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Masstige consumption in the emerging market: mediating effects of brand happiness and moderating role of age

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigates how Indian consumers evaluate local and foreign cosmetic brands, focusing on brand prestige, loyalty and evangelism. It explores brand happiness as a mediating variable and age as a moderating factor within the masstige consumption context in an emerging market.

Design/methodology/approach – A two-phase empirical approach was adopted. Phase 1 involved a comparative analysis of marketing strategies across Lakmé and international brands (MAC, L'Oréal Paris, and Maybelline) using a total sample of 573 female consumers. In Phase 2, only the high masstige brands (MAC and L'Oréal Paris) were retained, and responses from 244 participants were analyzed using structural equation modeling to examine the mediating role of brand happiness and the moderating effect of age.

Findings – Indian consumers perceive foreign brands like MAC and L'Oréal Paris as masstige brands. Masstige brand consumption significantly enhances brand happiness and brand loyalty, while its influence on brand evangelism is fully mediated through brand happiness and brand loyalty. Brand happiness partially mediates the relationship between masstige consumption and brand loyalty, and also indirectly affects brand evangelism through brand loyalty. Age weakens the effect of masstige consumption on loyalty but strengthens the effects of brand happiness on loyalty and brand loyalty on evangelism.

Originality/value – This study extends masstige marketing literature by integrating emotional (brand happiness) and demographic (age) variables into the brand prestige–loyalty–evangelism framework. It offers practical insights for global and local brands aiming to enhance consumer engagement in emerging markets through differentiated brand strategies.

Keywords Masstige marketing, Brand happiness, Brand loyalty, Brand evangelism, Moderated mediation analysis

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Masstige marketing, which combines mass-market accessibility with prestige symbolism, has become an important strategy for consumer engagement in emerging markets (Chaurasia *et al.*, 2024; Kolańska-Stronka and Krasa, 2024; Mansoor *et al.*, 2024; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Earlier research has often portrayed masstige consumption as a pricing-based compromise between luxury and mass goods. However, recent evidence highlights its deeper emotional and identity-driven dimensions (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Chaurasia and Panda, 2025; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Masstige consumption is no longer limited to product affordability; it represents a brand experience shaped by symbolic pride, uniqueness and social signaling (Kapoor *et al.*, 2025; Mansoor *et al.*, 2024; Moorlock *et al.*, 2023). In emerging markets, consumers assign meaning to masstige brands not only as products but also as cultural and aspirational resources

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(Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Das *et al.*, 2022a, b, c; Gupta *et al.*, 2023; Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023).

Despite the increasing scholarly interest, gaps remain in the integration of emotions and demographics into masstige frameworks. Prior studies have concentrated on purchase intentions and value perceptions, but relatively few have examined how emotional states influence subsequent consumer loyalty and advocacy. Research on brand happiness is particularly limited, even though happiness reflects a consumer's affective fulfillment from brand interaction (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). While some studies have associated masstige consumption with emotional benefits such as pride and joy (Mansoor *et al.*, 2024; Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Purohit *et al.*, 2024), there has been little attempt to model brand happiness as a mediator connecting masstige consumption with loyalty and evangelism. This oversight restricts understanding of how masstige strategies cultivate both emotional satisfaction and behavioral outcomes in emerging economies like India (Goyal, 2020).

Demographic factors also remain underexplored. Recent research emphasizes that age shapes consumer–brand relationships, influencing motivations, attachment and symbolic use (Kapoor *et al.*, 2025; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2025). Older consumers, often sensitive to aging stereotypes, may adopt masstige products as identity signals of youthfulness and relevance (Bae and Jo, 2024). Younger cohorts, in contrast, prioritize hedonic and expressive consumption experiences (Jhamb *et al.*, 2020). These contrasting motivations suggest that age may alter how masstige consumption translates into loyalty and evangelism. Yet very little empirical work has examined age as a moderator in masstige contexts. Addressing this gap is important for emerging markets like India, where both youthful consumers and older segments are increasingly aspirational.

India provides a distinctive context for this analysis. With a cosmetics sector exceeding USD 20 billion by 2025 and rapid growth in social commerce (IBEF, 2023), India represents one of the most dynamic emerging markets. Consumers in India navigate a hybrid of global aspirations and local values (Das *et al.*, 2022a, b, c; Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023). International brands such as MAC and L'Oréal Paris compete with entrenched domestic players like Lakmé, creating fertile ground for comparative insights. However, little is known about how consumers emotionally evaluate these brands and how masstige positioning translates into loyalty and advocacy.

To address these issues, the study investigates three research questions:

RQ1. How do Indian consumers perceive and differentiate the masstige positioning of international and domestic skincare brands, and how does this positioning provide a foundation for analyzing brand-related outcomes?

RQ2. To what extent does brand happiness act as a psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between masstige brand consumption and outcomes such as loyalty and evangelism?

RQ3. How does consumer age moderate the relationships between masstige consumption, brand happiness, loyalty and evangelism, and what does this reveal about demographic segmentation in emerging markets?

By reframing masstige consumption within an integrated model of emotional and demographic dynamics, this study advances theoretical understanding and provides practical guidance for brand strategy in aspirational economies.

The article is structured as follows. The second section synthesizes prior studies on the research constructs and theoretical stances on the subject under review. The third section details the research methodology, followed by the results. Finally, Section 4 describes the implications of the study, along with limitations and future scope for research.

Literature review

Conceptual framework and theoretical background

This study addresses these gaps by applying the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework. Although originally developed in environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), S-O-R has been widely adapted in marketing research to capture how external stimuli shape internal states and lead to behavioral responses (Atsız *et al.*, 2024; Eroglu *et al.*, 2001). Although traditionally viewed as a consumption outcome, we conceptualize masstige consumption as a symbolic marketing cue that triggers affective appraisal, consistent with extended interpretations of the S-O-R model in emotional branding research (Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Roy *et al.*, 2025). These brands are designed to offer a sense of luxury and prestige at more accessible prices, targeting the aspirational middle class. Here, masstige consumption operates as the stimulus, brand happiness functions as the organismic state, and loyalty and evangelism represent consumer responses. Age acts as a boundary condition that strengthens or weakens these pathways. While prior studies have used S-O-R for retail atmospherics, consumer engagement and emotional responses (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018), its application to masstige branding remains scarce. By embedding brand happiness and age within the framework, this study extends both the S-O-R model and masstige literature in a single integrated design.

This framework is particularly suitable for emerging market contexts, where external cues like accessible luxury branding are increasingly salient, and internal psychological processes mediated by socio-demographic variables and emotional experiences play a critical role in driving consumer outcomes. The model's flexibility in accommodating moderating and mediating variables aligns with its established application in marketing research (e.g. Eroglu *et al.*, 2001), offering a rigorous structure to explore the dynamic interplay between environmental triggers and consumer behavior, thus providing a high-fidelity lens for subsequent hypothesis development (see Figure 1).

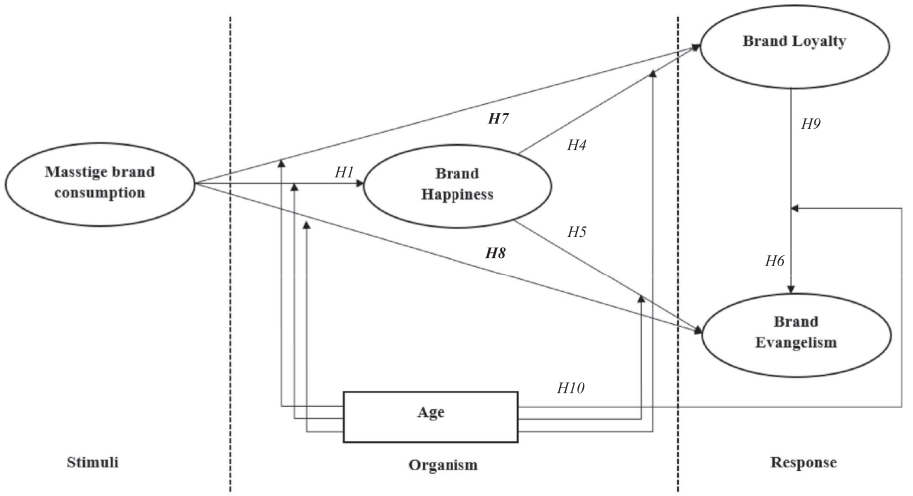


Figure 1. Conceptual Model. Source: Authors' own work

Masstige brand consumption and brand happiness

Masstige brand consumption, combining affordability with symbolic prestige, is closely tied to brand happiness (Mansoor *et al.*, 2024; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). Defined as emotional fulfillment from brand interactions (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018), happiness is particularly salient in emerging markets such as India, where masstige brands provide attainable prestige meeting both functional and symbolic needs (Chaurasia and Panda, 2025; Das *et al.*, 2022a, b, c; Roy *et al.*, 2025). This blend of accessibility and exclusivity generates pride, joy, and achievement (Mansoor and Paul, 2022), strengthens identity, and fosters engagement beyond utility (Atsız *et al.*, 2024; Kumar *et al.*, 2021; Moorlock *et al.*, 2023). Empirical studies confirm that masstige consumption enhances happiness and advocacy (Purohit *et al.*, 2024), with symbolic brands eliciting stronger emotions than functional ones (Nobre *et al.*, 2023). Internal drivers like love, co-creation, uniqueness and self-congruence outweigh external status (Atsız *et al.*, 2024; Boisvert *et al.*, 2023; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024, 2025). Symbolic associations further reinforce engagement (Roy *et al.*, 2025). Thus, we hypothesize:

H1. Masstige brand consumption positively influences brand happiness.

Masstige brand consumption and brand loyalty

In emerging markets, brand loyalty reflects consumers' need for consistency, assurance and symbolic value at affordable prices (Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Roy *et al.*, 2025). Masstige brands meet these expectations by combining prestige, quality and accessibility, enhancing satisfaction and encouraging repeat behavior (Aureliano-Silva *et al.*, 2018; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). Loyalty emerges in two forms: attitudinal, reflecting emotional and psychological attachment, and behavioral, expressed through repeat purchases and advocacy (Purohit *et al.*, 2024; Robertson *et al.*, 2022). Attitudinal loyalty, comprising cognitive, affective and conative components, is reinforced when brands are aspirational yet attainable, inspiring trust and admiration (Gupta *et al.*, 2023; Shah *et al.*, 2025; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Behavioral loyalty develops through repurchases and word-of-mouth, often fueled by strong attitudes and emotional drivers such as love, co-creation and distinctiveness (Lim *et al.*, 2022; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024; Shin *et al.*, 2022). In India, masstige loyalty is sustained by symbolic and self-expressive appeal Kapoor *et al.* (2025). Therefore, we posit:

H2. Masstige brand consumption positively influences brand loyalty.

Masstige brand consumption and brand evangelism

Brand evangelism, the voluntary and enthusiastic promotion of a brand, is particularly influential in emerging markets such as India, where peer recommendations strongly guide consumption (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2024). Masstige brands, which combine prestige with accessibility, serve as social signals that reinforce consumers' identity, self-image and belonging (Chaurasia *et al.*, 2024; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). Research shows that masstige consumption fosters advocacy through social media and recommendations (Bilro *et al.*, 2022; Purohit *et al.*, 2023), with brand happiness mediating this link by fulfilling emotional needs (Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Identity expression, including uniqueness, pride and symbolic value, further drives evangelism, supported by co-creation and authenticity (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Das *et al.*, 2022a, b, c; Roy *et al.*, 2025). Digital platforms amplify these effects, making masstige brands catalysts for advocacy across contexts (Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Atsız *et al.*, 2024). In view of these emotional, symbolic, and social dynamics, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Masstige brand consumption positively influences brand evangelism.

Brand happiness, brand loyalty and brand evangelism

Brand happiness is a strong predictor of brand loyalty. When consumers feel emotionally gratified by brand experiences, they are more likely to sustain long-term commitment (Kumar *et al.*, 2021; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). In emerging markets like India, affective engagement with masstige brands enhances value perceptions and trust, reinforcing loyalty (Kapoor *et al.*, 2025; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Happiness drives both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty: joy and pride shape positive attitudes and purchase intentions (Cuesta-Valiño *et al.*, 2022; Roy *et al.*, 2025), while authenticity, belonging and attachment mediate the satisfaction–loyalty link (Braxton and Lau-Gesk, 2020). Positive experiences also build trust and long-term retention (Elsäßer and Wirtz, 2017; Fernandes and Moreira, 2019; Huh *et al.*, 2023). Thus, affective experiences are central to sustaining loyalty in status-sensitive markets like India, we propose:

H4. Brand happiness positively influences brand loyalty.

Brand happiness also drives brand evangelism, defined as consumers' active and voluntary promotion of a brand (Sharma and Khandeparkar, 2025). In India, where social capital grows through consumer narratives, emotionally fulfilled consumers are more likely to share experiences (Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Purohit *et al.*, 2023). Happiness from masstige brands satisfies hedonic and identity needs, encouraging advocacy (Moorlock *et al.*, 2023; Song and Kim, 2022). Empirical work confirms this: happiness precedes word-of-mouth (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018), motivates Gen Z evangelism (Khandai *et al.*, 2025), and strengthens advocacy through indulgence and congruence (Purohit *et al.*, 2023). Studies across sectors show that love, attachment and identification convert happiness into evangelism (Chiengkul and Junla, 2023; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021). In identity-driven contexts such as India's urban middle class, happiness not only strengthens brand bonds but also mobilizes consumers as ambassadors. As such, we propose:

H5. Brand happiness positively influences brand evangelism.

Brand loyalty and brand evangelism

Brand loyalty is a strong predictor of brand evangelism, particularly in emerging markets like India where trust, familiarity and repeated interactions shape advocacy (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Emotionally and behaviorally committed consumers are more likely to endorse and promote brands, transforming loyalty into active advocacy (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Mansoor and Paul, 2022). Research shows loyal consumers not only repurchase but also defend and recommend brands in social and digital communities (Jam *et al.*, 2025; Shabbir *et al.*, 2024). Loyalty, supported by perceived quality and identification, catalyzes evangelism when experiences are consistent and positive (Shabbir *et al.*, 2024). Systematic reviews confirm loyalty as a key antecedent of evangelism across green brands, luxury services and mobile (Cavadas and Moreira, 2025; Purohit *et al.*, 2023). Emotional loyalty, in particular, fosters deep brand connections that inspire advocacy (Sharma and Khandeparkar, 2025). In collectivist cultures like India, where recommendations strongly influence consumption, loyalty naturally evolves into evangelism. Hence:

H6. Brand loyalty positively influences brand evangelism.

Mediating role of brand happiness

Brand happiness is a pivotal emotional mechanism linking masstige consumption to loyalty and evangelism. The S-O-R model suggests that emotional states mediate how external stimuli shape behavior (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). In masstige contexts, happiness arises from engaging with accessible prestige brands and drives attitudinal and behavioral commitments (Kumar *et al.*, 2021; Shahid and Paul, 2021). Empirical evidence supports this pathway.

Mansoor and Paul (2022) and Purohit *et al.* (2023) show that brand happiness mediates the link between masstige perception and advocacy. Chaurasia and Panda (2025) find the same in fine dining, while Rodrigues *et al.* (2024) and Kumar *et al.* (2021) confirm that happiness bridges symbolic brand value with repeat purchases and word-of-mouth. Emotional gratification also underpins attachment and evangelism (Boisvert *et al.*, 2023; Khandai *et al.*, 2025). Khan *et al.* (2024) further demonstrate that consumer well-being, related to happiness, mediates the masstige–loyalty relationship. This mediating effect strengthens when consumers experience self-pleasing and symbolic alignment. Nobre *et al.* (2023) note that happiness through brand identification fosters loyalty and evangelism across services, fashion and technology. Thus:

H7. Brand happiness mediates the relationship between masstige brand consumption and brand loyalty.

H8. Brand happiness mediates the relationship between masstige brand consumption and brand evangelism.

Mediating role of brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is not only an outcome but also a pathway through which emotional attachment transforms into advocacy (Panda *et al.*, 2020). Affective bonds formed through happiness drive loyalty, which in turn motivates consumers to evangelize the brand (Das *et al.*, 2022a, b, c; Purohit *et al.*, 2023). In high-involvement categories, especially in prestige-seeking markets, loyalty precedes and predicts advocacy behaviors. This sequential process reflects the deepening of emotional ties into long-term brand relationships (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Empirical evidence reinforces this pathway. Bıçakcıoğlu *et al.* (2018) demonstrate that brand loyalty mediates the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism, indicating that emotional attachment alone does not always translate directly to advocacy; loyalty is the key mechanism that bridges this transition. Many studies have confirmed the robustness of this mediating effect (Panda *et al.*, 2020; Song and Kim, 2022), underscoring the transformative role of loyalty in turning brand happiness into proactive brand promotion. Accordingly:

H9. Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between brand happiness and brand evangelism.

Moderating role of age

Age significantly shapes engagement with masstige and luxury brands by influencing motivations, attachment, and responses (Bae and Jo, 2024). Younger consumers prioritize experiential and sensory benefits, developing brand happiness through hedonic and self-expressive encounters that often lead to advocacy (Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka, 2019; Jhamb *et al.*, 2020; Khandai *et al.*, 2025).

Older consumers, by contrast, value stability, authenticity and symbolic identity reinforcement (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). When confronting negative stereotypes, they may adopt masstige brands to signal youthfulness and vitality (Bae and Jo, 2024). Their loyalty is typically rooted in emotional attachment and durable relationships rather than novelty (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Age also moderates how value perceptions translate into outcomes. Yeh *et al.* (2016) found emotional and social value more strongly predict loyalty for older consumers, while brand identification drives loyalty among younger cohorts. These contrasting pathways indicate that life stage and identity needs determine how masstige consumption translates into happiness, loyalty and evangelism. Thus,

H10. Consumer age moderates the relationship between masstige brand consumption and brand happiness, brand loyalty and brand evangelism.

Methods

Selection of skincare brands

Brand selection was limited to four dominant players to ensure focused comparison. Lakmé was chosen as India's leading cosmetics brand, while MAC, L'Oréal Paris and Maybelline were included for their international prominence and established presence in India. The study does not aim for exhaustive coverage but instead seeks to establish a strategic benchmark, consistent with applications of the Masstige Mean Index (MMI) in prior studies. The choice of skincare brands followed a three-step process: (1) segmentation of the beauty market to identify leading players; (2) evaluation of sales and market share data and (3) consideration of brand country of origin, as recommended in prior research (Alagarsamy *et al.*, 2024; Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024; Singh, 2024). L'Oréal Paris and Maybelline (both owned by L'Oréal) represent the international mass-prestige segment, offering skincare such as Revitalift and micellar waters priced between INR 500–1,500, with a combined 10–12% market share. Lakmé, supported by Hindustan Unilever's 28% share, represents India's domestic leader, offering affordable luxury via products like Sun Expert, starting at INR 300. MAC Cosmetics, owned by Estée Lauder, was included as a prestige benchmark with offerings such as Hyper Real Skincare. Together, these brands capture the dynamics of India's USD 13–16 billion skincare market, which is increasingly driven by digital channels and consumer demand for quality and affordability.

Sampling procedure

Data were collected through an online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey, using purposive and snowball sampling via professional networks and social media. To minimize self-selection and social desirability bias, the survey emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged honest responses based on actual experiences. Participation was voluntary, with digital informed consent obtained before starting. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw anytime. The survey was anonymous, collected no personal identifiers, and offered no incentives, reducing privacy concerns and motivating responding.

Data quality was ensured by screening for duplicate IPs, timing validation to remove speeders, and attention checks to exclude inattentive responses. Consistent with the study's scope, only female respondents in India evaluating four cosmetic brands were included. A total of 622 responses were received. After applying quality checks, 573 complete and valid responses were retained; 46 were incomplete and three declined participations. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the final sample.

Instruments

Masstige consumption was captured using Masstige Mean Scale (MMS) (10 items) from Paul (2019). We adopted the brand happiness scale from Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018), which consists of twelve items. Three items were also adopted from Brady *et al.* (2012) to measure brand loyalty, and another three from Matzler *et al.* (2007) to measure brand evangelism; all items are presented in the Appendix. The survey concluded with demographic questions about the participants. All items in the research were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale, which ranged from "1-strongly disagree" to "7-strongly agree."

Results

Stage 1 results

This study employs the MMI developed by Paul (2019) to evaluate consumer perceptions of four skincare brands in India. The MMI, grounded in the MMS, measures how effectively brands balance prestige with mass accessibility, serving as a consumer-based proxy for strategies such as pricing, quality and emotional value (Paul, 2019). It uses ten items rated on a 1–10 scale, yielding scores from 10 to 70, where values above 50 indicate strong masstige

Table 1. Demographic classification

Demographics	Categories	Brand				
		MAC	L'Oreal Paris	Maybelline New York	Lakmé	Total
Age	Under 20 years	7	10	11	22	50
	Between 21 and 30 years	52	54	102	121	329
	Between 31 and 40 years	32	44	20	19	115
	Over 40 years	26	19	14	20	79
Living Area	Urban	92	68	107	129	396
	Rural	25	59	40	53	177
Family Income (monthly)	Under Indian Rupees (INR) 0.30,000	9	18	18	46	91
	Between INR. 30,000 & INR. 49,999	20	38	32	40	130
	Between INR. 50,000 & INR. 74,999	30	33	33	29	125
	Between INR. 75,000 & INR. 99,999	28	17	29	19	93
	Over INR 100,000	30	21	35	48	134
Educational Qualification	School level	13	12	8	10	43
	Bachelor's degree	51	78	67	85	281
	Master's degree	53	37	72	87	249
Occupation	Salaried	34	37	27	33	131
	Self employed	18	20	10	12	60
	Students	45	42	95	123	305
	Unemployed	20	28	15	14	77
	Total	117	127	147	182	573

Note(s): All respondents were female, as the study targets women's perceptions of masstige beauty brands
Source(s): Authors' own work

positioning. Recent work shows MMI's association with symbolic motivations like pride, uniqueness and self-esteem, which drive masstige consumption and engagement (Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Khan *et al.*, 2024). The tool aids strategic decision-making by locating a brand on the mass-prestige continuum and guiding targeted interventions for aspirational consumers (Mansoor *et al.*, 2024; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). It also supports cross-sector and cross-market comparisons, advancing consumer-based brand equity research (Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Singh, 2024). Although newer scales like MasCal capture multidimensional constructs such as self-congruence and loyalty (Ishaq *et al.*, 2023), the MMI remains particularly suited to product-based contexts like skincare. In Stage 1, MMI scores are used to profile each brand, providing a basis for Stage 2's structural equation modeling of emotional and behavioral outcomes. This approach captures how consumers internalize strategic signals rather than firm-level tactics.

Table 2 reports ANOVA results comparing MMI scores of MAC, L'Oréal Paris, Maybelline and Lakmé. MAC and L'Oréal scored significantly higher than Maybelline and Lakmé, reflecting stronger masstige positioning. One sample *t*-test with a benchmark of 50 confirmed that L'Oréal (55.66) and MAC (53.6) meet prestige thresholds, while Maybelline (49.82) and Lakmé (48.64) do not. Lakmé also recorded significantly lower brand happiness, with similar gaps observed in loyalty and evangelism.

Stage 2 results

Stage 1 identified brand specific masstige perceptions, while Stage 2 examined the psychological mechanisms linking these perceptions to behavioral outcomes. The MMI scores served as the foundation for testing brand happiness as a mediator and age as a

Table 2. Research constructs score

Brand	*N*	Masstige mean score	F-Value (*p*-value)	Brand happiness mean	F-Value (*p*-value)	Brand loyalty mean	F-Value (*p*-value)	Brand evangelism mean	F-Value (*p*-value)
MAC	117	53.60	21.129 (0.000**)	5.32	9.966 (0.000**)	5.79	9.046 (0.000**)	5.36	16.324 (0.000**)
L'Oreal Paris	127	55.66		5.37		5.69		5.51	
Maybelline New York	147	49.82		5.09		5.59		4.88	
Lakmé	182	48.64		4.90		5.28		4.65	

Note(s): $^{**}p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own work

moderator of loyalty and evangelism. Only MAC and L'Oréal Paris were included in Stage 2, as they scored significantly higher on masstige value, happiness, loyalty and evangelism compared to Maybelline and Lakmé, ensuring alignment with the masstige construct. The final sample comprised 244 respondents (117 for MAC, 127 for L'Oréal Paris). Given the study's focus on predicting brand evangelism and its use of multiple indicators for brand happiness (12 items) and masstige consumption (10 items), PLS-SEM was considered the most appropriate analytical approach (Hair *et al.*, 2022).

The adequacy of the measurement model was evaluated using IBM SPSS and validated through model fit indices in AMOS, followed by structural testing in PLS-SEM. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed as Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeded the 0.70 threshold across all constructs (ranging from 0.895 to 0.936). Convergent validity was established with average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 (0.527–0.748), indicating that each construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators. Model fit indices further supported adequacy, with CMIN/DF = 2.740, CFI = 0.952, SRMR = 0.043, RMSEA = 0.055 and PClose = 0.024, all within recommended thresholds (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Discriminant validity was confirmed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE (diagonal values) exceeded inter-construct correlations, and through the HTMT ratio, with all values below the 0.90 cutoff (Henseler *et al.*, 2014). These results, summarized in Table 3, demonstrate that the constructs possess both convergent and discriminant validity, confirming the robustness of the measurement model prior to hypothesis testing in PLS-SEM.

Variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to test multicollinearity and common method bias (CMB). A VIF above three signals potential collinearity and CMB risk (Kock, 2015). As shown in Table 4, all VIF values were below this threshold, confirming no collinearity or CMB issues in the data.

The next step involves assessing the statistical significance of the path coefficients (β) that represent the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. Table 4 and Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that masstige brand consumption significantly and positively influences brand happiness ($\beta = 0.706$; $t = 12.741$; $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis H1. Masstige also significantly impacts brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.516$; $t = 6.616$; $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H2. However, the direct effect of masstige brand consumption on brand evangelism was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.141$; $t = 1.913$; $p = 0.056$), hence Hypothesis H3 is not supported. Brand happiness significantly affects brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.239$; $t = 2.705$; $p = 0.007$) and brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.299$; $t = 3.482$; $p = 0.001$), affirming Hypotheses H4 and H5, respectively. In addition, brand loyalty has a direct and statistically significant influence on brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.400$; $t = 5.731$; $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H6.

Masstige brand consumption indirectly influences brand loyalty through brand happiness ($\beta = 0.169$; $t = 2.563$; $p = 0.010$), validating Hypothesis H7 and confirming partial mediation. Furthermore, masstige indirectly enhances brand evangelism through three distinct pathways: from masstige to brand happiness to brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.211$; $t = 3.287$; $p = 0.001$), from masstige to brand loyalty to brand evangelism ($\beta = 0.206$; $t = 4.653$; $p < 0.001$), and via the serial mediation of brand happiness and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.068$; $t = 2.173$; $p = 0.030$). These indirect effects collectively yield a total indirect effect of $\beta = 0.485$ ($t = 7.596$; $p < 0.001$), which supports Hypothesis H8 and demonstrates full mediation of the relationship between masstige consumption and brand evangelism. Furthermore, brand happiness indirectly contributes to brand evangelism through brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.096$; $t = 2.271$; $p = 0.023$), confirming Hypothesis H9 and indicating that brand loyalty partially mediates this pathway.

The analysis also examined the moderating role of consumer age. Three interaction effects were found to be significant. First, age negatively moderates the relationship between masstige brand consumption and brand loyalty ($\beta = -0.229$; $t = 3.753$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that this path weakens as age increases. Second, age positively moderates the relationship between brand happiness and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.224$; $t = 2.714$; $p = 0.007$), suggesting that older

Table 3. Convergent validity and discriminant validity results

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Fornell and Lacker criteria				Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio		
				1	2	3	4	1	2	3
1. Masstige brand consumption	0.913	0.917	0.527	*0.726*						
2. Brand Happiness	0.936	0.932	0.536	0.716***	*0.732*			0.730		
3. Brand Loyalty	0.895	0.897	0.744	0.680***	0.669***	*0.863*		0.688	0.670	
4. Brand Evangelism	0.897	0.899	0.748	0.663***	0.702***	0.770***	*0.865*	0.673	0.687	0.781

Note(s): Diagonal value shows square root of AVE, $^{**}p < 0.01$
Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing and Mediation analysis

Structural relationship	Direct β	*t*-Value	*p*-value	Indirect β	*t*-Value	*p*-value	R^2	Q^2
Masstige brand consumption → Brand Happiness	0.706	12.741	0.000**				0.500	0.471
Age x Masstige brand consumption → Brand Happiness	−0.030	0.353	0.724					
Masstige brand consumption → Brand Loyalty	0.516	6.616	0.000**	0.169	2.563	0.010*	0.579	0.488
Brand Happiness → Brand Loyalty	0.239	2.705	0.007**					
Age x Masstige brand consumption → Brand Loyalty	−0.229	3.753	0.000**	−0.007	0.329	0.742		
Age x Brand Happiness → Brand Loyalty	0.224	2.714	0.007**					
Masstige brand consumption → Brand Evangelism	0.141	1.913	0.056	0.485	7.596	0.000**	0.658	0.476
Brand Happiness → Brand Evangelism	0.299	3.482	0.001**	0.096	2.271	0.023*		
Brand Loyalty → Brand Evangelism	0.400	5.731	0.000**					
Age x Masstige brand consumption → Brand Evangelism	0.037	0.577	0.564	−0.103	2.105	0.035*		
Age x Brand Happiness → Brand Evangelism	−0.135	1.795	0.073	0.090	2.671	0.008**		
Age x Brand Loyalty → Brand Evangelism	0.162	2.572	0.010*					

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own work

consumers exhibit stronger loyalty responses to brand happiness. Third, age positively moderated the relationship between brand loyalty and brand evangelism (β = 0.162; $t = 2.572$; $p = 0.010$), confirming that the loyalty–evangelism link strengthens with age. These findings provide partial support for Hypothesis H10, establishing that age significantly moderates specific relationships in the proposed model. The three significant interaction effects (simple slope) are illustrated in Figure 3. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples confirmed the reliability of the indirect and moderated mediation effects, with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero for all significant paths (Hair *et al.*, 2022).

The model's explanatory power and predictive relevance were assessed using R^2 and Q^2 values. The R^2 values indicate that 50.0% of the variance in brand happiness, 57.9% in brand loyalty and 65.8% in brand evangelism are explained by the proposed predictors, suggesting moderate to substantial explanatory power (Hair *et al.*, 2022). Correspondingly, the Q^2 values for brand happiness (0.471), brand loyalty (0.488), and brand evangelism (0.476) exceed the minimum threshold of 0, confirming the strong predictive relevance of the model (Hair *et al.*,

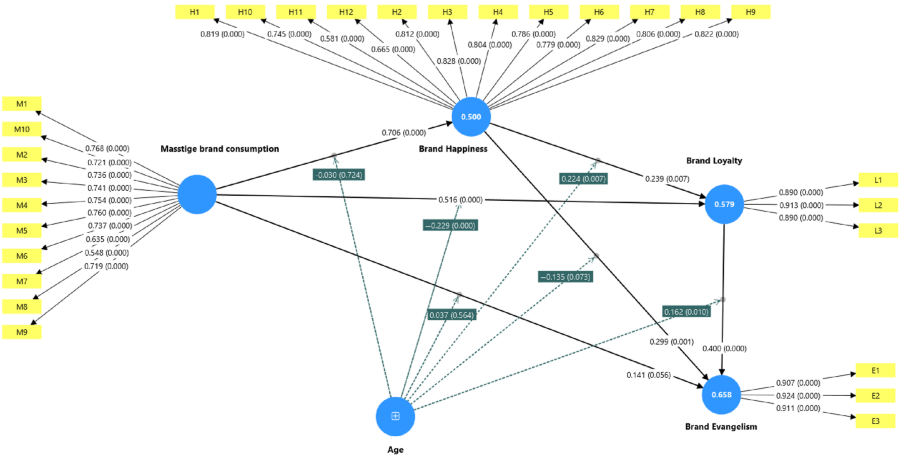


Figure 2. Structural Model. Source: Authors' own work

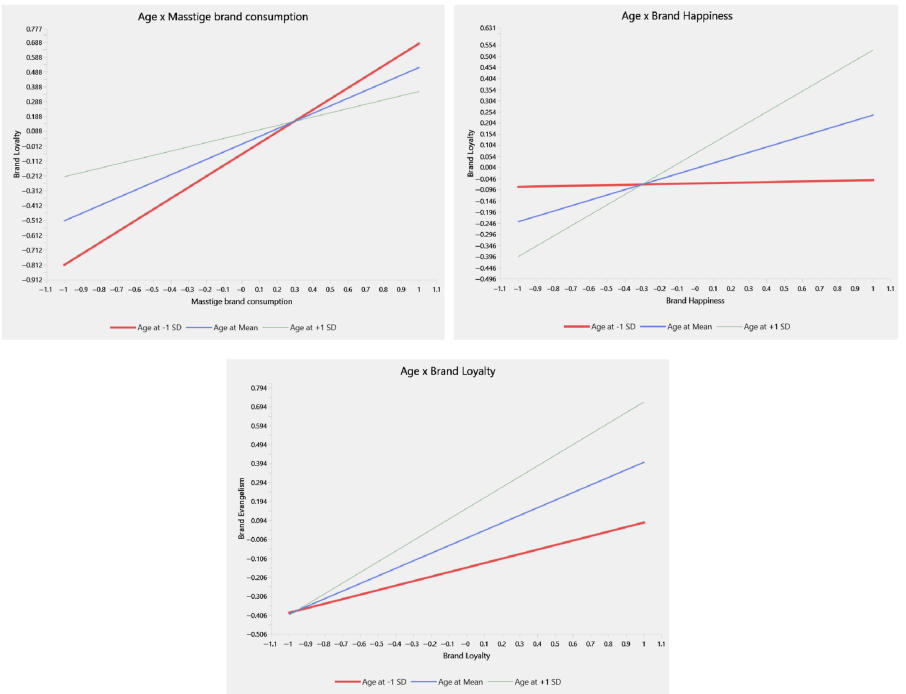


Figure 3. Interaction effect. Source: Authors' own work

2022). These results affirm that the structural model not only explains the outcome constructs effectively but also has excellent out-of-sample predictive accuracy, particularly in the context of consumer behavior toward masstige brands in emerging markets.

Discussions

This study examines masstige brand consumption in India's cosmetics market, focusing on its effects on brand happiness, loyalty, and evangelism through a two-stage S-O-R design. Findings show how consumer perceptions and psychological mechanisms shape brand relationships, offering contributions to masstige marketing literature.

Stage 1 applied the MMI to assess perceptions of MAC, L'Oréal Paris, Maybelline and Lakmé. Results revealed MAC and L'Oréal Paris scored significantly higher than Maybelline and Lakmé, reflecting stronger masstige positioning that balances prestige and accessibility (Paul, 2019). Indian consumers thus perceive these international brands as delivering premium quality and symbolic status without losing affordability, consistent with masstige strategies (Shahid *et al.*, 2023). Their higher scores likely reflect aspirational advertising, quality cues, and cultural resonance appealing to India's middle class (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, Maybelline's weaker scores suggest gaps in perceived quality or symbolic resonance (Das *et al.* 2022c), while Lakmé's domestic familiarity may limit aspirational value due to weaker exclusivity (Chaurasia *et al.*, 2024). These results underline the importance of consumer perceptions in aligning strategies with aspirational expectations (Roy *et al.*, 2025).

Stage 2 used PLS-SEM to test psychological pathways. Masstige consumption significantly enhanced happiness, supporting the S-O-R view that stimuli evoke emotions driving behavior (Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). Happiness partially mediated the link to loyalty (Mansoor and Paul, 2022) and fully mediated the link to evangelism, with effects through happiness alone and sequentially through loyalty. Thus, emotional fulfillment is crucial for advocacy, especially in India's collectivist culture (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Purohit *et al.*, 2023), extending prior work on emotional engagement in masstige contexts.

Loyalty also mediated happiness–evangelism pathways, confirming sequential links from satisfaction to advocacy. The absence of a direct effect from masstige to evangelism shows prestige alone is insufficient; emotional and behavioral commitment are required (Bıçakcıoğlu *et al.*, 2018; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). This underscore sustained interactions in building consumer ambassadors (Huang, 2017).

Age further moderated responses. Older consumers were less influenced by masstige in forming loyalty, favoring functional trust (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). Younger consumers, motivated by hedonic and expressive needs, responded more strongly to masstige cues (Jhamb *et al.*, 2020). However, older consumers exhibited stronger loyalty when experiencing happiness and were more likely to translate it into evangelism (Bae and Jo, 2024; Yoon and Occeña, 2015). Contrary to assumptions that youth drive luxury through materialism (Amatulli *et al.*, 2015), results suggest happiness from masstige transcends age via experiential and symbolic value (Aureliano-Silva *et al.*, 2018; Jian *et al.*, 2019). Thus, age remains a critical demographic factor shaping consumer–brand dynamics (Thaichon *et al.*, 2016).

Managerial implications

This study provides actionable insights for managers of masstige cosmetics brands in India, including MAC, L'Oréal Paris, Maybelline New York, and Lakmé. With the sector projected to reach USD 21 billion by 2025 and social commerce expanding (IBEF, 2023), strategies must integrate symbolic value with emotional engagement (Chaurasia *et al.*, 2024; Mansoor *et al.*, 2024). Findings show that international brands outperform domestic ones in masstige perception, happiness and advocacy. Managers should emphasize symbolic and emotional attributes that evoke pride, self-expression and aspirational value (Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). Campaigns aligned with self-enhancement or social visibility can effectively stimulate brand happiness, a proven driver of loyalty and evangelism (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018).

To leverage happiness, managers should design multi-sensory and personalized experiences that reinforce symbolic ownership while maintaining affordability, using AR-based try-ons, inclusive messaging and co-creation initiatives (Atsız *et al.*, 2024; Purohit *et al.*,

2023). Emotional branding must take precedence over transactional appeals, as intangible benefits such as joy and self-fulfillment are central in prestige-linked categories (Boisvert *et al.*, 2023; Moorlock *et al.*, 2023).

Loyalty can be cultivated through relational tactics like programs, exclusive communities and consistent quality. In masstige markets, symbolic value requires continual reaffirmation (Kapoor *et al.*, 2025; Robertson *et al.*, 2022). Lakmé, for instance, could strengthen competitiveness by aligning cultural narratives with masstige cues (Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023).

Brand evangelism, driven by happiness and loyalty, should be nurtured via user-generated content and influencer collaborations highlighting real transformations (Bilro *et al.*, 2022; Roy *et al.*, 2025). Advocacy is especially powerful in collectivist contexts like India, where peer recommendations amplify credibility (Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024).

Segmentation by age is essential. Older consumers are less responsive to masstige positioning but show stronger loyalty and evangelism when emotionally satisfied, whereas younger cohorts respond more to novelty and self-expressive cues (Bae and Jo, 2024; Khandai *et al.*, 2025; Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). Thus, differentiated campaigns are needed: trend- and experience-driven strategies for Gen Z and Millennials, versus authenticity- and trust-focused approaches for older segments. Finally, brand monitoring using tools like the MMI (Paul, 2019) allows benchmarking across consumer groups. Adjustments should prevent drift toward commodification or exclusivity, both of which dilute masstige equity (Nobre *et al.*, 2023).

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to theory in three substantive ways. First, it advances the S-O-R framework by reinterpreting masstige consumption as a symbolic marketing stimulus that triggers emotional appraisal, rather than treating it solely as a consumption outcome. Previous applications of S-O-R in marketing have largely examined retail atmospherics or service experiences (Eroglu *et al.*, 2001; Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018). By positioning masstige as the external cue, brand happiness as the organismic state, and loyalty and evangelism as responses, this study demonstrates how the framework can be extended to prestige-at-scale markets, a context largely overlooked in prior research (Anning-Dorson and Tackie, 2025; Roy *et al.*, 2025).

Second, the study establishes brand happiness as a central mediating mechanism in masstige branding. While earlier work examined constructs such as brand love, attachment, or self-congruence (Boisvert *et al.*, 2023; Nobre *et al.*, 2023; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024), limited evidence has directly linked masstige consumption to happiness as an affective driver of behavior. Our findings confirm that happiness significantly connects masstige with loyalty and evangelism, positioning it as a pivotal yet underexplored construct in prestige-accessible branding (Mansoor and Paul, 2022; Purohit *et al.*, 2024).

Third, the study highlights the moderating role of age in shaping consumer responses. Younger consumers respond to masstige through hedonic and expressive motives, while older cohorts emphasize stability and identity reinforcement (Bae and Jo, 2024; Jhamb *et al.*, 2020). By integrating age as a boundary condition, this study deepens understanding of demographic heterogeneity in aspirational markets, moving beyond generalized accounts of masstige consumption.

Limitations and future scope

This study has limitations that suggest directions for future research. It examined four hedonic skincare brands; future work could compare hedonic and utilitarian categories, include experiential and material purchases, and expand the scope to more Indian brands. Future research may also extend this study across categories to test the robustness and generalizability

of the findings. We modeled brand happiness as a mediator and age as a moderator, but other factors, such as personality traits, materialism, brand attachment and brand love, could be tested as mediators or moderators. Additional outcomes like repurchase intentions and brand forgiveness also merit attention. Methodologically, the cross-sectional, self-reported design may limit causal inference; future studies could employ longitudinal or experimental approaches and replicate the model in other developing economies.

Appendix

All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Masstige Brand Consumption (adapted from Paul, 2019).

(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.

(6) I believe this brand is known for its high quality.

(7) I believe this brand meets international standards.

(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.

Brand Happiness (adapted from Schnebelen and Bruhn, 2018).
Participants were asked to rate how the brand made them feel:

(1) Glad

(2) Cheerful

(3) Joyful

(4) Lively

(5) Peppy

(6) Vigorous

(7) Proud

(8) Superior

(9) Worthy

(10) Relaxed

(11) At ease

(12) Comfortable

Brand Loyalty (adapted from Brady *et al*., 2012).

(1) I am loyal to this brand.

(2) This brand is my first choice when I purchase this type of product.

(3) I am dedicated to doing business with this brand.

Brand Evangelism (adapted from Matzler *et al*., 2007).

(1) I have proselytized several of my friends to the brand.

(2) I try to convince as many people as possible of the brand.

(3) I feel the need to tell everybody that the brand is the most appealing brand.

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