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## *Affordable Luxury and Positive Psychology: Review of Masstige Consumption through the Lens of the PERMA Model*

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**Abstract:** *Masstige or “mass prestige” consumption is a contemporary phenomenon related to the consumption of affordable luxury products available to the masses. The masstige literature has focused on various antecedents and consequences, consumer perceptions and psychology to examine the factors that drive masstige consumption. Yet, the gap exists in understanding masstige consumption from the lens of positive psychology. The PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment) paradigm of positive psychology and well-being is used in this study to conceptualise masstige consumption psychology. The study presents its conceptual framework using conceptual development, the first stage of the general method of theory building. The findings of the study present that masstige brands can utilise the positive psychology aspects in their production, pricing, and promotion strategies to influence consumer emotions, resulting in positive masstige consumption behaviour. The study offers a novel viewpoint on the exploration of positive psychology in masstige consumption.*

**Keywords:** *Masstige consumption, positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishment.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of masstige or ‘mass prestige’ brands was originated by Silverstein and Friske (2003) to introduce the ‘new luxury.’ Masstige brands were pointed out as an accessible luxury that falls somewhere between super-premium and middle-class pricing ranges (Silverstein & Friske, 2003). Paul (2018, p. 2) defined masstige marketing 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.” Based on the literature, the key determinates of masstige consumption are consumption values, affordable prices, ideal self-congruence, brand engagement, brand love, brand tribalism, co-creation, perceived status, consumer inconspicuousness, need for uniqueness, symbolism, fear of missing out and, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Boisvert et al., 2023; Das et al., 2022; Park et al., 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2023; Shahied et al., 2024). The consequences of masstige consumption include electronic word-of-mouth, attitude loyalty, and perceived brand happiness (Purohit & Radia, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2022). The values and motives behind masstige consumption are largely attributed to status and prestige. Therefore, we can understand masstige consumption as ‘affordable status consumption’ for mass-class consumers.

The literature on masstige has proliferated in the last decade, and the focus is primarily on empirical studies that establish relationships between different brand attributes and masstige consumption. Paul (2015, 2018) established the masstige theory based on the downward extension of luxury firms and gave a 10-item masstige value scale that measures the brands as masstige based on the consumer scores.

The conceptualisation of masstige is done through different theories like expectancy-value theory (Das et al., 2022), self-determination theory (Saavedra & Bautista, 2020; Shahied et al., 2024), stimulus-organism-response theory (Gupta et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2022), consumer culture theory (Das et al., 2022), post-keynesian theories (Iah & Susjan, 2023), theory of reasoned action (Ananda et al., 2024), behavioural reasoning theory (Uluturk & Asan, 2024), commodity theory (Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023), the theory of planned behaviour (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Saavedra & Bautista, 2020), theory of consumption values with generational cohort theory (Gilal et al., 2022), the rational choice theory with information processing theory (Katyal et al., 2022) and cognitive dissonance theory with masstige as a self-concept (Wang et al., 2022). The conceptualisation based on these theories has contributed vastly to masstige literature in examining the cause-effect relationship. However, a gap still exists in understanding and conceptualising masstige through the psychological lens.

The present study aims to address these gaps with the research questions: RQ1) How does the positive psychology model PERMA shape the masstige consumption behaviour? RQ2) What is the application of PERMA in masstige consumption through the conceptual framework? To answer these questions, the present study will use the model PERMA, abbreviated for (positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishment) developed by Seligman (2012) to present the consumer's internal state for masstige consumption. The study will develop a conceptual framework to present its findings showing PERMA in masstige consumption.

The study is a novel approach to applying the psychological well-being and happiness approach to masstige consumption. It contributes to masstige literature by exploring masstige consumption through the positive psychological lens, and it is one of its kind to apply the PERMA model in masstige literature. Masstige brand managers can also benefit from the study's practical implications, which include using consumer positive psychology to inform their marketing mix strategy. The study offers academic implications for the researchers to explore and validate the interdisciplinary phenomena with empirical examinations.

The remaining paper is structured as follows: The review of the literature is covered in the second section, followed by the methodology in the third part, the fourth part deals with the conceptual development using the PERMA model, and the findings and discussion in the fifth part. The sixth and seventh parts deal with a conclusion and future work.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 The Masstige Consumption

The message is made up of two words, 'mass' and 'prestige.' The literal meaning of the word is products of the brands that are perceived to be prestigious and are available to the masses. The masstige brands came into the mainstream from Silverstein and Friske (2003) article in Harvard Business Review, 'luxury for the masses.' Since then, the masstige literature has prospered with different theoretical, methodological and practice-based studies. The association of masstige consumption is often seen with the values arrived from the masstige products. The role of perceived values (functional, symbolic, experiential and vanity) has an impact on masstige purchase intention (Al Issa et al., 2024; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Das et al., 2022; Goyal, 2020; Park et al., 2022; Purohit & Radia, 2022). The consumption of masstige products drives the social recognition and status for the consumers (Alagarsamy et al., 2024; Baber et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Das et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2024). The consequences or outcomes of masstige consumption include perceived brand happiness in the short and long term (Burhanudin, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2022), attitudinal loyalty (Purohit & Radia, 2022) and Ewom (Rodrigues et al., 2022). The masstige literature has also been explored through psychological theories. The impact of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation is taking help from self-determination theory (Shahid et al., 2024), behavioural reasoning theory (Uluturk & Asan, 2024), and

consumer culture theory (Das et al., 2022). Wang et al. (2022) studied the consumption behaviour of masstige brands in the post-covid period from the viewpoint of the consumer to comprehend how a pandemic affects people's morals and worldviews. The theory of cognitive dissonance and self-perception was used to understand how consumers perceive masstige products post covid era (Wang et al., 2022). The literature highlights that the key reasons for masstige consumption behaviour are: (i) perceived status in social groups from masstige consumption. (ii) The affordable prices for the luxury status. (iii) Sense of achieving meaning and higher success from owning the masstige brands. The current study explores the masstige from the PERMA model in an effort to contribute a new conceptual foundation.

## 2.2 PERMA Model

The field of positive psychology was introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in 2000. Its goal is to comprehend human flourishing and people's capabilities, in contrast to psychology's traditional focus on treating mental illnesses and pathology (Cabrera & Donaldson, 2024). The fundamental components of positive psychology and well-being were presented in different aspects of the PERMA framework. The PERMA components were positive emotions that reflect happiness, feelings of joy, gratitude, and well-being. Engagement is used to describe a subjective emotion that indicates how deeply someone is immersed in something (Aoki, 2021). Feelings of belonging, social integration, concern, respect, and support are all a part of relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Meaning is the conviction that one's existence has significance and the sense of being a part of something bigger than oneself or other people (Grénman et al., 2023). Accomplishment involves both exterior and interior objectives; internal objectives, such as growth and relationships, bring a higher level of well-being than outward objectives, like wealth and notoriety (Grénman et al., 2023; Khaw & Kern, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2012). Subjective well-being was found to be substantially positively correlated with the PERMA model (Cabrera & Donaldson, 2024). The PERMA paradigm has also been used in a variety of consumer scenarios, such as leisure, tourism, and sports consumption (Grénman et al., 2023). The PERMA model's elements relate to the masstige consumption outcomes. Thus, The current research endeavours to implement the positive psychology model PERMA in conceptualising masstige consumption.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Method

The current research attempts to use qualitative methods for conceptual development. A conceptual study's primary purposes include reviewing relevant literature, developing concepts, evaluating research designs, and acting as a guide for understanding the findings (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The present study reviewed the literature on masstige consumption and the positive psychology model PERMA. To build conceptual insights and theory building, the present study used a general method of theory building, a methodical approach to theory construction for applied discipline (Lynham, 2002; Nielsen, 2010). The method has five phases. First, the conceptual development phase proposes the idea and develops a conceptual framework. Second, the operationalisation phase works on connecting the theory with practical context. Third, the application phase works on applying the theory in an organisational setup. Fourth, the confirmation or disconfirmation phase works on accepting or rejecting the statement based on application results. In the end, the continuous refinement and development phase works for theory adaption, improvement, and development. This study will present the first phase of conceptual development, presenting the conceptual framework using theoretical background. Further studies can work on the application process to present empirical results.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The current study is a review-based conceptual development study. Taking the general method of theory building's first phase, it aims to integrate the masstige literature with a positive psychology lens. The primary source of data collection in this research is published articles, which are conceptual, review, and empirical papers. The databases used in this study are SCOPUS

and Web of Science since these are the standard databases with international acceptance. The papers were initially screened for their relevance, and only papers which provided insightful findings were included in the conceptual development process.

#### IV. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

##### 4.1 Integrating Masstige Consumption and PERMA

The concept of masstige evolved from luxury consumption since luxury brands decreased their price points so that middle-income groups could target their products in the mass market. The masstige consumption literature has primarily focused on the consumer perception of masstige; this includes external and internal factors contributing to masstige consumption. In their study, Purohit and Radia (2022) conceptualised the masstige buying behaviour using qualitative and quantitative studies. Their model included achievement signalling as one of the factors affecting the intention to consume masstige brand products. Achievement signalling in masstige refers to a sense of accomplishment and growth (Purohit & Radia, 2022). The empirical findings support that brand aspirations in the form of achievement signalling lead to positive behaviour intention towards masstige (Purohit & Radia, 2022). The factors of achievement and growth relate to the accomplishment factor of the PERMA model.

Burhanudin (2022) explored self-perception in a masstige context by empirically examining the role of self-indulgence, self-control, and short and long-term happiness. The findings supported the role of self-indulgence in the consumption behaviour of masstige. The short-term happiness derived from instant gratification and momentum leads to long-term happiness by giving a sense of living and meaning, leading to positive purchase intention for masstige consumption (Burhanudin, 2022). The factors of self-indulgence and happiness relate to the positive emotions factor of the PERMA model. Another study from Chatterjee et al. (2023) demonstrates through empirical evidence how brand features can increase the likelihood of favourable masstige purchases with the moderating effects of emotion, status, and pride. The study relates to the positive psychology framework by indicating that a sense of accomplishment, pride, and meaning leads to masstige consumption.

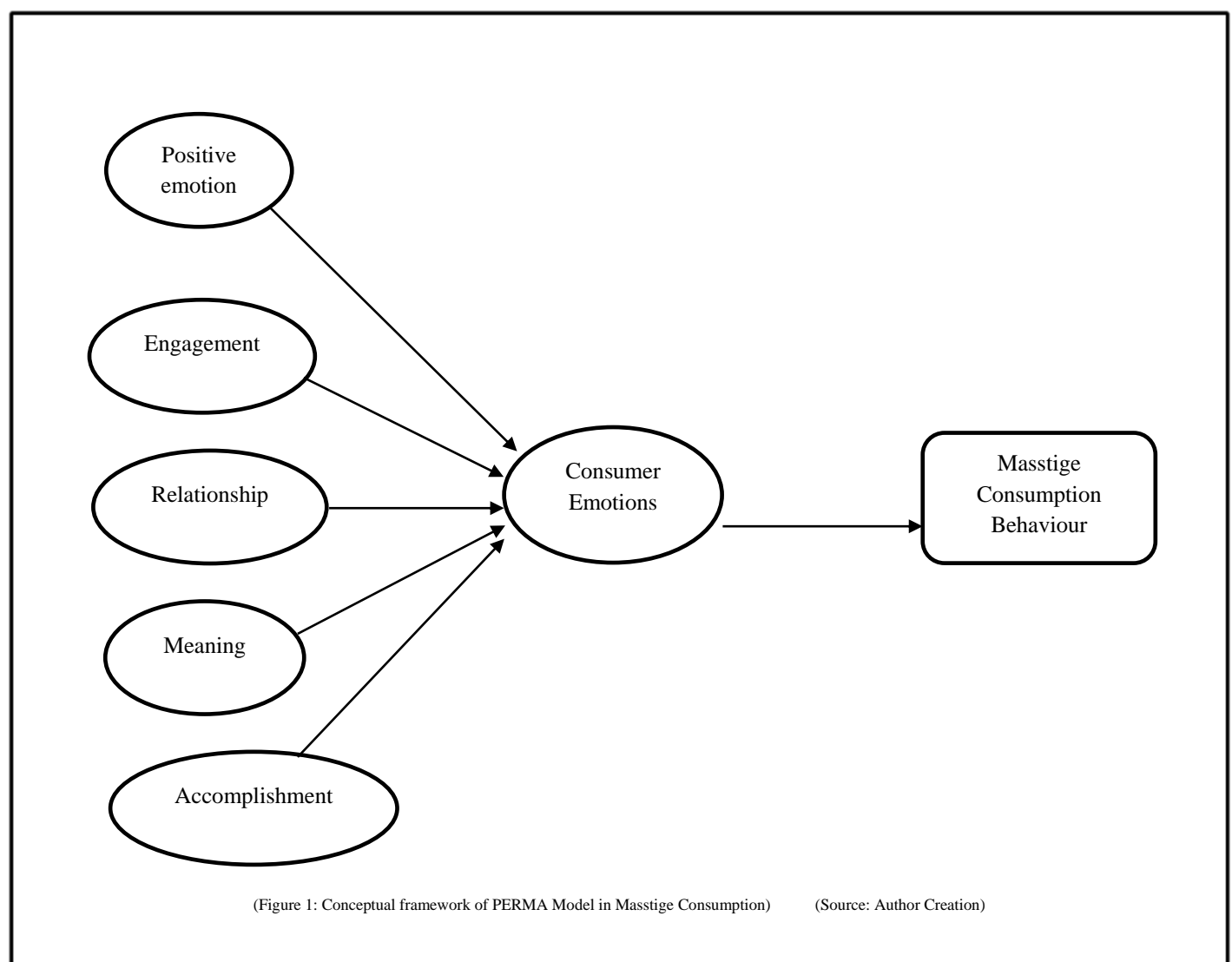
Shahid et al. (2024) examined the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on masstige consumption, taking theoretical support from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). They found that internal motivation for masstige consumption can be consumer self-perception, ideal self and well-being. They found a strong, favourable connection between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the form of integrated, introjected, and external regulation on the consumption behaviour of masstige (Shahid et al., 2024). The study aligns with the conceptualisation that masstige consumption leads to positive emotions, meaning, and achievement. Engagement in PERMA is described as the state of being preoccupied with tasks and completing them with zeal and dedication (Chisale & Phiri, 2022).

In the previous studies of masstige consumption, engagement is defined as “consumers' experiences of prestige brand consumption manifested through cognition, emotion and behaviour.” Three dimensions were used to measure engagement: behavioural, affective, and cognitive (Das et al., 2022). These three dimensions relate to positive psychology and subjective well-being, thus making them relevant to the PERMA model. One another study that reflects the PERMA model with masstige consumption is from Wang et al. (2022), which conceptualised and redefined masstige consumption in post covid era. The conceptualisation was based on the masstige in the self-context. The findings were based on the masstige as self-process, self-other, self-content, and self-context. The study suggested that consonance is the ultimate truth for the message. The qualitative findings suggested that consumer behaviour in the post covid era is shifting towards peace, calmness, harmony, balancing the inner self and attaining meaningful life through mindful consumption (Wang et al., 2022). The consumption shifting towards this peace-building and attaining meaning shows that masstige consumer's positive psychology and well-being can be attributed to the PERMA model's components.

## 4.2 Conceptualising Masstige Consumption with PERMA

The current research, taking theoretical support from the masstige literature and PERMA model, conceptualises that positive psychology model PERMA components influence the consumer emotions that result in positive masstige consumption behaviour. The conceptual framework (figure 1) presents that positive emotions are derived from masstige consumption because consuming mass prestige products can bring social status and short and long-term happiness (Burhanudin, 2022). The positive emotion component of PERMA influences consumer emotions, resulting in positive masstige consumption behaviour. The component engagement makes consumers involved and passionate about the masstige brand (Das et al., 2022). This affects consumer consciousness, resulting in positive masstige consumption behaviour. The relationship component of PERMA that associates with making meaningful social interaction is based on the conceptualisation of self as other or belongingness in society through masstige consumption (Wang et al., 2022). The positive relationship building influences consumer emotions, resulting in positive masstige consumption behaviour.

The meaning component of PERMA that relates to achieving a sense of purpose and higher self has also been discussed in the masstige literature (Burhanudin, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). This means attaining a sense of purpose and meaning influences positive consumer emotions, resulting in positive masstige consumption. The achievement component of PERMA relates to achieving the ambition and goals in life that give meaning to it. The masstige literature has discussed the importance of achievement and accomplishment as antecedents of masstige consumption (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Purohit & Radia, 2022). This helps in conceptualising that accomplishment significantly influences consumer emotions, resulting in positive masstige consumption.



## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Human flourishing is viewed in positive psychology as an abstract and universal notion and as a psychological matter that pertains to each individual (Willen et al., 2022). However, different authors have worked on presenting multidimensional approaches to human flourishing (Grénman et al., 2023). Seligman (2012) founded the principles of positive psychology and presented five domains for well-being: positive emotions to lead a happy life, engagement to indulge in meaningful behaviour, constricting soulful relationships, realising the higher self and meaning in life, and accomplishment to achieve the desired goals in life. The PERMA framework's intrinsic link to hedonic and eudaimonia, as well as its emphasis on applying the PERMA factors to one's own life, are two of its distinctive features (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Seligman, 2012). The framework can facilitate in a more profound comprehension of an individual's emotional states and their longer-term impacts on relationships, significance, and accomplishments in a variety of psychosocial spheres of existence (Butler & Kern, 2016; Seligman, 2018).

Businesses are already experimenting with novel approaches to selling luxury products and services that appeal to consumers' desires for status, extravagance, and better experiences. The meaning of "luxury" has evolved in recent years, resulting in the conception of "new luxury" (Eckhardt et al., 2015). The 'new luxury' is accessible, reasonably priced, and available to a large consumer base (Kumar et al., 2021). The masstige literature has incorporated the empirical examination of the impact of brand happiness, social recognition, status, emotion, values, and self-context on masstige consumption behaviour. To establish a conceptual understanding, the current study first examined the literature on PERMA and masstige consumption. The literature on masstige has components of the PERMA model as either antecedents or consequences of masstige consumption. Based on that, the study developed the conceptual framework that PERMA model components can trigger consumer emotions and influence the masstige consumption behaviour positively.

Based on the present study's findings, the masstige brands can design and market their products based on psychological aspects. Masstige brands can use symbols or logos that boost positive emotions in consumers since the consumer perception of cute luxury increases their brand equity for luxury brands (Li & Eastman, 2023). The masstige brands can run advertisement campaigns that engage the consumers and give them a sense of accomplishment by using the brand to boost positive psychology for enhanced masstige consumption. The tagline of some masstige products like Nike's 'Just do it,' Apple's 'Think different,' Gucci's 'Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten,' and Mercedes-Benz's 'The best or nothing' give a sense of accomplishment and meaning to use the brands. Masstige brands can also infuse sustainability into their promotion strategy to build positive emotions, meaningful relations, and compassionate engagement to enhance their consumption. Thus, the present study conceptualises that PERMA can be applied to the context of masstige brands and their product, pricing, and promotion strategies.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study of positive psychology involves applying psychological theories, research methods, and intervention strategies to comprehend the adaptive, flexible, imaginative, and emotionally satisfying facets of human conduct (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The application of psychology in consumer behaviour helps in understanding consumer perception, emotions, and decision-making. The luxury marketing literature emphasises consumer psychology as it helps to know how consumers perceive luxury products and shape their consumption behaviour. Masstige brands are termed 'affordable luxury' or 'democratisation of luxury' since they originated from luxury brands with the goal of reaching mass-class people through accessible pricing strategies. The literature on masstige is still developing to understand it through various consumer perceptions and empirical examinations. The current research tried to explore the interdisciplinary approach to understanding masstige consumption through the lens of positive psychology.

Based on the objectives, the study concludes by reviewing the literature on positive psychology and masstige consumption to understand the role of the PERMA model in masstige consumption. The study found relevant literature on masstige

consumption to support the idea that PERMA aspects positively influence masstige consumption. Based on the second objective, the study presented the application of PERMA in masstige in the form of designing marketing strategies that can develop positive emotions for the brand, keep the consumers passionate through engagement, give them a sense of socially significant relations, serve them for their higher meaning in life and, a sense of accomplishment through the consumption. The conceptual framework presented that the PERMA framework can influence consumer emotions for enhanced masstige consumption.

The study contributes in the following ways: first, it contributes theoretically to advance the literature on masstige consumption psychology. The study provides a novel lens of positive psychology in masstige consumption that has not been explored in earlier studies. Second, the managerial contributions are for masstige brand managers in designing their product, price and promotion strategies to keep positive psychology factors in the centre.

## VII. LIMITATION AND FEATURE WORK

The present study is based on masstige consumption and the PERMA model, which is a way to understand masstige consumers' perceptions through the lens of positive psychology. The study has identified, reviewed, integrated, and presented the literature on positive psychology and masstige. However, several gaps exist in the present study. The first gap is the empirical evidence to support the conceptual findings. The study has developed the conceptual framework based on the literature review, but strong empirical evidence is needed to prove the theory. Future studies can work on this gap by using the PERMA profiler scale in the consumer context. The development of the PERMA scale for consumer behaviour can also be a direction for future work. The second gap exists in the methodology adopted (Lynham, 2002; Nielsen, 2010) general theory-building method. The method has five phases, but the present study incorporated only the first phase to develop the conceptual understanding. Future studies can work on this gap and can use the PERMA method for the focus group or interviews to determine the real perception and develop a conceptual framework based on that. Finally, future studies can investigate the various antecedents, mediators, and outcomes of PERMA in the masstige context to deepen the roots of positive psychology in masstige consumption literature.

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