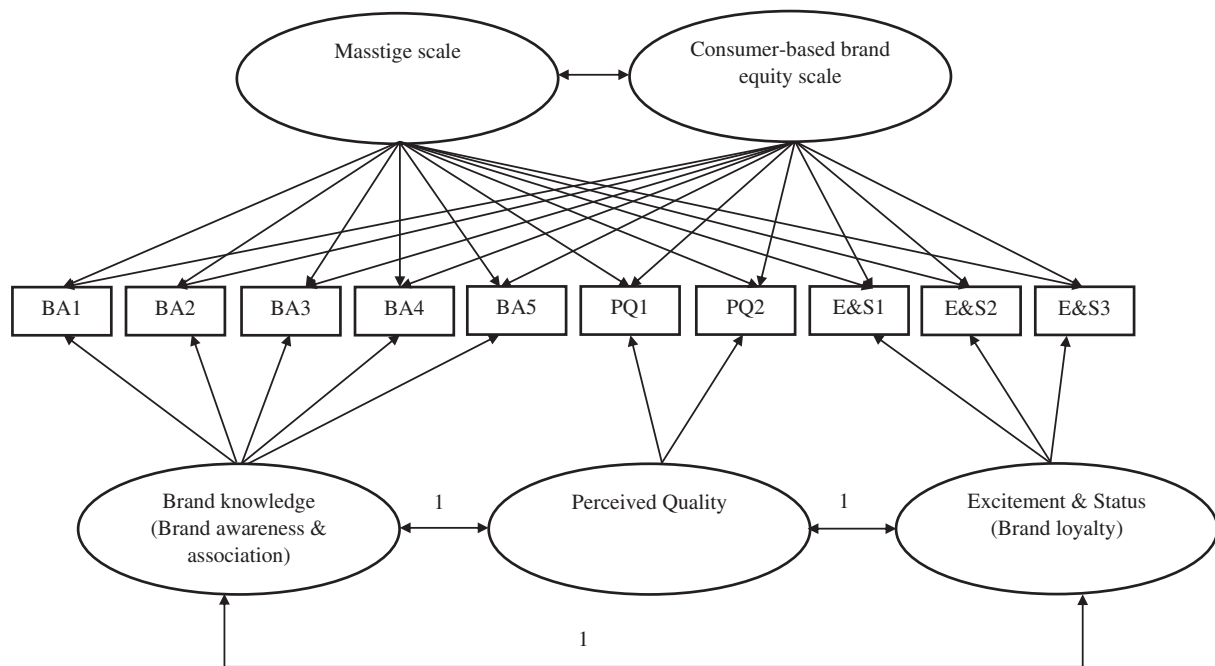
After carefully comparing the model fit measures of the four MTMM models, convergent and discriminant validity was tested, matrix level convergent validity was tested by comparing CTCM (Figure 2) and the NTCM (Figure 3) models. When  $\Delta\chi^2$ ,  $\Delta CFI$  and

$\Delta RMSEA$  values are highly significant between these two models ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.078$ ,  $\Delta CFI = 0.103$  and  $\Delta RMSEA = -0.053$ ), they show the presence of convergent validity (Byrne, 2013). Also, AIC and BIC values for the CTCM model are less than the NTCM model. This result also shows the same evidence of convergent validity (see Table 2).

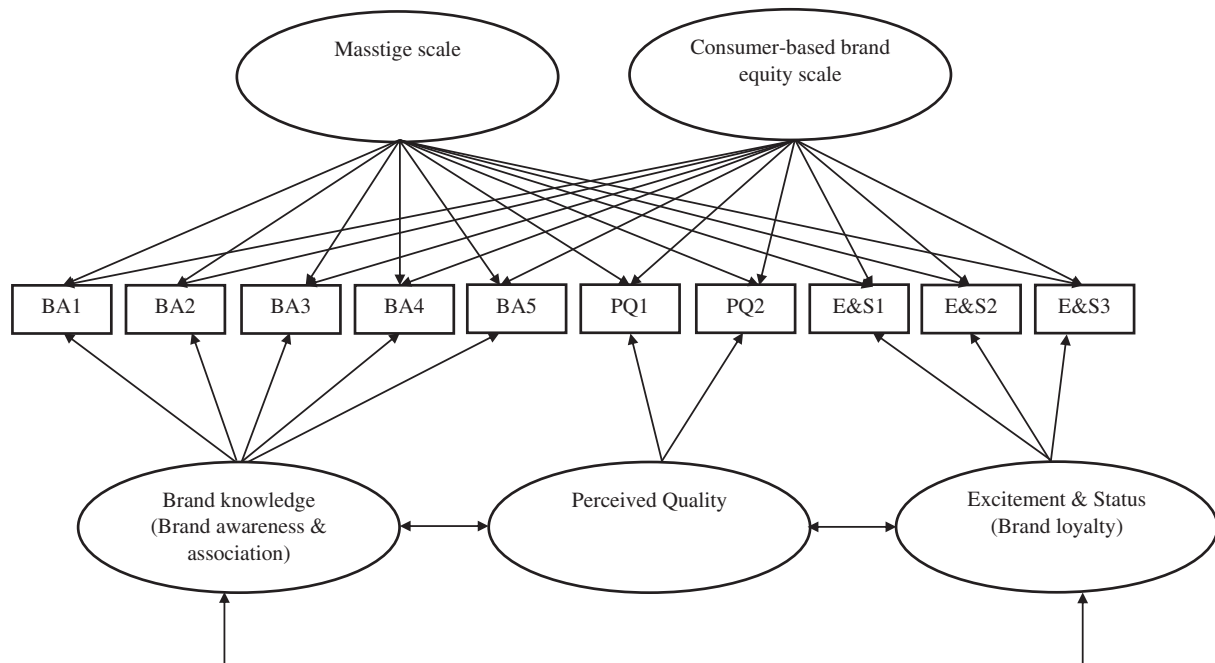
Trait and method models were considered while evaluating the discriminant validity at the matrix level. The discriminant validity of the traits was assessed by checking the model fit measures' statistical significance between Model 1 (Figure 2) and Model 3 (Figure 4). In this, the three trait constructs are correlated freely, significantly improving the model fit and showing that the three traits are not perfectly correlated with one another. The statistically significant difference between the fit of Models 1 and 3 supports the discriminant validity of the traits ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 2.100$ ,  $\Delta CFI = 0.055$  and  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.036$ ). AIC and BIC values of Model 3 are also higher than in Model 1.

Next, model fit measures of Model 1 (Figure 2) and Model 4 (Figure 5) were compared to assess the method's discriminant validity.





**FIGURE 4** Perfectly correlated traits/freely correlated methods model (PCTCM)



**FIGURE 5** Freely correlated traits/uncorrelated methods (CTUM)

In Model 1, methods were freely correlated but uncorrelated in Model 4. The comparison of these two models shows a statistically significant difference between the fit of Models 1 and 4 ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 2.31$ ,  $\Delta CFI = 0.126$  and  $\Delta RMSEA = -0.037$ ). Results show that each of the two methods employed—the masstige scale and MBE scale—provides non-redundant information about the traits in question. The model fit criteria and the nested models' comparison are identical to the measurement invariance comparison criteria (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Finally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to check the differences between the research construct scores based on four brands. As per the score pattern recommended by Paul (2019), the masstige mean score was calculated for all four brands by summing up all 10 items of the masstige scale. The masstige mean score findings show that Nike, Adidas and Reebok have created mass prestige in the Indian market, attaining a masstige mean score of 54.77, 51.22 and 50.24. Paul (2015) recommends 'to use one-sample

**TABLE 3** Score of the constructs

Brands	N	Masstige scale		Brand awareness/associations		Perceived quality		Brand loyalty	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Nike	165	54.77	9.01	5.59	0.92	5.13	0.91	5.59	0.93
Adidas	129	51.22	9.44	5.18	1.10	4.79	1.03	5.25	0.95
Reebok	117	50.24	8.82	5.07	0.99	4.79	0.93	5.20	0.82
Puma	82	48.89	9.23	4.97	0.94	4.73	0.97	5.10	0.98
Total	493	51.79	9.36	5.25	1.01	4.90	0.97	5.33	0.94
F value (p value)		9.946 (.000**)		10.120 (.000**)		5.191 (.000**)		7.330 (.000**)	

\*\* $p < .01$ .

t-test by taking the benchmark value of masstige to check mass prestige of the brand'. In our study, we set the masstige benchmark value as 50, and the result of the t-test concludes masstige score of Puma is equal to the benchmark value of 50 ( $t = -1.089$ ,  $df = 81$ ;  $p = .279$ ;  $M = 48.89$ ;  $SD = 9.23$ ). Based on this, we can conclude that the Puma brand is also considered a masstige brand in India. One-way ANOVA and t-test results imply that all the four brands are masstige and have substantial brand equity in India. ANOVA results revealed that Nike's masstige score is significantly higher than Adidas, Reebok and Puma. The respondents' opinions about the four brands' MBE constructs were tested using one-way ANOVA. The results conclude that the Nike brand's positive brand equity level (brand awareness/associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty) is significantly higher than Adidas, Reebok and Puma (see Table 3).

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Nowadays, consumers are willing to pay a premium price for some brands as they have a high positive brand equity level (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Based on the literature, the masstige scale can measure brand perception and brand equity (Paul, 2018). Both measures conceptualize both mass prestige and brand equity. To advance the literature on mass prestige and brand equity, the researchers must measure brand equity and masstige using the same instrument. Hence, the present study aims to find evidence for the validity of an alternative measure of brand equity. It suggests that the masstige scale may be a suitable alternative for measuring consumer-based brand equity for a premium product.

Paul (2015) uses the masstige scale as 'an alternate method to measure international marketing strategies' effectiveness that creates better brand equity'. This study provides evidence for the masstige scale's factorial validity, internal reliability and construct validity. Similar results are recorded for the MBE scale. For both the masstige scale and the MBE scale, the three-factor structure is relatively more supportive than the single-factor structure. The estimated correlation between the two methods (masstige scale and MBE scale) is .63, which again supports the two's convergent validity. The MTMM framework and differences in the nested model fit measures show that the masstige scale and MBE scale have convergence and divergence though they are not identical. Moreover, in both scales, many items have shared contents

(i.e., brand knowledge and prestige items and perceived quality items), creating a small problem. Due to this issue, the traits' discriminant validity is slightly affected. However, the AIC and BIC values support the traits' discriminant validity. Finally, this study concludes that the masstige scale has a broader scope than the MBE scale since the masstige scale can measure brand perception (prestige) and brand equity; however, the MBE scale measures only brand equity.

The study results show a high masstige score for the Nike brand. This can be attributed to the fact that Nike keeps its leadership position in its industry. Nike has strong brand awareness and brand prestige value when we see it from a masstige perspective. Their brand association includes high-quality product lines, innovation, high performance and global presence and responsiveness. They are associated with achievers, champions, determinants and accomplishment-oriented personalities. Nike has used sponsorships, ads and experience-based retailing to boost its brand image and awareness. Athlete support may be its most important achievement among these strategies. Nike's prestige perceptions derive from a unique, exceptional accomplishment inherent to the brand. Brand prestige is generated by interactions with people, product attributes, and symbolic values, which were found to be missing in other athletic shoe brands. With this explanation, we can conclude that the Nike brand is synonymous with prestige and luxury, mainly because its products are unique and comfort their consumers.

### 5.1 | Implications

This study has theoretical implications. First, we administered two instruments to test whether the masstige scale is the alternative to measure consumer-based brand equity. For better theoretical contribution, the masstige scale and MBE scale's subscales can be pooled to create better items since both are considerably invariant. Researchers can use the masstige scale for a more comprehensive measure of masstige value and brand equity because masstige marketing strategy helps build brand prestige, love and equity. We followed the three-factor factorial structure of the masstige scale developed by Paul (2018), which consists of three constructs, namely, (1) brand knowledge and prestige, (2) perceived quality and (3) excitement and status. These also measure the core constructs of MBE (brand awareness/

association, perceived quality and brand loyalty). However, the MBE construct's brand loyalty was measured under the masstige scale's brand knowledge and prestige construct, along with brand awareness/association. Many studies argue that a more robust brand personality, mainly excitement, leads to higher brand loyalty (Bekk et al., 2017; Chung & Park, 2017). Previous studies posit that when a brand gives a sense of satisfaction, the consumers are more likely to become loyal customers (Goldsmith et al., 2012; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Roy & Chau, 2011). Based on the above discussion, we use the MBE model's brand excitement and status construct of the masstige scale-related consumer loyalty construct. In the future, special attention should be given before following the factorial structure of the masstige scale. It is recommended to change the item structures; such results will increase the reliability of the masstige scale. This study significantly adds to the amount of knowledge already available on measurement scales for brand–consumer relationships. According to the findings of this study, these scales can be used to investigate how consumer-based brand equity and masstige value are influenced by potential antecedents such as brand knowledge, perceived quality, enthusiasm and status. Furthermore, the measure can study the effects of brand equity and masstige value.

Based on the second objective, this study provides a few practical implications. Practitioners can use these measures to evaluate and track a brand's performance over time. They can see where the brand does well and where it does not. Paul (2018) derived three theoretical propositions to develop strategic brand management. ‘The higher the masstige value of brands, the greater the likelihood of success in a distinct market. The better the marketing mix's appropriateness, the higher the masstige value in that market. Certain brands create higher brand equity in terms of masstige value in foreign markets’. Other shoe brands can follow similar strategies in India to create mass prestige. Paul (2018) concludes, ‘Masstige marketing has roots in product and promotion strategies, whereas it has nothing to do with the price change’. As explained in the results section, Nike has the highest masstige value. The company effectively follows a marketing mix (place, promotion and product) to create mass prestige and positive brand equity. Nike prices remain constant at a premium or relatively higher than other athletic shoe brands.

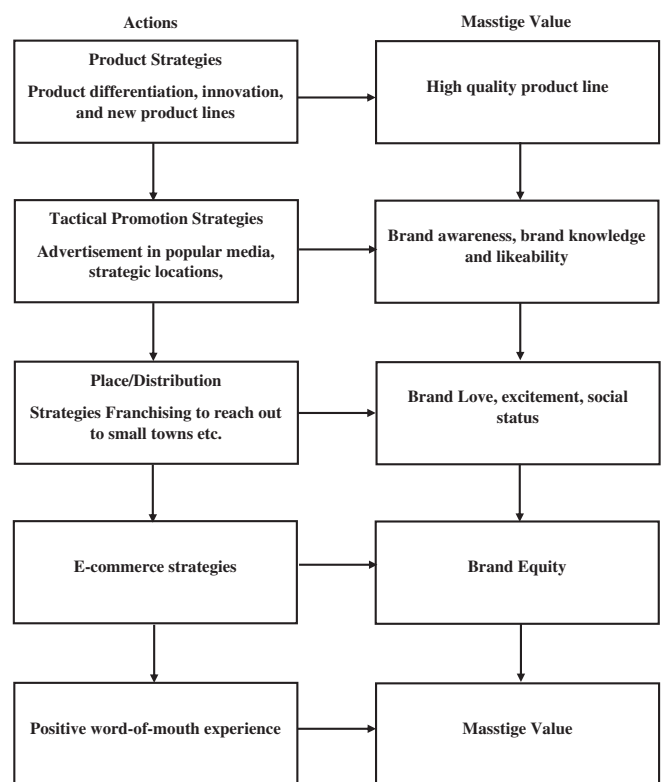
Designing branding and marketing strategies to build brand equity would benefit significantly from the findings of this study. The creation of recognition and desirability is advised to marketers to establish brand equity and encourage bandwagon consumption to increase brand knowledge and awareness for masstige brands (Singh, 2022). Therefore, marketers of masstige brands must convey to their target audience the symbolic and functional value of the brand using a variety of media, as Nike currently does. Other shoe brands can apply these techniques to boost their brand equity and masstige value. The study's conclusions also show that perceived quality, status, and excitement support the masstige brand equity by increasing consumer propensity to purchase masstige goods. Customers are more likely to pay a higher price and spread good word of mouth about a brand when they believe it to be reputable and distinctive (Nguyen et al., 2015; Singh, 2022). Marketers must develop a brand reputation

based on their products' performance; this will draw customers and foster loyalty.

Our result clarifies that all four brands are masstige in the Indian market. However, they are not ‘top of the mind’ brands, implying that they need to create awareness, availability, accessibility and affordability. As Paul (2018) recommended, shoe brands can follow a 5-step ‘masstige value creation approach’ to create mass prestige, as shown in Figure 6.

## 5.2 | Limitations and directions for future research

This study provides some specific directions for future research. This study is based on data from India and considered only four athletic shoe brands. For better generalization, data can be collected from multiple countries with different cultures. In addition, comparative studies using mass brands and class brands can be undertaken for greater insights. Similar studies can be conducted on a single brand market research to check the masstige value or brand equity level in different markets (local markets and international markets). Future research can focus on multiple brands (cobrands) or the masstige value or level of brand equity in a single market. Our study uses four athletic shoe brands, all of which are foreign brands. As Paul (2018) recommended, it is good to use different brands (including local brands) from different countries of origin for such studies because perception about the country of origin might influence the consumer's



**FIGURE 6** The masstige value creation approach. Adapted from Paul (2019), masstige model and measure for brand management

purchase intention and, thereby, the value of the masstige. There is significant income inequality in emerging economic countries. Future researchers should include respondents from different income groups to better understand masstige value and increase the external generalizability. We used the original masstige scale developed by Paul (2018) to measure the masstige value. Based on our results, the masstige scale measured masstige value and brand equity; however, the brand loyalty construct was not adequately measured. Future researchers can extend the three dimensions of the masstige scale into subdimensions, which will help clarify the masstige structure in detail. It is suggested that an experimental study be conducted to enhance the empiricism of the masstige scale further; in addition, a longitudinal study is strongly encouraged.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the present study offers evidence for a new instrument's reliability and construct validity to assess masstige value and brand equity. The masstige scale measures the same constructs as evaluated with the alternative measurement instrument MBE. This means the masstige scale is a reasonable alternative that can simultaneously assess masstige value and brand equity. This research opens new avenues for future studies using the unexplored masstige scale to measure a brand's mass prestige and equity.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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have been downloaded over 800,000 times during the last 6 years. An author of over 140 research papers in SSCI journals, Justin has over 80 papers in A or A star journals (ABDC) and 65+ in UK-CABS 3 or 4 level journals. He has visited over 60 countries as a visiting professor/public speaker.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness

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## Abstract

This study investigates how the relationships consumers establish with prestigious brands can lead to brand happiness. A study of 545 responses covering 19 global brands assessed consumers' perceptions of their relationship with prestigious brands—in both functional and symbolic categories—and brand happiness. Using structural equation modeling and moderation analysis, we show that (1) the prestige associated with brands induces consumers to formulate relationships with those brands and (2) brands' mass prestige (*masstige*) helps them achieve brand happiness. We show that consumers' attitudes toward luxury brands moderate the *masstige*–brand happiness relationship. In addition, brand classification (functional vs. symbolic) is an important moderator, with consumers perceiving symbolic brands as more intimate and, thus, as exhibiting more prestige and contributing more to brand happiness than functional brands. The more passionate consumers' relationship with a *masstige* brand, the happier they are with the brand.

## KEYWORDS

brand happiness, consumer–brand relationships, consumer happiness, *masstige*, new luxury brand relationship, symbolic consumption

## INTRODUCTION

Consumption is a source of individual emotions, feelings, pleasure, and images that bring meaning to consumers' lives. This meaning can stem from either functional or symbolic consumption (Fournier, 1998). Symbolic consumption is particularly embedded in subjective and *irrational* personal appeals (Kassarjian, 1971; Leibenstein, 1950). The purchase decision process associated with symbolic consumption is dominated by *feeling* motives<sup>1</sup> (Ratchford, 1987). Consumers use their possessions (e.g., objects and brands) to extend the self, build an identity, perform social roles, and so on (Belk, 1988). Therefore, consumer experiences are also a source of self-esteem and self-consistency (Sirgy, 1982). All these aspects contribute to the rationale behind the concept of consumer–brand relationships (Kaufman, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016). Consumers assume the role of partners in a dyadic relationship with brands that resemble their

own social relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Through these meaningful relationships, they develop emotional bonds (Blackston, 1993, 1995) and affection (Kim & Ko, 2012) that can lead to high levels of involvement (Payne et al., 2009), commitment (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004), and even love for the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Happiness can generally be achieved by the integration of brand experiences, material possessions of objects and brands, and commercial experiences with “purely psychological experiences” (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a, p. 168) such as spending time with friends and family. Thus, relationships with brands contribute to consumer happiness through brand happiness. Brand happiness derives from moment-based experiences that can result from any brand contact (e.g., product disposal and advertising) (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018) and has the ability to induce high emotional fulfillment through pleasure and life meaning. This article analyzes consumer–brand relationships that lead to brand happiness in the context of mass prestige marketing.

Luxury is a *fluid* concept that is socially constructed (Belk, 1999). Social, economic, and cultural differences affect the perception of luxury (Vickers & Renand, 2003). Brands such as Apple, Starbucks, and Dior fragrances

<sup>1</sup>According to Ratchford (1987), the purchase decision process develops along a continuum between the two separate dimensions of *think* and *feel*. The *think* dimension dominates the information processing in the purchase decision of products related to functional motivations, and the *feel* dominates the information processing of products linked to symbolic purchase motivations, such as personal gratification, social acceptance, and sensory.

capitalize on such perceptual cultural, social, and economic differences to induce an image of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Evidence indicates that the image of luxury and prestige can also be associated with non-luxury brands through a *masstige* strategy. *Masstige* represents a marketing strategy that makes luxury and prestige accessible to the mass market, sometimes through regular products, mainstream brands, and *unexpected* forms of luxury consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). In a *masstige* strategy, brands targeted to the masses are endowed with prestige by keeping the price relatively high (Paul, 2015). This type of brand is called a *masstige brand*. Brand managers execute a *masstige* strategy through a downward extension of either luxury brands or born *masstige* brands. Examples of *masstige* brands include Apple's iPhone, Louis Vuitton, and Tiffany. Brands use mass prestige (*masstige*) strategies to upgrade their offers and make them more attractive to the market (e.g., Samsung and Fiat 500) (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Traditional luxury brands engage in mass marketing through their less expensive and not-so-exclusive brand extensions (e.g., Mercedes-Benz A Class and Louis Vuitton's tote bags) (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016). Therefore, *masstige* and luxury often appear interchangeably. Thus, we argue that *masstige* is a vehicle for consumer happiness and a source of pleasure by making brands (even regular brands) more attractive, providing consumers with feelings of exclusiveness and well-being. Given the economic importance democratic luxury has assumed in the past two decades in the globalized world (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Paul, 2015), researchers have an opportunity to investigate the gap in the link between brand happiness and the consumption of mass-consumed luxury brands. Thus, our examination of the singular setting of the democratic luxury market of mass prestige brands, in both functional and symbolic categories, reinforces the novelty of our research.

Luxury consumption is normally associated with expensive, high-quality, and durable products, such as cars, watches, and slow fashion, or items that are consumed occasionally, such as "little luxuries" (e.g., an expensive wine and a celebration in a special restaurant) (Belk, 1999, p. 41). Consumers usually purchase luxury and prestigious brands because of symbolic attachments, self-connection, and/or the intense consumer-brand relationships formed (Nobre & Simões, 2019). Thus, luxury brands represent a suitable context to examine brand happiness and ascertain how it can contribute to consumers' well-being over time. We further argue that consumer-brand relationships and, thus, the emotional connections consumers form with brands may be an antidote to the contradictory feeling of pleasure versus guilt that luxury and, especially, mass prestige consumption can impose on consumers (Amatulli et al., 2020). These feelings are due to the psychological conflicts that arise from ethical reasons (e.g., luxury consumption can be

considered unethical, ephemeral, and a waste) and social concerns (e.g., conspicuous consumption associated with a lack of social sensitivity and a selfish person), with the consumption of luxury (prestige brands) exerting an impact on consumers' well-being (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021).

Although the debate about whether money can buy happiness is an old one (Vohs & Baumeister, 2011), how exactly (or through what mechanism) consumers attain happiness through consumption is still largely unknown, despite recent empirical evidence confirming the connection between the relationship with brands and consumer happiness (e.g., Alba & Williams, 2013; Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) helped resolve this debate when they conclusively established that the relationships consumers form with brands leads to brand happiness. They further called for researchers to extend their results with different types of brands (hedonic and utilitarian). In particular, the happiness construct remains rather unexplored in the context of *masstige* brands (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Kumar, Paul, and Starčević (2021) also called for an understanding of the link between *masstige* brands and happiness by considering factors that can potentially affect it. We address these calls in our study by exploring *masstige* and its relationship to brand happiness, considering the concept of the *NewLux* (new luxury) brand relationship (Nobre & Simões, 2019) an important influential factor for functional and symbolic *masstige* brands.

Classic consumer behavior theory is grounded on the notion that consumption is a response to needs, desires, and aspirations. Thus, relationships with brands, of a functional/utilitarian or psychosocial/emotional order (Fournier, 1998), can contribute to consumer well-being and happiness. In the particular setting of the democratic luxury market, we predict that the stronger a *NewLux* brand relationship (Nobre & Simões, 2019), the longer consumers will stay happy with the *masstige* brand. With this study, therefore, we rekindle the debate on how the relationships consumers establish with *masstige* brands can represent paths to happiness. Consumer-brand relationships represent a theoretical ground for assessing and understanding the subjective meanings, experiences, and identities (Kaufman, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016) embedded in symbolic consumption of *masstige* brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019) that may lead consumers to attain brand happiness.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

### Brand happiness and consumer relationships with *masstige* brands

What makes people happy? One part of happiness theory maintains that having goals and attaining them make

people happy (Myers & Diener, 1995). Goal-directed consumption can result in a positive mood and experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A positive mood further induces people to adopt goals and strive to achieve them (Labroo & Patrick, 2009). As goals and mood form a circle, reaching goals makes people happy (Manusov et al., 1995). From a marketing perspective, brand consumption represents goal-directed consumption. Consumers perceive and interact with brands in complex psychological ways that transmit identity signals and symbolism (Schmitt, 2012). Brands and marketers have attempted to establish brands as vehicles that move consumers closer to their self-concept goals, such as the ideal self (Liao & Wang, 2009), thus winning their admiration (Aaker, Garbinsky, & Vohs, 2012). According to Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006), visualizing the best possible self increases the positive affect. Other perspectives link consumer happiness with aspirations (McBride, 2010). Consumers tap into their aspirations by comparing themselves with others (McBride, 2010) and evaluating them as better. They fulfill their aspirations by achieving their desired identity and self through the use of brands (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002). Feeling unique and different from others can make consumers feel happy (Koydemir, Şimşek, & Demir, 2014), and brands can play a role in this regard.

This discussion brings us to the concept of brand happiness. Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018, p. 102) define brand happiness as “a consumer’s greatest emotional fulfillment, a moment-based experience of pleasant high and low arousal emotions, induced at different brand contact points (e.g., via purchase, consumption, advertisements).” Thus, brand happiness is an emotional state that is subjective and time limited in nature (Mogilner & Norton, 2019) and assumes different degrees of intensity. The reasons to operationalize brand happiness are multiple. First, when we refer to happiness in the context of consumption of brands, we do not consider general measures of happiness such as subjective well-being and satisfaction, as well-being represents general happiness and the role of the brand in it is unknown. Second, constructs such as subjective well-being measure happiness in the long run, whereas brand happiness is about those specific moments when consumers are encountering brands. Therefore, brand happiness is a useful measure that differentiates short- and long-term happiness. Third, just because brand happiness is momentary does not mean that it has no influence on long-term well-being. Research has established that repeated momentary exposures result in long-term happiness (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Wang, John, & Griskevicius, 2021). This makes brand happiness the only available construct that measures happiness derived from consumption activities with an impact on individual long-term well-being. We therefore use brand happiness to operationalize happiness in a brand consumption context in this study.

Happiness appears to be a key motivation for buying expensive items. Paying a premium price for a luxury item may reflect the desire to live a unique experience (Cristini et al., 2017; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) or fulfill a personal desire or aspiration (e.g., status, pleasure, and belongingness) (Belk, 1988; Kapferer, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), but luxury consumption always represents a rational demand for superior performance and quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011). Thus, in general, luxury and prestige brands inspire positive feelings in buyers (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Nobre & Simões, 2019) and therefore constitute promises of happiness. This may be one of the main reasons for the economic success of the new luxury market. A masstige strategy helps brands achieve symbolic value and, consequently, consumer happiness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021).

Consumers often form status, inspiration, impulsive, and rewarding relationships with masstige brands (Hanslin & Rindell, 2014). These relationships, which are vehicles for the ideal self as a result of social comparison (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), make them relatively happy (Tu & Hsee, 2016). Branding theory empowers masstige brands with all the capabilities of the brand concept. The symbolic, psychological roles brands play for consumers are even more true and relevant for masstige brands and the relationships consumers form with them (Reimann et al., 2012). Sustaining strong positive relationships with brands might be a distant reality for consumers (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016), but brands can serve as momentary influencers through their use of masstige brands. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H1.** The prestige associated with brands leads consumers to form relationships with masstige brands.

According to Schnebelen & Bruhn (2018), brand relationship quality is an important determinant of brand happiness. In support of this idea, Schmitt et al. (2015a, p. 169) argue that brand experience is a “key mediator between consumption and happiness.” Thus, masstige marketing represents a means by which to promote unique and rewarding experiences, sometimes with unconventional luxury product categories, such as technology, food, or beverages. The subjective and individual experiences that consumers enjoy from the use of new luxury brands reinforce the experiential dimension of luxury consumption (see Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a) and the pleasure that consumers derive from it. This is true even for consumers who do not follow the masses or avoid displaying the status with which masstige is usually associated (Gaston-Breton et al., 2021; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014).

Although consumption is commonly associated with well-being, in general researchers argue that short-term infatuation does not lead to happiness; instead, what really matters is people’s long-term overall disposition

(Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). Despite the well-being literature's criticism of consumerism, people can save money and wait patiently to buy a special or rare item or an expensive brand to which they aspire or love. Even in the case of non-traditional luxury brands or products, consumer who wish to own them can perceive them as luxury. Given the symbolism and subjective meanings consumers attach to luxury products (goods and services), luxury brands offer room to investigate brand happiness and to ascertain how the happiness consumers derive from the consumption of brands may contribute to their well-being, with an impact on life happiness in the long run.

Research often defines conspicuous consumption as aggressive and selfish (Belk, 1999; Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Wang, John, & Griskevicius, 2021). Mass marketing, in turn, is associated with waste and unsustainable behaviors, due to environmental consciousness (e.g., waste of water and pollution) or social concerns (e.g., working conditions and low salaries) (Amatulli et al., 2020). Therefore, the proliferation of prestige/premium brand extensions and product lines can increase the perceptions of conspicuousness and ephemerality of luxury products and thereby exacerbate psychological conflicts and feelings of guilt in some consumers. That is, masstige marketing might dilute the associations of rationality, consciousness, and sustainability that durability and high (fair) prices of luxury products and brands instill in consumers, increasing their environmental and social concerns. This can provoke psychological tensions, with a negative impact on their well-being (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). In this case, we propose that strong consumer–brand relationships can act as an antidote to the contradictory emotions of pleasure versus guilt that the consumption of masstige brands can evoke.

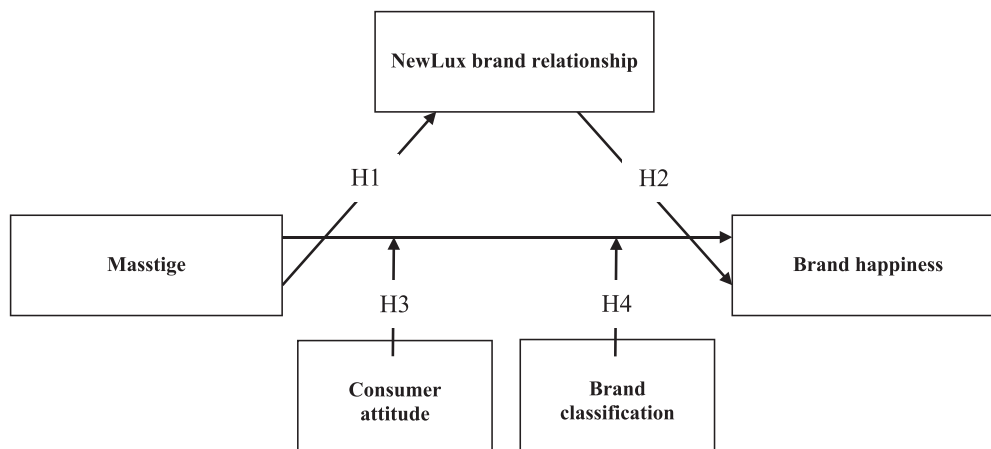
Building on the literature, we suggest that the relationships that consumers form with masstige brands, as captured by Nobre and Simões's (2019) concept of NewLux brand relationship, act as a mediator in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. The NewLux

brand relationship concept relies on the dimensions of commitment, self-connection, intimacy/loyalty, and passion. Commitment addresses the behavioral intention to use the brand and reflects the efforts a consumer expends to maintain that relationship (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995). Self-connection represents the congruence between the self and brand image, which evokes symbolism (Fournier, 1998). Thus, the greater the commitment and self-connection, the greater the brand happiness. Intimacy/loyalty transmits feelings of trust and continuity, and passion represents intense feelings of high emotional reward (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fletcher et al., 1999); both these dimensions are symbolic in nature and act together specifically in prestigious brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019). Thus, high scores on these two factors are associated with a high degree of happiness. Therefore, the NewLux brand relationship concept is an expression of the symbolism-in-use (see Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018) that a masstige brand represents to consumers. Therefore, we predict that the stronger consumers' relationships are with their masstige brands, the greater their happiness with their masstige brands (see Figure 1):

**H2.** The NewLux brand relationship mediates the relationship between masstige and brand happiness.

### Moderation effects of consumer attitude and product category on the happy–masstige brand relationship

Masstige brands have become mass symbols that incite bandwagon consumption. The *bandwagon effect* occurs when the masses follow peers, celebrities, or social groups they aspire to, belong to, or admire (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014). While these empowered new consumers are eager to improve their self-status and move closer to the upper social classes (Belk, 1999), for



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual model: consumers' relationship with masstige brands and happiness



people with a higher-than-average “need for uniqueness” (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, p. 1403), the perceived value of these expensive items, services, and brands is at risk (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). The bandwagon effect is more visible in people with low need for uniqueness and, thus, with high levels of social conformity. Therefore, the attractiveness of a masstige brand seems to decrease for consumers with a greater-than-average need for uniqueness, which denotes a kind of snob effect (Leibenstein, 1950; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Moreover, luxury and conspicuous consumption may evoke feelings of shame and guilt in consumers with high social concerns (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021), with a negative impact on their predisposition toward masstige brands.

Even if masstige no longer offers guarantees of social stratification and separation, as traditional luxury does (Belk, 1988, 1999; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), it may still offer room for subjective interpretation of consumption through new and creative forms (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). On the one hand, masstige can help consumers achieve different personal goals, such as a high self-concept, status seeking, and self-status improvement (Belk, 1988, 1999; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999); self-satisfaction through the bandwagon effect of following peers, celebrities, and the masses (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2022; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014); rewarding experiences (Cristini et al., 2017); subjective meanings through new types of consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021); and happiness through material possessions and experience (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a). On the other hand, masstige can pose psychological and social issues for consumers, such as the fear of being a victim of popular consumption culture (e.g., those high in need for uniqueness; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Mansoor & Paul, 2022); the snob effect, which claims uniqueness and rarity (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); the lack of sophistication, as true luxury should be discrete and rare (Heine, 2012); selfish and indulgent feelings and social constraints (Belk, 1999); feelings of shame and guilt for using expensive items in a society marked by inequality (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021); and self-consciousness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021).

We argue that consumers’ attitudes toward luxury brands influence the relevance of masstige brands in their lives and the happiness they attain from their consumption. Moreover, consumers pursue diverse goals (e.g., following celebrities or showing off status vs. investing in traveling or spending time with friends or family) and establish different types of relationships with luxury brands and objects, depending on both their own characteristics (e.g., personality traits, occupation, and life-cycle stage) and contextual factors (e.g., occasion of use, self-giving, and private vs. public consumption). With this in mind and given the panoply of different meanings, goals, and motivations that can be involved in

masstige consumption, we considered three groups of consumers in our analysis: luxury brand fans, luxury brand indifferents, and luxury brand avoiders. A luxury brand fan enjoys the luxury attached to the brand (due to the bandwagon effect). For a luxury brand indifferent, a masstige luxury brand makes no difference despite the luxury meaning attached to it (due to the snob effect). A luxury brand avoider shuns brands associated with a luxury image altogether. The reasons for avoiding luxury items and brands can vary, from a complete indifference to all luxury to conflicting feelings of indulgence, selfish behavior, and guilt (Belk, 1999; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). Therefore, we posit that the attitudes that consumers form toward luxury brands (fans, indifferents, and avoiders) induce different levels of relationship intensity and happiness with masstige brands (see Figure 1):

**H3.** As consumers move from being luxury brand avoiders to luxury brand fans, the masstige-brand happiness relationship increases.

Previous empirical research indicates that the product category can influence consumers’ relationship with the brand (Casteran, Chrysochou, & Meyer-Waarden, 2019; Nobre & Simões, 2019). The construct of consumer-brand relationship seems to work better in symbolic than utilitarian categories (e.g., supermarket brand and regular mineral water) (Nobre, 2010). Regardless, research finds mixed results on the influence of category on brand relationships (see Dawes, Meyer-Waarden, & Driesener, 2015). Uncles, Wang, and Kwok (2010) find no effect of product category on the consumer-brand relationship in their study, whereas Stern and Hammond (2004) find different degrees of loyalty for different product categories. Fetscherin et al. (2014) report that the product category can affect the intensity of consumers’ relationship with brands, whereas in their study on the UK’s Big Six electricity providers, Rutter et al. (2018) suggest the importance of using branding tools (e.g., symbolic brand personality traits) to achieve differentiation, fight commoditization, and retain customers in a typical switching behavior consumption sector. This latter case—low-contact services in a commoditized sector—is a good example of utilitarian consumption and one of the more difficult scenarios in which consumers form symbolic ties with a brand. This helps reinforce our view of the influence of brand category and the appeal of symbolism on consumers’ attachment to brands.

In this study, we operationalize consumer-brand relationships through both functional and symbolic mass prestige/luxury brands. We expect luxury consumption, given its symbolic nature (Kapferer, 1998), to affect consumer-brand relationships in both *functional/utitarian* and *psychosocial/emotional* (Fournier, 1998) categories (Nobre & Simões, 2019; Vogel, Cook, &



Watchravesringkan, 2019). Specifically, from a masstige perspective, we argue that symbolism associated with products contributes positively to consumer happiness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021). Thus, we posit that the type of product category (functional vs. symbolic) influences the happiness that a masstige brand can evoke in consumers:

**H4.** Symbolic brands moderate the masstige–brand happiness relationship more positively than functional brands.

## METHOD

### Data collection

Data collection aimed to collect consumers' self-reported perceptions of the level of masstige they associate with a specific brand, their relationship with the brand, and brand happiness. Consumers were informed about the study and asked for their consent to participate in it. Respondents were invited to choose up to three brands from a set of 19 global masstige brands with which they had some consumption experience. Two items also asked them about their predisposition toward luxury brands measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The scores on these items allowed us to assign respondents to one of the three groups: (1) luxury brand fans, (2) luxury brand indifferents, and or (3) luxury brand avoiders. The respondents then filled out a questionnaire for each chosen luxury brand. The last part of the questionnaire included demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, and occupation).

The individual questionnaires began with a brand familiarity item measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not familiar at all*, 5 = *very familiar*). For the instrument design, we followed the procedures of Nobre (2010, 2011). Subsequently, we asked respondents about their brand relationships and perceptions of masstige and brand happiness on a set of attitude and behavior items on three scales adapted from the literature. We operationalized the relationship with masstige brands using the NewLux Brand Relationship scale, which includes 16 items (Nobre & Simões, 2019) (Table A1). Nobre and Simões (2019) propose an experience-based definition for mass-consumed luxury under the paradigm of new luxury. First, the NewLux Brand Relationship scale asks respondents about their *commitment* and *self-connection* (e.g., “When thinking about your relationship with NewLux brand ...” 1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Second, it asks them about the attributes related to *intimacy/loyalty* and *passion* (e.g., “If the NewLux brand were a person, how would you describe your relationship with the brand?” 1 = *least adequate*, 7 = *most adequate*).

To measure the masstige associated with brands (the masstige mean index), we used the only available scale (see Paul, 2015). This scale has 10 items (Table A3), and responses to these items are summed up to obtain the masstige score. The higher the score, the greater the masstige associated with a brand. We assessed the masstige mean index's items on a scale anchored by *least applicable* (1) and *highly applicable* (7). We operationalized the happiness induced from using brands with the Brand Happiness scale (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). The 12 items (Table A2) were also accessed on a scale anchored by *least applicable* (1) and *highly applicable* (7).

We subjected the initial draft of the questionnaire to tests of translation/back-translation from English to Portuguese. A bilingual researcher helped in the translation phase. We conducted a pilot study with 26 respondents (mostly faculty staff) to test their understanding of the adjectives, attributes, and questions overall and to refine the translation process. The final version of the questionnaire met the ethical rules for data collection by the university in Portugal where the study was developed. The questionnaire was released, in April 2020, in institutional form by the official university's communication office. The questionnaire collected data following the convenience sampling technique.

### Brands selected

Brand selection followed the procedures Nobre and Simões (2019) used in their study, which also focuses on the Portuguese market. Thus, the stimuli included different brand personalities and product categories, ranging from functional to symbolic consumption. We classified the brands into two groups according to the respective product category. The functional brands included iPhone, Samsung, Miele, Bang & Olufsen, Nespresso, Apple (Mac), Sony, and Canon. The symbolic brands included Louis Vuitton, Chanel, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Cartier, Burberry, Gucci, Prada, Hugo Boss, and Carolina Herrera. Interbrand (2020) and Business Insider (Davis, 2020) report guided the selection of brands. We classified brands as functional versus symbolic following Aaker (1997). Aaker, however, notices that some product categories like automobiles can be considered in both functional and symbolic groups, depending on the consumer or purchase motivations. We assume that the same can happen with brands associated with technology like iPhone, Samsung or Apple (Mac). Thus, we classified brands in a continuum, as suggested by Ratchford (1987), between two extreme points: functional purchase motivations (i.e., cognitive information processing dominates the purchase decision) and symbolic purchase motivations (i.e., affective information processing dominates the purchase decision), respectively. Therefore, we assigned the brands relatively more associated with functional purchase motivations to the

functional group, and the brands relatively more linked to affective and sensory aspects to the symbolic group. As the primary market of our sample was Portugal, we also considered information from the trade industry on the Portuguese automobile market (Cofina Media, 2020). The final brand sample comprised global masstige brands, which increases the probability of the generalization/scope of this study to a global audience. To capture the consumption experience with luxury brands of the upper-middle class in a developed economy, as well as to gain generalizability of the results, we opened the questionnaire to a range of product lines and brand extensions under the prestige/luxury label, such as smaller automobile models from prestige brands (e.g., Mercedes-Benz, BMW) and sunglasses, accessories, and fragrances from fashion luxury brands (see Nobre & Simões, 2019).

### Sample profile

The singular setting under study (i.e., mass prestige/accessible luxury brands) and the need to obtain respondents familiar and experienced with the selected brands created some difficulty in terms of the sample profile of a small European country (Portugal) that still has one of the lowest minimum national wages in Europe. Thus, we collected a non-random sample, using the Portuguese university communication services for convenience and to guarantee rigor in the application of ethical data collection procedures. The data collection resulted in 585 complete questionnaires. Each questionnaire corresponded to a consumer–brand relationship (the unit of analysis). We ensured that the respondents were familiar with and had experience with at least one of the 19 masstige brands under study. For the methodology, respondents needed to rate their familiarity with the brand on a one-item scale at the beginning of each questionnaire. We rejected 40 questionnaires in which the familiarity with the brands was less than 3 on the 5-point scale. Therefore, we used 545 responses for analysis. The sample entailed 391 respondents representing 545 valid brand relationships. The sample contained respondents of all age groups, ranging from younger consumers (millennials) to older consumers (third age), with an age range of 18 to 75 years.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We checked the three constructs (masstige, NewLux brand relationship, and brand happiness) for reliability at the beginning of analysis. Cronbach's alpha value for the 16 items of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale was 0.941 and 0.91 and 0.97 for the masstige and brand happiness scales, respectively. Thus, all scales used in the study are quite robust in reliability. Before analysis, we

checked the data for common method bias. We adopted the most frequently used method of common method bias in business research (Fuller et al., 2016)—Harman's single-factor test. We took all the items in the study covering all the constructs and subjected them to factor analysis by restricting the number of factors to one. As a result, a single factor explained 52% of the variance, a percentage well within the acceptable range in business research (e.g., Fuller et al., 2016<sup>2</sup>). We calculated scores for the masstige scale only as suggested by Paul (2015); for the other scales, we used the mean values in analysis. Therefore, we subjected the NewLux Brand Relationship and Brand Happiness scales to factor analysis with principal component analysis as the extraction method and with varimax as the rotation method. The Brand Happiness scale gave a one-factor solution; we calculated the score of brand happiness by taking the gross mean of its questions. The NewLux Brand Relationship scale gave a three-factor solution; here, we retained two of the original factors of Nobre and Simões's (2019) model: intimacy/loyalty and passion. We combined the rest of the factors into a new dimension that we termed *faithfulness*. The reliability values are 0.93 for faithfulness, 0.83 for intimacy/loyalty, and 0.85 for passion. The NewLux Brand Relationship scale was the only scale with multiple dimensions, so we tested it for validity by building a measurement model in AMOS. The scale's measurement model indicated good fit (CMIN/*df* = 2.94, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05). The composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) values for faithfulness, intimacy/loyalty, and passion are above 0.85 (see Table 1). The square roots of the AVE for all three dimensions of NewLux brand relationship are less than the correlations among them, thus indicating strong reliability and validity of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale and its dimensions. We calculated the score of masstige following the scoring instructions of the scale (Paul, 2015). Finally, we took the gross mean of the three dimensions of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale (see Table 2).

To address the question whether masstige leads to brand relationships (see Figure 1), we used structural equation modeling and ran a hybrid structural model in AMOS, with masstige as the independent variable and the NewLux brand relationship dimensions as the dependent variables. After adjusting for some modification indices, we achieved good model fit (CMIN/*df* = 2.83, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06). The relationships between masstige and all three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship construct were significant. All the standardized regression estimates were greater than 0.75 (masstige → faithfulness [0.93], masstige → intimacy/loyalty [0.78], masstige → passion [0.75]).

<sup>2</sup>In their study, Fuller et al. (2016) use Monte Carlo simulation to address common method bias. They note that common method variance "would need to be on the order of 70% or more before substantial concern about inflated relationships would arise" (p. 3197); this percentage is much higher than what we obtained in our study (52%).

**TABLE 1** Reliability and validity of NewLux dimensions

Constructs	CR	AVE	Faithfulness	Intimacy/loyalty	Passion
Faithfulness	0.868	0.623	0.789 <sup>a</sup>	—	—
Intimacy/loyalty	0.922	0.570	0.686	0.755 <sup>a</sup>	—
Passion	0.861	0.675	0.735	0.691	0.821 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Square root of the AVE.

**TABLE 2** Masstige and brand happiness scores

Brands	Masstige score	Brand happiness mean value
iPhone	30.47	2.45
Samsung	26.10	1.94
Miele	35.00	2.63
Smeg	26.33	2.42
Bang & Olufsen	31.50	1.96
Nespresso	29.12	2.29
Apple (Mac)	32.37	2.61
Sony	25.82	1.88
Carolina Herrera	39.80	3.95
Louis Vuitton	36.25	3.27
Chanel	39.00	3.98
BMW	35.05	3.04
Mercedes-Benz	37.65	3.17
Porsche	45.33	4.39
Cartier	44.33	4.17
Burberry	36.38	3.17
Gucci	34.25	2.50
Prada	37.75	3.54
Hugo Boss	30.08	2.97

The highly significant standardized estimates are an indication that prestige associated with brands helps consumers form relationships with these brands. The higher the value of prestige associated with a brand, the greater the intensity of commitment a consumer shows to the brand and the greater the perceived self-connection with and faithfulness to the masstige brand. Analysis also revealed that consumers have passionate and intimate relationships with masstige brands. These results provide support for [H1](#).

## Mediation analysis

To test whether the NewLux brand relationship mediates the masstige–brand happiness relationship, we ran a hybrid structural model in AMOS. The hybrid model achieved good model fit ( $CMIN/df = 2.98$ ,  $CFI = 0.94$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.06$ ). To check the mediation, we first assessed the masstige–brand happiness relationship without the mediator in the AMOS hybrid model. We

then examined the masstige–brand happiness relationship in the presence of the NewLux brand relationship. As the NewLux scale has three dimensions, we also ran a Sobel test to check the mediation. We examined the results of both mediation analyses together to discern mediation. Given the three dimensions of the mediator in the study, we ran three mediation analyses on a hybrid structural model. For each analysis, we used estimands in AMOS to report the indirect effects for each of the mediator dimensions and calculated separate indirect effects for each of the dimension of the NewLux brand relationship. Table 3 reports the results of the analysis.

Analysis reveals that the relationship between masstige and brand happiness without the mediator is strong (regression estimate: 0.93). When we add the mediator to the model, the relationship is still significant, but its weight marginally decreases (regression estimate: 0.88). Indirect effects are not significant for the faithfulness dimension. The Sobel test for faithfulness is also not significant. Both analyses reveal that faithfulness does not mediate the masstige–brand happiness relationship (Table 3). For intimacy/loyalty and passion, the indirect effects are significant. A Sobel test on both dimensions also shows significant results, indicating that intimacy/loyalty and passion both mediate the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Of note, intimacy/loyalty has a negative indirect effect and passion a positive indirect effect. To understand this, the regression estimates for masstige–intimacy/loyalty (regression estimate: 0.58) and intimacy/loyalty–brand happiness (regression estimate:  $-0.27$ ) show that the greater the intimacy/loyalty to the masstige brand, the lesser is the happiness, whereas the greater the masstige of the brand, the greater the intimacy/loyalty. Overall, we show that an intimate relationship with a masstige brand negatively mediates the positive relationship between masstige and brand happiness. Intimacy/loyalty has a slightly higher indirect effect than passion (Sobel test). The mediation of the passion dimension of the NewLux brand relationship indicates that the happiness induced by the use of masstige brands is routed through passion associated with the brand. Thus, the NewLux brand relationship mediates the masstige–brand happiness relationship only through two of the three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship construct. These results provide partial support for [H2](#).

**TABLE 3** Mediation analysis for masstige–brand happiness relationship (with NewLux brand relationship as mediator)

NewLux dimensions	Without mediator	With mediator	Indirect effects	Sobel test	Does mediation exist?
	Masstige–brand happiness	Masstige–brand happiness	Masstige–NewLux brand relationship → brand happiness		
Faithfulness	0.93***	0.88***	0.07	0.57	No
Intimacy/ loyalty			−0.16***	−4.38***	Yes
Passion			0.12**	4.12***	Yes

\* $p < 0.10$ . \*\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

## Moderation analysis

To check the moderation of the masstige–brand happiness relationship to consumer attitude toward luxury brands and brand type, we first classified consumers into three categories depending on their responses to prestige and luxury. We used the responses on two items: CC1 (“I am a fan of expensive/luxury brands”) and CC2 (“I avoid buying brands associated with a luxury image”). The mean values of these two items were as follows: (1) if the mean value → CC1 is greater than or equal to 4 and the mean value → CC2 is less than or equal to 2, the consumer is a luxury brand fan; (2) if the mean value → CC1 and the mean value → CC2 are less than or equal to 3, the consumer is a luxury brand indifferent; and (3) if the mean value → CC1 is less than or equal to 2 and the mean value → CC2 is greater than or equal to 4, the consumer is a luxury brand avoider. For the moderation on brand types, we categorized the 19 brands in the study into functional and symbolic categories. We began with consumer attitudes as moderators and operationalized the moderation by using group differences with critical ratios in our hybrid model in AMOS. As we had three categories, we made three combinations by grouping two categories at a time to check the moderation using group differences with critical ratio criteria. The three combinations are luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent, luxury brand fan and luxury brand avoider, and luxury brand indifferent and luxury brand avoider. In the moderation analysis, for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group, we first checked the masstige–brand happiness relationship for luxury brand fans and examined its significance and regression estimates. Similarly, we checked the relationship’s significance and regression estimate for consumers who were luxury brand indifferent. Thereafter, we examined the differences in the significance and estimates of the two groups using critical ratios. If the groups’ estimates and significance are significantly different, moderation is confirmed. We did this for all three groups. For the brand types (functional vs. symbolic), we followed the same criteria. In addition to the masstige–brand happiness relationship, we checked the moderation for other relationships (masstige–faithfulness, masstige–intimacy/loyalty, masstige–passion, faithfulness–brand happiness, intimacy/loyalty–

brand happiness, and passion–brand happiness) to gain a detailed understanding (see Table 4).

The results of the moderation analysis indicate that for the masstige–brand happiness relationship, luxury brand fans feel happier due to the use of masstige brands. Thus, H3 is supported. The moderation occurs for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. The standardized regression estimate for the luxury brand fan group (0.66) is higher than that for the luxury brand indifferent group (0.54). Thus, those who are fans of luxury brands, if they use masstige brands, their happiness will increase more than that of indifferents toward luxury brands. Similarly, moderation exists in the masstige–faithfulness relationship for all group combinations. Standardized regression shows that luxury brand fans are more faithful to masstige brands than those who are indifferent, but those who avoid luxury brands are more committed to and self-connected (faithful) with the masstige brand than luxury brand fans and luxury brand indifferents. We also find moderation in the faithfulness–brand happiness relationship for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. As already reported, luxury brand fans form faithful relationships with masstige brands, and this faithfulness leads to happiness only for this group when compared with indifferents. We find no significant differences for avoiders.

Regarding the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic), no moderation exists for the masstige–brand happiness relationship. That is, regardless of whether the masstige brand is functional or symbolic in nature, the happiness evoked from its usage will not differ. Thus, the results do not provide support for H4. With regard to the moderation for the other relationships in the hybrid model, we find that moderation exist for the masstige–intimacy/loyalty relationship. Standardized regression estimates show that an intimate relationship is stronger for symbolic than functional brands.

## DISCUSSION

### Symbolic and functional masstige brands

In this study, the commitment and self-connection factors from the original model of Nobre and Simões

TABLE 4 Moderation analysis

Relationship	Consumer attitudes toward luxury brands		Moderation analysis: Group difference tests using critical ratios					Standardized regression weights if moderation exists	
	A	B	Estimate (A)	P (A)	Estimate (B)	P (B)	Z score	A	B
Masstige–brand happiness	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.923</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.557</b>	<b>0.021</b>	<b>−1.171</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	0.249	0.433	1.433	0.000	2.9442***	0.66***	0.54***
	Fan	Avoider	0.249	0.433	6.097	0.588	0.520	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	1.433	0.000	6.097	0.588	0.415	NM	NM
Masstige–faithfulness	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.838</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.901</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.496</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	0.584	0.000	0.957	0.000	2.8781***	0.95***	0.90***
	Fan	Avoider	0.584	0.000	1.507	0.000	3.4963***	0.95***	0.98***
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.957	0.000	1.507	0.000	2.1065**	0.90***	0.98***
Masstige–intimacy/loyalty	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.550</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.745</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>2.051**</b>	<b>0.74***</b>	<b>0.86***</b>
	Fan	Indifferent	0.528	0.000	0.674	0.000	1.428	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.528	0.000	0.812	0.000	1.616	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.674	0.000	0.812	0.000	0.830	NM	NM
Masstige–passion	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.699</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.699</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
Faithfulness–brand happiness	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.048</b>	<b>0.809</b>	<b>0.161</b>	<b>0.359</b>	<b>0.429</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	1.003	0.045	−0.179	0.347	−2.213**	0.68**	−0.14
	Fan	Avoider	1.003	0.045	−3.254	0.656	−0.582	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	−0.179	0.347	−3.254	0.656	−0.422	NM	NM
Intimacy/loyalty–brand happiness	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>−0.267</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>−0.321</b>	<b>0.010</b>	<b>−0.367</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	−0.290	0.055	−0.392	0.000	−0.566	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	−0.290	0.055	−0.300	0.011	−0.050	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	−0.392	0.000	−0.300	0.011	−0.603	NM	NM
Passion–brand happiness	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>0.205</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.205</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	NM	NM
	Fan	Indifferent	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM

Abbreviation: NM, no moderation.

\* $p < 0.10$ . \*\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

(2019) merged into a new factor we termed *faithfulness*. This outcome might be due to the predominance of consumer relationships with functional (82%) rather than symbolic (18%) brands in the final sample, as previous findings (e.g., Nobre, 2010) reveal that the consumer–brand relationship, a construct theoretically related to the brand personality concept, works better with symbolic than functional product categories. We used five functional categories (smartphones, household appliances, personal computers, televisions, and sound systems) and two symbolic categories (fashion product brands and automobiles). Our sample is quite different from the original sample Nobre and Simões used to develop the NewLux Brand Relationship scale. They

built the NewLux model with a sample of relationships with mass-luxury brands in mostly symbolic product categories (e.g., Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Mercedes-Benz) mostly associated with old luxury (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Thus, the characteristics of our sample might be a reason for the convergence of the two attitudinal constructs, commitment and self-connection, into one.

Masstige induces symbolic consumption that usually involves high involvement and affective ties (Belk, 1988). Thus, attitudinal loyalty is a better measure of masstige brands than behavioral loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty measures include commitment, intention to purchase, verbal



probability (as partly reflected in the items of the commitment scale used in this study), attitude toward the brand, and brand preference (as the self-connection scale seems to indicate). These are better predictors of future behavior and are more suitable to assess loyalty than behavioral measures (e.g., frequency of and actual purchase) (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001; Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty is also associated with a will “to remain faithful” (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 37). As noted, faithfulness, together with intimacy/loyalty and passion, encompasses the third NewLux brand relationship in this study.

## Masstigeness of brands

The stimuli used in this study capture the perceptions of masstige that consumers form from their brands and products. However, the masstige scores were low for the majority of the brands in the study (see Table 2). The respondents only seem to associate some masstige with Porsche (45.33) and Cartier (44.33). According to Paul (2018), masstige scores between 40 and 50 indicate that a firm has not yet succeeded in brand building based on masstige marketing. The masstige scores for Carolina Herrera (39.80) and Chanel (39.00) are on the borderline of brands with the potential for masstige marketing. As the sample of the symbolic brands in the study is small, we analyzed the results at the aggregate level rather than by individual brand because it normally offers better consistency in results (Brown, 1985; Dall’Olmo Riley et al., 1997; Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001). That is, when calculating masstige scores at the aggregate level for functional and symbolic brands, none of the categories achieve the masstige mark. For functional brands, the masstige score average is 28.91, while for symbolic brands, it is 36.41. It seems that respondents generally associate more prestige with the symbolic brands in the sample.

Regarding the functional brands, while respondents may attribute status to them (e.g., iPhone), they do not seem to view them as luxury or masstige. This result may have two explanations. First, respondents might not have associated masstige with their possessions. Second, they might have been constrained by the conflicting meanings that luxury can represent to them (see Amatulli et al., 2020; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). This might also be the reason for the generally low masstige scores that respondent attributed to brands in the study. As noted, study respondents belong to Portugal’s well-educated middle/upper-middle class. On the one hand, they might not have wanted to associate masstige with the brands they purchase. The respondents likely try not to follow the masses, be associated with popular consumption culture, or be a victim of the bandwagon effect (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014). On the other hand, they might view the consumption of conspicuous

luxuries as selfish, indulgent, and socially unacceptable (Belk, 1999). According to Manika et al. (2021, p. 252), “people want to hold consistent attitudes with their knowledge”; thus, the more people factually know (objective knowledge) and the more they perceive they know (subjective knowledge) about a subject,<sup>3</sup> the more favorable their attitudes will be toward the social norms that conform to their knowledge.

The classification of the respondents ( $n = 545$ ) into the three categories of luxury brand fans ( $n = 92$ ), luxury brand indifferents ( $n = 284$ ), and luxury brand avoiders ( $n = 115$ ) indicates that there are as many as 54 relationships (our unit of analysis) that are not falling in any of these categories. We call this category 4. Consumers in category 4 rated high on both items “I am a fan of expensive/luxury brands” and “I avoid to buy brands associated with a luxury image.” The results indicate that 16.9% (92) of consumers are luxury brand fans, 52.1% (284) are luxury brand indifferents, 21.10% (115) are luxury brand avoiders, and 9% (54) are undefined. We conclude that 376 respondents (92 luxury brand fans and 284 luxury brand indifferents) clearly do not seem to be concerned about whether to buy a luxury item, and 92 inclusively enjoy doing so. However, 169 respondents (115 luxury brand avoiders and 54 undefined—category 4) avoid brands linked with luxury, do not have a consistent or definitive opinion about it, or do not want to be associated with it.

## Diffused happiness and relationship from masstige brands

Our results corroborate the findings of Kumar, Paul, and Unnithan (2020) that masstige is a source of happiness. Nevertheless, the scores for happiness were also low (see Table 2). For the scores for masstige, respondents seem to associate happiness only with Porsche (4.39), Cartier (4.17), Chanel (3.98), and Carolina Herrera (3.95). Again, we aggregated the data to compare functional and symbolic brands. Regarding the differences in happiness scores for functional (2.25) and symbolic (3.23) brands, consumers seem happier with the latter. Luxury consumption is symbolic and subjective in nature (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) and, thus, experiential (Nobre & Simões, 2019). In line with these notions, we assume that consumers’ experiences with their brands help define how they perceive luxury or masstige. Moreover, it is the symbolism and experiences that make consumers happy with their masstige brands (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a, 2015b). Consider museums, for example. Museums, a particular set

<sup>3</sup>According to Manika et al. (2021), (1) objective knowledge refers to the knowledge, whether correct or not, that consumers hold in memory, and (2) subjective knowledge corresponds to what consumers think they know. Both objective and subjective knowledge have a positive effect on attitudes, with subjective knowledge having a greater impact on behavior change.



of cultural organizations, offer many scenarios for the development of individual and subjective experiences; yet they can also be a source of status, social recognition, uniqueness, and exclusiveness for visitors and people in their membership programs (e.g., Ebbers, Leeders, & Augustijn, 2021). In their study, Ebbers, Leeders, and Augustijn (2021) conclude that perceived prestige of the museum leverages value co-creation activities with an impact on members' perceived benefits, thus improving their perceived social status and the museum's prestige. Moreover, visiting museums and taking part in their offerings (e.g., stores and restaurant) can help enhance visitors' social image.

The relationships between masstige and all three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship were significant. This finding evidences that prestige associated with brands can influence consumers to form relationships with these brands. Thus, the results confirm that the NewLux brand relationship is a mediator in the masstige-brand happiness relationship. However, the NewLux brand relationship only partially mediates the path between masstige and happiness, through the intimacy/loyalty and passion dimensions. The indirect effect for faithfulness is not significant, which may be due to two reasons. First, commitment can relate to a pragmatic or opportunistic behavioral intention to stay with a brand because it is expensive and durable (e.g., "I am likely to be using Mercedes one year from now" one of the items of the commitment scale). This can also happen with the other brands in the study; note, however, that we did not include beverages, hospitality services, or other consumable goods or services (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001) in the sample. Second, consumers might be loyal to Apple, for example, because its system is compatible with their iPhone and not because it gives them happiness. For self-connection, some of the scale items may evoke psychological and social conflicts (e.g., "The Mercedes brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be" and "The Mercedes brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life"), such as feelings of inauthenticity driven by undue privilege or an antisocial or selfish image induced by the use of expensive brands (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). Again, these conflicts have nothing to do with happiness.

According to Belk (1999, p. 42), "the closer an item is to being regarded as a necessity, the less likelihood that any opprobrium (or prestige) will attach to its use." This may be a reason for the low scores of masstige and happiness in our study. One aspect of relevance here is the finding that 81.8% of the responses in the final sample have relationships with functional brands (e.g., iPhone, Samsung, and Sony) versus 18.2% with symbolic brands (e.g., Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Prada). Although functional brands can bring meaning to consumers' lives (Fournier, 1998), they are associated more with stability and reliability. These are typical characteristics of intimacy/loyalty relationships and less associated with the intense emotions and excitement that a passionate

relationship provokes. Prior research suggests that, beyond a certain point, loyalty begins decreasing, which may result in less happiness (Aksoy et al., 2015). Our results lend support to this idea, as the score of the intimacy/loyalty dimension was the highest (4.05) among the three dimensions on the NewLux Brand Relationship scale, and respondents with intimacy/loyalty relationships seem to be the least happy with their masstige brands. The symbolic consumption of luxury is embedded in superfluousness and glamor (Kapferer, 1998) and therefore is associated more with passion and brand happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). In Fletcher et al.'s (1999) *ideals of intimate inter-personal relationships*, intimacy/loyalty and passion are the two dimensions of a bifactorial model developed to explain close inter-personal relationships that somehow act as opposite dimensions. Similarly, our results indicate that intimacy/loyalty has a negative indirect effect on the masstige-brand happiness relationship and passion has a positive indirect effect. Thus, the stronger the consumer-brand relationship of passion with the masstige brand, the happier a consumer with that masstige brand. By contrast, the more a consumer has an intimate and loyal relationship with a masstige brand, the less happy he or she is. This negative intimacy/loyalty effect is a notable finding that needs further intervention from scholars.

### Luxury fan versus indifferent versus avoider

Consumer attitude toward luxury brands moderates the masstige-brand happiness relationship. However, the moderation only exists for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. These consumers do not avoid buying luxury items, in contrast with luxury brand avoiders or people who experience social costs for buying expensive brands that others cannot afford (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). These fans seem to experience more happiness as result of using masstige brands than the indifferent group; however, no differences exist between fans and luxury brand avoiders for this relationship. Similarly, moderation exists in the masstige-faithfulness relationship for all group combinations. The results suggest that those who avoid luxury brands are more committed to and self-connected with the masstige brand than luxury brand fans and luxury brand indifferents. This result is logical for masstige avoiders, as using a masstige brand might provide them with superior value. Moreover, the more a consumer is a luxury brand fan, the more happiness he or she attains from being faithful to masstige brands, when compared with indifferents, though not avoiders. Therefore, luxury brand indifferents (the *snobs*) are less happy with masstige brands, and they also have less faithful relationships with these brands than luxury brand fans and avoiders. This result confirms Kumar et al.'s (2021, p. 6) finding that "self-consciousness [dampens] the relationship between

masstige and brand-induced happiness.” A possible explanation for this result is that those who are indifferent or avoid luxury/prestige brands use masstige brands only because of the value those brands confer.

We found no moderation effects, however, for the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic) in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Thus, our results confirm previous research that masstige is an antecedent of happiness and can be highly profitable and beneficial to brands (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Regarding the path from masstige to the NewLux brand relationship, the type of brand was only a moderator in the case of the intimacy/loyalty relationship dimension. It seems that intimate relationships are stronger for symbolic than functional brands. This partial moderation confirms previous research (Nobre, 2010) that shows that brand relationships work better when symbolic brands are involved.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Consumers engage in various activities and use brands to gain happiness, such as sharing brand purchases on social media (Duan & Dholakia, 2017), engaging in gamified experiences with brands (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017), and participating in brand communities (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018). For example, consumers buy Apple products for social exposure and happiness (Arruda-Filho, Cabusas, & Dholakia, 2010), which in turn leads to customer loyalty (Chen & Ann, 2016). Overall, brands can provide consumers with extraordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) and meet their emotional and psychological needs. These relationships also give consumers satisfaction, bringing meaning to their lives (Fournier, 1998) and, consequently, triggering happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Thus, brand managers need to be cognizant of the importance of fostering strong relationships with consumers, with the aim to increase their general satisfaction. In particular, the subjectivity and symbolism involved in the consumption of masstige brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019) can be a source of rich life experiences, which in turn can enhance consumer well-being in the long run (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a). In addition, managers need to put in practice the right marketing strategies that can improve the masstige scores of their brands (Paul, 2015).

Our results indicate that the more passionate a NewLux brand relationship is, the more happiness a consumer associates with the brand, and this result is indifferent to the type of brand category (functional or symbolic). Although we found that luxury fans are the happiest with their masstige brands (as expected), luxury brands avoiders form the strongest faithful relationships with masstige brands. Thus, consumer attitude toward luxury brands is a moderator of the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Given this result, we encourage managers to foster strong NewLux brand relationships as these can

represent important sources of profit for the company, whether because they make luxury fans happy or because they become special to avoiders. This indicates that a masstige strategy can bolster subjective and emotional attachments to the brand. This is especially true for indifferents, who make use of their masstige brands in creative and unique ways, similar to those with a higher-than-average need for uniqueness (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

Luxury is no longer for the elite; instead, under the new luxury paradigm, purchasing, using, or owning masstige brands engenders meaningful experiences for many more consumers. Marketers can creatively encourage brand experiences (e.g., through social media; Kim & Ko, 2012) to influence consumer preferences, relationship quality, and purchase intention toward the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Kim & Ko, 2012) and, in turn, foster brand happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). A masstige strategy can be extended to categories such as services, food, beverages, and other *little luxuries* (Belk, 1999); to products typically associated with functional and utilitarian characteristics; and, finally, to eudemonic versus hedonic consumer’s consumption experiences (e.g., enjoying an Italian gelato or studying in a prestigious university; Cristini et al., 2017). Thus, managers can explore masstige as ground for the creation of experiences that can be subjectively perceived and conceived by consumers in the use of their products and brands.

Brand managers could also use a masstige strategy for ethical and sustainable products, which tend to be pricier and more exclusive, reflecting a certain lifestyle and income. In doing so, they can attract different targets, especially those opposed to consumerism (e.g., out of concerns related to human or animal welfare). A premium price usually corresponds to superior quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011), which might also contribute to more sustainable, less wasteful, and more ethical consumption. In this way, a new luxury brand positioning could help dilute the psychological conflicts and social tensions associated with luxury consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) and thus contribute to consumer well-being (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). This line of thought constitutes a direction for future research.

In summary, masstigeness leads to consumer–brand relationships and brand happiness. Thus, we propose a three-dimensional strategy. First, brands with a low masstige score should invest effort in improving the masstigeness associated with their images in consumers’ minds. If consumers begin perceiving these brands as masstige brands, their relationships with these brands will be enhanced, as our results show. Second, managers can work to boost symbolism in the positioning of their brands, as consumers form better relationships with symbolic brands. Third, managers can promote experiences as part of the package. Symbolic associations stem from lifestyle aspirations, ethical concerns, a sustainable way of life, luxury sensations, and upscale experiences.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research is a novel attempt to understand consumer happiness in masstige brands context. The study's operationalization of the consumer–brand relationship and brand happiness constructs is unique. This study also advances the literature on branding, in general, and research on masstige marketing, in particular, which is still an understudied field. As such, additional research in this area is required to substantiate the generalization of our results. Further research could replicate our study in different regions with different brands and consumer types and adopt different methodology (e.g., experiential design). For example, masstige is a function of price, which is also tied to income from a consumer perspective. Therefore, income might play an important role in masstige consumption behavior; its impact, however, might vary depending on consumers' identity culture or country. Consumer behavior is embedded in a wide social context that exerts control over individuals' actions and behaviors, and the degree of social influence depends on the extent to which individual behavior is influenced by "role differentiation" (Patel, 2017, p. 90). Consumer behavior, therefore, represents a trade-off between individuals' preference for their cultural *grid-group* and the larger social context in which they are embedded. Thus, the role of income in masstige consumption and its interaction with consumers' cultural identity represent a worthwhile direction for future study. Moreover, demographics such as age, education, and gender, as determinants of individual behavior, might affect masstige consumption differently. This question also merits further research.

We explored the relationship between masstige and brand happiness in light of NewLux brand relationships. This raises important questions that future studies could address: Are luxury seekers more concerned with the product's aura of luxury and less so with the specific masstige brand name? Do *indifferents* aspire for more luxury that only exclusive lines can give them? Do they always avoid the masses and seek exclusive and elitist brands? How consumer–brand relationships can enhance brands scoring low on masstige is beyond the scope of our study.

Another possible direction for future research is to ascertain the nature of consumers who do not fall into any of the three categories (i.e., luxury brand fans, indifferents, and avoiders). Consumers in category 4 seem to be inconsistent in their position, as they rated high as both luxury brand fans and luxury brand avoiders. This might be due to financial constraints (e.g., lack of resources), psychological conflicts (e.g., shame and guilt; Belk, 1999; Amatulli et al., 2020), the *impostor syndrome* (i.e., psychological tension related to feelings of inauthenticity in luxury consumption; Goor et al., 2020), or social tensions (e.g., social conformity; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) associated with luxury consumption.

A criticism of consumerism in the literature on well-being is based on the argument that consumption provides consumers with momentary positive feelings but does not lead to an overall happy life (Ahuvia, 2017). Our study evidences that consumer–brand relationships with a masstige brand contribute to brand happiness, and we suspect that this happiness tends to be longer when luxury brands are repetitively used, contributing to consumers' long-term well-being (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Wang, John, & Griskevicius, 2021). This issue deserves further investigation.

We also call attention to the finding that happiness did not differ whether the masstige brand was functional or symbolic. One possible explanation for this result could be the difficulty in objectively ascertaining the functional versus symbolic motivations underlined in the purchase decision process of some products, such as smartphones and computers. As referred before, we classified brands as relatively more utilitarian or relatively more symbolic, according to a continuum, ranging between functional purchase motivations dominance and symbolic purchase motivations dominance (Ratchford, 1987). However, some of the product categories in the study can be considered either functional or symbolic, depending on the consumer and his/her purchase motivations (Aaker, 1997; Ratchford, 1987) (e.g., iPhone, Samsung, and App). Thus, the categorization of brands into two distinct groups (functional vs. symbolic) could be somewhat forced. We consider this one of the limitations of the study that deserves further inquiry. Another possible explanation for this result can stem from the nature of the happiness under consideration. Thus, future research could explore whether this holds true when evaluating happiness from different perspectives (e.g., hedonic vs. eudemonic) and across different categories (e.g., tourism and hospitality services). We suspect, however, that eudemonic happiness is more difficult to capture in a context of consumption. This is because people often do not associate consumerism and marketing activities (or, at least, the negative connotation that marketing may have to them) with psychological experiences, even when those experiences involve products, services, or brands (e.g., cultural products and services). This question also deserves further investigation.

## CONCLUSION

This study represents one of the first attempts to analyze how consumer's relationships with masstige brands play a role in their happiness. We conclude that the use of masstige brands makes consumers happy. The study also establishes that consumers form relationships with masstige brands, which partially mediates the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. The findings

indicate that consumers who have intimate and loyal relationships with masstige brands are less likely to feel happy than consumers who form more intense and passionate relationships with these brands. The happiness experienced from masstige brands is indifferent to the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic), while consumer attitude toward luxury brands is a moderator in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. We find that luxury brand fans attain (1) more happiness from using masstige brands and (2) more happiness from their faithful relationships with masstige brands than indifferents but not avoiders. However, avoiders form the strongest faithful relationships with masstige brands.

The more passionate the consumer–brand relationship, the happier consumers will be with their masstige brand. We predict that this happiness might enhance consumers' overall disposition, contributing to their long-term well-being.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**Ajay Kumar** is an assistant professor with the Central University of Haryana, India. Prior to his current position, he was an assistant professor in Central University of Himachal Pradesh, India. His research interest includes Branding, Brand Equity, Masstige Branding, and Brand Personality. He has published on Masstige Branding, Brand Equity, and Brand Personality in peer reviewed journals including International Business Review, Journal of Business Research, and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services. He serves as reviewer to multiple peer reviewed journals

**Minas N. Kastanakis** is a professor of marketing and has been the editor-in-chief of the European Management Journal. His research has been published in leading academic journals, and he has served as a guest editor for several Special Issues, for example, for the Journal of Business Research and the European Management Journal.

**Justin Paul**, PhD, is the editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Consumer Studies and a professor in the University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Business, San Juan, PR, USA, and also a distinguished scholar of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM-K), Kerala, India.

Justin Paul is the current editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Consumer studies. He serves as an associate editor (International Business) with the European Management Journal, the Journal of Strategic Marketing and The Services Industries Journal; he has been a guest editor for the Journal of Business Research. His publication record includes top-tier international journals such as Journal of World Business, California Management Review, Journal of Business Research, International Business Review, and International Marketing Review; he is a well-known author of several best-selling books, including “Business Environment” (McGraw-Hill, 4th edition), “International Marketing” (Pearson, 2nd edition), and “Export Import Management” (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition).

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## APPENDIX: CONSTRUCTS AND ITEMS NAMES

TABLE A1 NewLux Brand Relationship scale.

Measure	Items Original English items names (Nobre & Simões, 2019)	Items Portuguese version of the items for the present study
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I am very loyal to <b>MasstigeBrand</b>.”</li> <li>• “I am willing to make small sacrifices in order to keep using <b>MasstigeBrand</b>.”</li> <li>• “I am so happy with <b>MasstigeBrand</b> that I no longer feel the need to watch out for other alternatives.”</li> <li>• “I am likely to be using <b>MasstigeBrand</b> one year from now.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Sou muito leal à <b>MasstigeBrand</b>”</li> <li>• “Estou na disposição de fazer pequenos sacrifícios de forma a poder continuar a utilizar/consumir a <b>MasstigeBrand</b>”</li> <li>• “Estou tão contente com a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> que não sinto necessidade de estar atento a outras alternativas”</li> <li>• “Provavelmente, vou continuar a ser utilizador/consumidor da <b>MasstigeBrand</b> num futuro próximo”</li> </ul>
Self-connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The <b>MasstigeBrand</b> brand connects with the part of me that really makes me tick.”</li> <li>• “The <b>MasstigeBrand</b> brand fits well my current stage of life.”</li> <li>• “The <b>MasstigeBrand</b> brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be.”</li> <li>• “Using <b>MasstigeBrand</b> lets me be a part of a shared community of like-minded consumers.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A <b>MasstigeBrand</b> associa-se a uma parte da minha pessoa que realmente me toca”</li> <li>• “A <b>MasstigeBrand</b> corresponde bem à minha atual fase de vida”</li> <li>• “A <b>MasstigeBrand</b> tem muito a ver com a pessoa que eu gostaria de ser”</li> <li>• “Ser utilizador/consumidor da <b>MasstigeBrand</b> faz-me pertencer a uma comunidade partilhada por consumidores com interesses parecidos”</li> </ul>
Intimacy/ loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The <b>MasstigeBrand</b> brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life.”</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A <b>MasstigeBrand</b> exprime aquilo que é importante para mim na vida”</li> <li>• Honesta</li> <li>• De respeito</li> <li>• De confiança</li> <li>• Que dá apoio</li> </ul>
Passion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate</li> <li>• Excitement</li> <li>• Challenging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apaixonada</li> <li>• Entusiasmante</li> <li>• Estimulante/desafiante</li> </ul>

TABLE A2 Brand Happiness scale (Schnebelen &amp; Bruhn, 2018)

Items	Items
Original English version (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018)	Portuguese version of the items for the present study
1. “Glad”	1. “Contente”
2. “Cheerful”	2. “Alegre”
3. “Joyful”	3. “Feliz”
4. “Lively”	4. “Animado”
5. “Peppy”	5. “Esfuziante”
6. “Vigorous”	6. “Enérgico”
7. “Proud”	7. “Vaidoso”
8. “Superior”	8. “Importante”
9. “Worthy”	9. “Merecedor”
10. “Relaxed”	10. “Descontraído”
11. “At ease”	11. “Tranquilo”
12. “Comfortable”	12. “Sentir-se bem”

TABLE A3 Masstige scale (Paul, 2015)

Items Original English version (Paul, 2015)	Items Portuguese version of the items for the present study
1. "I like <b>MasstigeBrand</b> because of the mass prestige associated with it."	1. "Eu gosto da <b>MasstigeBrand</b> por causa do prestígio associado à marca"
2. "I feel like to buy <b>MasstigeBrand</b> because of mass prestige."	2. "Apetece-me comprar a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> por causa do prestígio"
3. "I tend to pay high price for <b>MasstigeBrand</b> for status quo."	3. "Eu estou disposto a pagar um preço elevado pela <b>MasstigeBrand</b> devido ao seu status quo"
4. "I consider <b>MasstigeBrand</b> as a "top of mind" brand in my country."	4. "Eu considero a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> como sendo uma marca "top of mind" no meu país"
5. "I would like to recommend <b>MasstigeBrand</b> to friends and relatives."	5. "Eu recomendaria a marca <b>MasstigeBrand</b> aos meus amigos e familiares"
6. "Nothing is more exciting than <b>MasstigeBrand</b> ."	6. "Não há nada mais entusiasmante do que a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> "
7. "I believe <b>MasstigeBrand</b> is known for high quality."	7. "Eu considero que a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> é conhecida pela sua elevada qualidade"
8. "I believe <b>MasstigeBrand</b> is of international standard."	8. "Eu considero a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> como detendo um padrão de nível internacional"
9. "I love to buy <b>MasstigeBrand</b> regardless of the price."	9. "Eu adoro comprar a marca <b>MasstigeBrand</b> independentemente do seu preço"
10. "I believe that people in my country consider <b>MasstigeBrand</b> as a synonym of prestige."	10. "Eu acho que os portugueses consideram a <b>MasstigeBrand</b> como um sinónimo de prestígio"

*Note:* MasstigeBrand refers to one of the following mass prestige/luxury brands: iPhone, Samsung, Miele, Bang & Olufsen, Nespresso, Apple (Mac), Sony, Canon, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Cartier, Burberry, Gucci, Prada, Hugo Boss, and Carolina Herrera.

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## TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

### **Co-Author Statement**

My name is Ajay Kumar. I'm serving as an Assistant Professor with Central University of Haryana, India. I'm a co-author with Prof (Dr) Justin Paul in 4 research papers (given below).

This is to inform you that Prof Justin Paul has contributed equally in these manuscripts as a co-author. I would also like to say that I got motivated to start working in the area of Masstige Marketing based on the original and unique papers including his 2015 Masstige Scale. Specific details of his contributions are as follows:

1. Kumar, A., & Paul, J. (2018). Mass prestige value and competition between American versus Asian laptop brands in an emerging market—Theory and evidence. *International Business Review*, 27(5), 969-981. Impact Factor 8.06 (71 citations). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.02.007>

**Prof Justin Paul's contribution:** Idea generation, Conceptualisation, Literature Review, Writing the article, Writing and re-writing different sections, Deciding Hypotheses based on discussion with me, Interpretation of Results, Discussion and Conclusion, 3 Rounds of Revision of the article based on comments of Reviewers. We use Prof Justin Paul's Masstige scale (Paul, 2015) in this paper.

2. Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Unnithan, A. B. (2020). 'Masstige' marketing: A review, synthesis and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 113, 384-398. Impact Factor 10.97, UK-CABS 3, A in ABDC Australia <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.030>

**Prof Justin Paul's contribution:** Idea, Selection of Methodology, Conceptualization, Synthesis of articles reviewed, Writing the article, Directions for Future Research/ Future

Research Agenda, Journal selection and cover letter, Two Rounds of Revision of the Article based on comments of reviewers

3. Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Starčević, S. (2021). Do brands make consumers happy? -A masstige theory perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102318. Impact Factor 10.97, A in ABDC Australia, UK-CABS 2.. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102318>

**Prof Justin Paul's contribution:** Conceptualization, Selection of Smartphone segment for the study, Idea for selecting competing brands including Apple I-Phone, Literature Review, Writing and Re-writing different sections, Responding and revising the paper based on comments from the reviewers, Working in our team and inspiring co-author/s to complete the work on time. We used Prof Justin Paul's masstige theory in this paper.

4. Nobre, H., Kumar, A., Kastanakis, M. N., & Paul, J. (2022). Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness. *European Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12538>

**Prof Justin Paul's contribution:** Discussion with the co-authors to conceptualise the Paper. Inviting third author to join the project as a co-author, Literature review and writing the paper, Working and revising towards acceptance of a Risky Revision based on the comments of the reviewers, Decision to submit to European Management Review.



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**TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN**

**Subject:** Co-author Contribution Statement

I am Mahnaz Mansoor. I have the privilege of publishing research articles with Prof (Dr) Justin Paul as a co-author with his valuable contribution as follows:

**Mansoor, M., & Paul, J. (2022). Mass prestige, brand happiness, and brand evangelism among consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, 484-496. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.015>**

**Prof. Justin Paul's contribution:** Ideas and discussion for finalizing the topic; model and hypotheses; co-writing different sections of the paper; literature review; revising the paper 3 times based on the comments of the reviewers; Journal selection; refining different paragraphs of the paper working with me patiently with dedication towards acceptance of the paper.

---

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# MANIPAL

ACADEMY of HIGHER EDUCATION  
DUBAI CAMPUS

(Institution of Eminence Deemed to be University)

**3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023**

**To Whom It May Concern:**

My name is Subburaj Alagarsamy. I am a co-author of the paper Alagarsamy, S., Mehroliya, S., & Paul, J. (2022). Masstige scale: An alternative to measure brand equity. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*.

**<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12873>**

I wish to confirm that Prof Justin Paul has contributed equally to this manuscript as a co-author. His specific contributions are as follows:

Prof Paul has been instrumental in idea generation and conducting an extensive literature review. He also contributed significantly to rewriting, updating, and refining different sections of the manuscript, particularly presenting the Masstige scale as an alternative to the CBBE Scale. In addition, he collaborated closely with me to revise the paper based on the feedback received from the reviewers appointed by the Guest Editor of the Special Issue. His effort in meticulously proofreading the manuscript was of great value.

The contributions made by Prof Justin Paul were crucial for the successful completion and publication of this research.

Thank you,

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## Co-Author Statement

Sladana Starčević <sstarcevic@fefaf.edu.rs>

To: "profjust@gmail.com" <profjust@gmail.com>

Sun, Jul 2, 2023 at 2:02 PM

### Co-Author Statement

My name is Sladjana Starcevic. I'm based in Serbia.

I'm a co-author with Prof (Dr) Justin Paul in a research paper. Details are given below.

This is to inform you that Prof Justin Paul has contributed equally to these manuscripts as a co-author. I got inspired to start working in the area of Masstige Marketing based on the original and unique papers of Justin Paul's 2015, 2018, and 2019 research papers on Masstige Marketing. Specific details of his contributions in our paper are as follows.

Kumar, A., Paul, J., & Starčević, S. (2021). Do brands make consumers happy? -A masstige theory perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102318. Impact Factor 11 +, A in ABCD Australia, UK-CABS 2.. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102318>

*Prof Justin Paul's contribution:* Conceptualization, Selection of Smartphone segment for the study, Idea for selecting competing brands including Apple iPhone, Literature Review, Writing and Re-writing different sections, Responding and revising the paper based on comments from the reviewers, Working in our team and inspiring co-author/s to complete the work on time. We used Prof Justin Paul's masstige theory in this paper.



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Request for a co-author statement

Sangeeta Mehroliia School of Business and Management <sangeeta.mehroliia@christuniversity.in>

To: Justin Paul <profjust@gmail.com>

Sat, Jul 1, 2023 at 11:00 PM

Dear Sir,

My name is Sangeeta Mehroliia, I'm a co-author with Prof (Dr) Justin Paul in this paper.

Atagarsamy, S., Mehroliia, S., & Paul, J. (2022). Massstige scale: An alternative to measure brand equity. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12873>

Prof Justin Paul has contributed equally to this manuscript as a co-author. Specific details of his contributions are as follows.

Idea generation, Literature review, Rewriting, updating and refining different sections, Presenting the Massstige scale as an alternative to CBBE Scale. Working with time to revise the paper based on the reviewers' comments appointed by the Special Issue's Guest editor.

Thanks

Dr. Sangeeta Mehroliia

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Thanks and Regards

Dr. Sangeeta Mehroliia

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## Co-author statement

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**Minas Kastanakis** <mkastanakis@escp.eu>

To: Justin Paul <profjust@gmail.com>

Sat, Jul 1, 2023 at 2:03 PM

To whom it may concern/Co-author statement:

My name is Dr. Minas Kastanakis and, since 2016, I am a tenured full Professor at ESCP Business School, London.

I'm a co-author with Prof (Dr) Justin Paul in the paper " *Nobre, H., Kumar, A., Kastanakis, M. N., & Paul, J. (2022). Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness. *European Management Review*. "* <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12538>

This email serves to highlight Professor Justin Paul's contribution for this particular manuscript. Specific details of his contribution as a co-author include:

- 1) Discussion with co-authors in order to conceptualise the Paper;
- 2) Inviting me to join the project as a co-author;
- 3) Literature review and writing the paper;
- 4) Working and revising towards acceptance of an initial Risky Revision based on the comments of the reviewers;
- 5) Decision to submit to the "European Management Review".

Best,

**Minas N. Kastanakis**

Minas Kastanakis, LL.B., MBA, PhD

Professor of Marketing

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## Co-author Statement

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Shadma Shahid <Shadma.Shahid@canadore-stanford.com>

To: "profjust@gmail.com" <profjust@gmail.com>

Sat, Jul 1, 2023 at 9:11 PM

Hello Sir

My name is Shadma Shahid. I am a co-author with Prof Justin Paul in paper titled " Intrinsic motivation of luxury consumers in an emerging market". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102531.

I wish to confirm that Prof Justin Paul has contributed equally to this manuscript as a co-author. His specific contributions are as follows:

Prof Justin Paul's contribution:  
Conceptualization of the paper. Strengthening and updating the literature review and writing and strengthening different sections of the paper. And working and revising towards acceptance of a difficult revision based on the comments of the reviewers.

Thank You

Regards

Shadma Shahid