

GEN Z AND MASSTIGE BEAUTY BRANDS IN INDIA: A REVIEW OF EMERGING CONSUMER TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The Indian beauty market has witnessed remarkable transformation with the emergence of masstige brands products positioned between mass-market and prestige segments capturing the attention of Generation Z consumers. This literature review synthesizes scholarly research examining the intersection of Gen Z consumer behavior and masstige beauty consumption in India. Drawing from 23 peer-reviewed studies published primarily between 2020 and 2026, this review critically analyzes key themes including social media influence, digital beauty culture, self-identity construction, affordability dynamics, influencer marketing effectiveness, sustainability consciousness, aspirational consumption patterns, and online shopping behavior. The thematic discussion reveals that Indian Gen Z consumers navigate complex decision-making processes shaped by authenticity demands, value consciousness, and digital nativity. Despite growing academic interest, significant research gaps persist regarding integrated frameworks specific to Indian masstige beauty markets and the unique aspirational consumption patterns in emerging economies. This review contributes theoretical insights into generational consumer behavior while offering managerial implications for beauty brands targeting digitally-savvy, value-conscious young consumers in India's rapidly evolving retail landscape.

KEYWORDS: *Generation Z, Masstige Brands, Beauty Industry, Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Sustainable Consumption, Consumer Behavior.*

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INTRODUCTION

The global beauty and personal care industry has undergone substantial reconfiguration in recent years, with the masstige segment emerging as a strategic middle ground between mass-market accessibility and premium brand prestige. Masstige brands, a combination of “mass” and “prestige,” provide premium products and experiences at affordable prices, making them especially attractive to younger consumers. In India, this phenomenon has gained remarkable momentum as economic liberalization, rising disposable incomes among urban youth, and digital infrastructure expansion converge to reshape beauty consumption patterns.

Generation Z (Gen Z), broadly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a demographic cohort characterized by digital nativity, social consciousness, and distinctive consumption values. As this generation enters peak purchasing power, their preferences increasingly dictate market dynamics across industries. Within the beauty sector

specifically, Gen Z consumers demonstrate unique behavioral patterns that diverge from previous generations, including heightened authenticity expectations, sustainability consciousness, and reliance on peer-validated information through digital channels. The Indian context adds further complexity, as traditional beauty ideals intersect with globalized standards, creating hybrid consumption patterns that warrant scholarly attention.

The rise of masstige beauty brands in India coincides with several transformative market forces. E-commerce platforms have democratized access to previously unavailable international brands while enabling domestic players to scale rapidly. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, have evolved into primary discovery and validation channels where beauty influencers wield considerable persuasive power. Simultaneously, Indian Gen Z consumers exhibit sophisticated brand literacy, navigating between affordability constraints and aspirational desires while increasingly prioritizing ethical considerations such as cruelty-free formulations and sustainable packaging.

Despite the commercial significance of this intersection between Gen Z consumers and masstige beauty brands in India, academic literature remains fragmented across disparate research streams. Existing studies tend to examine isolated aspects influencer marketing effectiveness, sustainability attitudes, or digital shopping behaviors without integrating these dimensions into comprehensive frameworks specific to the Indian masstige beauty context. Furthermore, much of the luxury and premium beauty research originates from Western markets, limiting its applicability to emerging economies where consumption motivations and constraints differ substantially.

This literature review addresses these gaps by systematically examining scholarly research on Gen Z consumer behavior and masstige beauty consumption in India. The review pursues three interconnected objectives:

- To examining the growth of masstige beauty brands among Indian Gen Z consumers
- To analyse the multifaceted factors influencing their brand preferences
- To identify emerging consumer trends shaping this dynamic market segment.

Through critical engagement with contemporary research, this review aims to advance theoretical understanding while providing actionable insights for industry practitioners navigating India's complex and rapidly evolving beauty landscape.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Media Influence and Digital Beauty Culture

The strong influence of social media platforms on Gen Z beauty buying behavior is a major theme in recent studies. Research shows that platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are not just communication tools, but also important spaces where beauty trends, product information, and purchase decisions are shaped. A bibliometric review by Bansal et al., (2025) identified five distinct research clusters related to influencer driven social media marketing for Gen Z, including parasocial interaction with influencer credibility, branding and consumer purchase intention relationships, sustainability-driven marketing, immersive marketing experiences, and psychological well-being considerations. This clustering reveals the multidimensional nature of social media's impact, extending beyond simple promotional effects to encompass complex psychological and social dynamics.

Empirical evidence substantiates the strong positive association between social media influencer engagement and purchase intentions among Indian Gen Z consumers. The study by Singh (2023), conducted quantitative analysis using

Pearson Product Moment Correlation, identifying trust, perceived credibility, perceived image, and brand attitude as critical influencing elements that demonstrate strong positive associations with purchasing intention in the cosmetic and skincare industry. These findings align with experimental research by Nathasia et al., (2025), which revealed that brand reputation significantly increases purchase intention, with high influencer credibility strengthening this positive impact while low credibility exerts no significant effect. Notably, trust fully mediates the relationship between brand reputation and purchase intention, suggesting that trust grounded in direct brand experiences and overall reputation operates somewhat independently of external endorsements.

The platform-specific dynamics of beauty content consumption warrant particular attention. Research examining skincare product marketing found that Instagram and YouTube dominate as preferred platforms, with visual content such as videos and images playing crucial roles in influencing purchase. When influencers share products, Gen Z perceives these endorsements as more than mere advertisements, prioritizing authenticity and relatability over traditional promotional messaging. This preference for authentic communication reflects broader generational values, as Gen Z consumers demonstrate sophisticated media literacy and heightened skepticism toward overtly commercial content Fathima and Malagi (2025).

The Indonesian context provides instructive parallels to India's digital beauty culture. Generation Z influencer marketing techniques for Somethinc products on Instagram, finding that visual marketing with engaging, informative, and often humorous content successfully attracted consumer attention and significantly increased sales Putriana and Kholi (2024). Similarly, research on Avoskin skincare in Bogor revealed that influencer marketing and product quality significantly affected purchasing decisions, while general social media marketing showed no significant impact Permai and Martawijaya (2025). This distinction suggests that the credibility and authenticity associated with specific influencers matters more than broad social media presence, a finding with important implications for brand strategy.

Micro influencers have emerged as particularly effective agents in shaping beauty brand perceptions among Gen Z. Basariet al., (2025) demonstrated that micro-influencers significantly influence authentic and engaging storytelling, which subsequently increases green brand perception among Gen Z consumers in the eco-friendly cosmetics industry. The effectiveness of micro-influencers may stem from their perceived relatability and authenticity compared to celebrity endorsers, aligning with Gen Z's preference for peer validated information over top-down marketing communications.

Self Identity Construction and Symbolic Consumption

Beauty consumption among Gen Z extends beyond functional product benefits to encompass identity construction and symbolic meaning-making. Singh A (2023) examination of young Indian women's attitudes toward luxury apparel and accessories revealed that self-identity and prestige in social networks positively relate to purchase intention, with high consumer involvement directly influencing self-concept. Conversely, low prestige in social networks inversely leads consumers to make high-value luxury purchases, suggesting compensatory consumption mechanisms. Interestingly, hedonic, materialistic, utility, and functional values did not significantly influence purchase intention, indicating that social and identity-related dimensions predominate over utilitarian considerations for this demographic.

The Chinese context offers valuable comparative insights into Gen Z's identity-driven beauty consumption. Liu et al., (2025) explored Generation Z's engagement with niche fragrances, finding that personalization, uniqueness, community identity, brand story, and cultural value drive engagement, with psychological ownership fostering emotional attachment. The research extends psychological ownership theory by introducing symbolic ownership and cultural

territoriality concepts, highlighting how Gen Z's evolving luxury notions emphasizing authenticity, sustainability, and quiet cultural expression reshape luxury branding dynamics. While focused on fragrances rather than cosmetics and situated in China rather than India, these findings illuminate universal Gen Z tendencies toward individualized consumption that expresses personal identity rather than conforming to mass preferences.

The relationship between beauty products and self-identity construction appears particularly salient for Gen Z consumers navigating complex social landscapes. Singh et al.,(2025) highlighted that eco-friendly cues and self-identity significantly shape Gen Z beauty choices, touching on aspirational motives within the Indian masstige context. This connection between environmental awareness and identity shows that sustainability has become an important part of how young consumers express their values through their buying choices.

Maybelline's strategy exemplifies how masstige brands successfully balance affordability and innovation to resonate with younger consumers' identity needs. This balance aligns with consumers' self-identity and brand perception, demonstrating high relevance to Gen Z consumer behavior toward masstige beauty brands in India Pandita et al., (2025). The ability to offer aspirational brand associations at accessible price points enables masstige brands to serve as identity resources for consumers who seek premium experiences but face budget constraints.

Affordability Dynamics and Value Consciousness

Price sensitivity and value consciousness represent critical yet nuanced factors in Gen Z beauty consumption. Contrary to simplistic assumptions that Gen Z prioritizes low prices above all else, research reveals sophisticated value calculations that balance affordability with quality perceptions, brand associations, and ethical considerations. According to the study by Suthar et al., (2024) Gen Z skincare preferences in Ahmedabad City found that affordability ranks among the top priorities alongside sustainability and authenticity, with preferences significantly influenced by community reviews and beauty influencers. This finding suggests that affordability operates not as an isolated criterion but within a constellation of values that collectively shape purchase decisions.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour framework provides theoretical grounding for understanding Gen Z's ethical consumption patterns despite financial constraints. Djafarova and Foots (2022) found that Generation Z demonstrates strong awareness of ethical and environmental issues, driven primarily by unlimited exposure to social media platforms and online resources. However, the cohort's frugality limits their ability to purchase truly ethical products at their current life stage, with financial aspirations suggesting future desires to purchase high-value ethical items. This temporal dimension current constraints coupled with future aspirations characterizes Gen Z's relationship with premium and masstige beauty products, positioning these brands as aspirational yet potentially attainable.

The masstige positioning itself represents a strategic response to Gen Z's value consciousness. Lyroni and Spais (2024) explained consumer brand happiness of premium fashion brands, exploring Gen Z shoppers' attitudes and willingness to pay premium prices. Based on the masstige brand happiness model, the research highlights aspirational premium purchases, price sensitivity, and digital shopping behaviors, revealing the delicate balance brands must strike between premium positioning and accessible pricing. Paul J et al., (2025) examination of masstige consumption in India found that consumption fosters advocacy through social media, suggesting experience-driven strategies for Gen Z and Millennials. This advocacy dimension indicates that when masstige brands successfully deliver value, Gen Z consumers become active brand ambassadors, amplifying marketing efforts through organic social sharing.

Influencer Marketing Effectiveness and Credibility Dynamics

Influencer marketing has evolved from a peripheral tactic to a central pillar of beauty brand strategy targeting Gen Z consumers. However, effectiveness depends critically on influencer credibility, authenticity, and alignment with audience values. Rizomyliotis et al., (2024) examined social media influencers' credibility and purchase intention, finding that credibility positively affects brand consideration and purchase intention among GenZ consumers, with green consumption values moderating these relationships. This moderation effect suggests that influencer effectiveness varies based on audience characteristics, with environmentally conscious consumers particularly responsive to credible influencers who authentically embody sustainable values.

Authenticity emerges as the critical currency in influencer-consumer relationships. Fathima and Malagi(2025) found that Gen Z prioritizes authenticity and relatability, making influencers who portray themselves as trustworthy and transparent particularly powerful. Influencers who establish authentic relationships with their audiences by creating content that resonates with their values prove more successful in facilitating consumer action. Consequently, brands must focus on authenticity in marketing efforts and partner with influencers aligned with Gen Z's interests and values rather than pursuing transactional endorsement arrangements.

The systematic review by Singh and Dagur (2022) on influencer marketing effects in masstige fashion provides relevant insights despite its fashion focus. The review notes that masstige appeal is pronounced among Gen Z, whose choices prioritize authenticity, personal identity, and inclusion. These priorities extend beyond fashion to beauty products, suggesting that influencer marketing effectiveness in masstige beauty similarly depends on authentic representation of diverse identities and inclusive brand values. The cross-category applicability of these findings underscores fundamental Gen Z preferences that transcend specific product domains.

Platform-specific influencer dynamics also merit consideration. Research on TikTok's role in beauty marketing reveals the platform's unique characteristics in shaping Gen Z purchase intentions. The short-form video format, algorithm-driven content discovery, and emphasis on authentic, unpolished content create distinct influencer dynamics compared to Instagram's more curated aesthetic or YouTube's longer-form educational content. Brands must therefore adapt influencer strategies to platform-specific norms and audience expectations rather than applying uniform approaches across channels.

Sustainability Consciousness and Ethical Consumption

Environmental and ethical considerations increasingly influence Gen Z beauty consumption decisions, though the relationship between attitudes and behaviors remains complex. Sonkar (2025) applied Value-Belief-Norm theory to examine Generation Y and Z preferences toward green cosmetics in the Indian market, finding high relevance of sustainability considerations in consumption for these demographics. This theoretical grounding suggests that sustainability operates not merely as a product attribute but as a value-laden belief system that shapes normative expectations and behavioral intentions.

The gap between sustainability attitudes and actual purchase behavior represents a persistent challenge documented across multiple studies. Djafarova and Fouts (2022) found that while Gen Z shows strong awareness of ethical and environmental issues, their frugality limits actual ethical purchases at their current life stage. This attitude-behavior gap reflects the premium pricing often associated with sustainable beauty products, creating tension between Gen Z's

values and budget constraints. Masstige brands that successfully integrate sustainability at accessible price points may therefore capture significant market share by resolving this tension.

Micro-influencers play a particularly important role in building green brand perceptions. Basari et al., (2025) demonstrated that micro-influencers significantly influence authentic storytelling, which increases green brand perception among Gen Z in the eco-friendly cosmetics industry. The effectiveness of micro-influencers in sustainability communication may stem from their perceived authenticity and genuine commitment to environmental values, contrasting with celebrity endorsements that may appear opportunistic or commercially motivated.

Green consumption values moderate the effectiveness of influencer marketing, as Rizomyliotis et al., (2024) demonstrated in their research on cosmetic products. This moderation effect suggests that sustainability-conscious consumers respond more strongly to influencer endorsements, particularly when influencers authentically embody environmental values. Brands must therefore ensure alignment between influencer partnerships and sustainability positioning to maximize effectiveness among environmentally conscious Gen Z segments.

Nykaa's strategy exemplifies how leading beauty retailers integrate sustainability into their Gen Z engagement approach. Mishra et al., (2025) highlighted that Nykaa's customer-centric approach includes a focus on sustainability that aligns with Gen Z's values and preferences. This strategic integration demonstrates that sustainability has evolved from a niche concern to a mainstream expectation among young Indian consumers, requiring systematic incorporation into brand positioning, product development, and marketing communications.

Aspirational Consumption and Luxury Democratization

Masstige brands occupy a unique position in the aspirational consumption landscape, offering accessible entry points to premium beauty experiences. The concept of luxury democratization making prestige-associated products available to broader consumer segments fundamentally characterizes the masstige value proposition. Kumari et al., (2026) structured literature review of masstige marketing using the S-O-R model provides conceptual grounding for understanding how masstige brands stimulate aspirational desires while remaining accessible. The review explores sustainability, cultural heritage, and digital trends including AI, the metaverse, and social media in branding, suggesting future research directions particularly relevant to Generation Z in India.

Aspirational motives intersect with identity construction in complex ways. Singh (2023) research on luxury apparel and accessories found that self-identity and prestige in social networks positively relate to purchase intention, with high involvement directly influencing self-concept. Conversely, low prestige in social networks inversely leads to high-value luxury purchases, suggesting compensatory consumption mechanisms. These dynamics likely extend to masstige beauty products, where consumers may use accessible premium brands to construct desired identities and signal aspirational status within peer networks.

The shift from established luxury labels to emerging brands reflects changing aspirational patterns among younger consumers. The study by Aggarwal (2025) examined factors driving this transition, finding that Millennials and Gen Z prioritize ethics, transparency, and self-expression over traditional brand prestige and status. Sustainability concerns, digital media influence, and desires for identity expression and uniqueness drive experimentation with emerging brands that suit consumers' budgets, values, and lifestyles. This shift creates opportunities for masstige beauty brands that authentically embody these values while maintaining accessible pricing.

“Fear Of Missing Out” (FOMO) represents a powerful psychological driver in aspirational consumption. Arora et al., (2026) explored FOMO-driven online shopping for masstige apparel products, focusing on aspirational consumption patterns and including cross-generational comparisons relevant to Gen Z. The research touches on social media marketing and sustainability cues, investigating Indian shoppers’ behavior regarding masstige brands. While focused on apparel, these findings suggest that FOMO similarly influences beauty consumption, particularly given social media’s role in creating urgency around trending products and limited-edition releases.

Digital Shopping Behavior and Omnichannel Engagement

The digital transformation of beauty retail has fundamentally altered how Gen Z consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products. Online shopping preferences among Gen Z reflect not merely convenience but alignment with digital nativity and expectations for seamless, personalized experiences. Research by Loreno Ovung (2024) on social media’s impact on skincare purchasing found that most respondents prefer online shopping, highlighting e-commerce’s importance in the skincare market. This preference extends beyond transactional convenience to encompass the entire customer journey, from discovery through social media to post-purchase review sharing.

Omnichannel strategies that integrate online and offline touch points prove particularly effective for Gen Z engagement. The study by Mishra and Darshi (2025) highlighted Nykaa’s omnichannel strategy as a key success factor, integrating seamless online and offline shopping to offer accessibility and convenience. The hybrid inventory model ensures wide product selection while leveraging data analytics for personalized experiences. This integration addresses Gen Z’s expectations for flexibility, allowing them to research online, test products in physical stores, and purchase through their preferred channels without friction.

Platform-specific shopping behaviors require tailored approaches. Kowsalya S (2025). Examination of Gen Z’s influence on fashion market trends found that the cohort gravitates toward technology-driven retail solutions such as AI recommendations and AR try-ons. While focused on fashion, these preferences likely extend to beauty products, where virtual try-on technologies and personalized product recommendations enhance online shopping experiences. Brands that invest in these technologies may gain competitive advantages by reducing purchase uncertainty and increasing engagement.

The role of reviews and user-generated content in digital shopping decisions cannot be overstated. Research on skincare purchasing by Loreno Ovung (2024) found that authentic customer reviews are highly valued, with most consumers regularly consulting them before buying. Despite moderate trust in social media reviews overall, they remain influential in purchase decisions, suggesting that Gen Z consumers engage in sophisticated information triangulation, weighing multiple sources rather than relying on single endorsements. Brands must therefore cultivate authentic review ecosystems while addressing concerns about misleading promotions through transparent marketing practices.

Mobile commerce represents an increasingly dominant channel for Gen Z beauty purchases. The cohort’s smartphone-centric lifestyle translates into mobile-first shopping behaviors, with social commerce features enabling seamless transitions from content consumption to purchase. Platforms like Instagram Shopping and TikTok Shop reduce friction in the purchase journey, allowing consumers to buy products directly within social media environments. This integration of content, community, and commerce creates new opportunities for masstige beauty brands to reach Gen Z consumers at moments of peak interest and engagement.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION

The Authenticity Imperative in Masstige Beauty Marketing

A major trend in the literature shows that authenticity is highly important in Gen Z beauty consumption. Indian Gen Z consumers prefer brands that are transparent, trustworthy, and aligned with genuine values rather than purely promotional marketing. They expect effective products, honest communication, clear sustainability practices, and authentic influencer partnerships. Studies also show that credible influencers and micro-influencers often have a stronger impact on purchase intention because consumers view them as more relatable and trustworthy than celebrity endorsers Nathasia et al., (2025), Banasari et al., (2025). In addition, sustainability and ethical practices have become important indicators of brand authenticity, encouraging masstige beauty brands to integrate responsible practices into their products, packaging, and operations.

Value Consciousness Beyond Price

While affordability clearly matters to Gen Z consumers, the literature reveals that value consciousness extends far beyond simple price sensitivity. Gen Z consumers engage in sophisticated value calculations that weigh price against quality perceptions, brand associations, ethical considerations, and identity alignment. Masstige brands occupy a strategic sweet spot by offering premium experiences and associations at accessible price points, resolving the tension between aspirational desires and budget constraints. The masstige value proposition succeeds precisely because it addresses multiple value dimensions simultaneously. At the functional level, masstige products offer quality formulations that deliver tangible results, justifying their premium positioning relative to mass-market alternatives. At the symbolic level, they provide aspirational brand associations and identity resources that enable self-expression and social signaling. At the ethical level, many masstige brands integrate sustainability and cruelty-free practices that align with Gen Z values. This multi-dimensional value creation distinguishes masstige brands from both mass-market products that compete primarily on price and luxury brands that may be financially inaccessible.

The Indian context adds particular complexity to value consciousness. Regional variations in purchasing power mean that masstige brands may serve different functions across India's diverse geography. In metropolitan areas with higher disposable incomes, masstige brands may represent everyday indulgences or entry points to premium beauty routines. In tier-two and tier-three cities, the same brands may function as aspirational purchases reserved for special occasions. Understanding these geographic nuances enables more effective market segmentation and positioning strategies. The temporal dimension of value consciousness also merits attention. Research indicates that Gen Z's current frugality coexists with future aspirations to purchase high-value ethical items. This suggests that masstige brands can cultivate long-term loyalty by serving as accessible entry points during consumers' early career stages, with the potential to trade up to luxury offerings as purchasing power increases. Brands that successfully build relationships during the masstige phase may retain customers as they progress through life stages and income brackets.

Digital Nativity and the Transformation of Beauty Discovery

Gen Z's digital nativity fundamentally transforms how beauty products are discovered, evaluated, and purchased. Unlike previous generations who adopted digital technologies as adults, Gen Z has never known a world without smartphones, social media, and instant information access. This digital immersion shapes not only channel preferences but cognitive patterns, information processing, and decision-making heuristics that beauty brands must understand and accommodate.

Social media platforms function as primary beauty discovery channels for Gen Z, displacing traditional advertising and even search engines in many cases. Instagram's visual focus makes it ideal for showcasing product aesthetics and application techniques, while YouTube's longer-form content enables detailed tutorials and reviews. TikTok's algorithm-driven discovery and authentic, unpolished content style resonate particularly strongly with Gen Z's preferences for genuine peer recommendations over curated brand messaging. Masstige beauty brands must therefore develop platform-specific content strategies that align with each channel's unique characteristics and audience expectations.

The shift from passive content consumption to active participation characterizes Gen Z's digital engagement. Rather than merely viewing brand content, Gen Z consumers create their own reviews, tutorials, and product discussions, contributing to collective beauty knowledge production. User-generated content often carries more weight than brand messaging, as peers are perceived as more trustworthy and relatable sources. Brands that successfully cultivate engaged communities where consumers actively participate in content creation and knowledge sharing gain significant competitive advantages. The integration of commerce directly into social media platforms through features like Instagram Shopping and TikTok Shop reduces friction in the purchase journey, enabling seamless transitions from discovery to transaction. This social commerce evolution aligns perfectly with Gen Z's preference for mobile-first, integrated experiences that minimize the steps between inspiration and purchase. Masstige brands that optimize for social commerce can capitalize on moments of peak interest and engagement, converting inspiration into immediate action.

Identity Construction through Masstige Beauty Consumption

Beauty consumption among Gen Z extends far beyond functional product benefits to encompass identity construction, self-expression, and social signaling. Masstige brands serve as particularly effective identity resources because they offer aspirational associations and premium experiences at accessible price points, enabling consumers to construct desired identities without the financial barriers associated with luxury brands. The relationship between beauty consumption and self-identity operates through multiple mechanisms. At the individual level, beauty products enable personal expression and experimentation with different aesthetic identities. The accessibility of masstige brands facilitates this experimentation by reducing the financial risk of trying new products or styles. At the social level, beauty consumption signals group membership, values, and aspirational status within peer networks. Masstige brands that successfully cultivate distinctive brand identities enable consumers to communicate specific messages about themselves through their consumption choices.

The intersection of identity construction and sustainability consciousness reveals important generational shifts. For Gen Z consumers, environmental and ethical commitments increasingly function as identity markers, distinguishing them from less conscious consumers and signaling alignment with progressive values. Masstige beauty brands that authentically integrate sustainability into their positioning enable consumers to construct identities as environmentally responsible individuals without the premium pricing often associated with sustainable luxury brands. Cultural dimensions of identity construction warrant particular attention in the Indian context. Gen Z consumers navigate between traditional Indian beauty ideals and globalized standards, creating hybrid identities that blend local and international influences. Masstige brands that successfully balance global prestige associations with local cultural relevance may resonate particularly strongly with Indian Gen Z consumers seeking to express cosmopolitan identities while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The Sustainability Challenges: Values, Constraints, and Compromises

A persistent tension emerges in the literature between Gen Z's strong sustainability values and their actual purchase behaviors. While research consistently documents high environmental awareness and ethical consciousness among Gen Z consumers, the translation of these attitudes into consistent sustainable purchasing remains constrained by affordability limitations, availability challenges, and competing priorities. This sustainability paradox creates both challenges and opportunities for masstige beauty brands. The attitude-behavior gap in sustainable consumption reflects multiple factors. Financial constraints represent the most obvious barrier, as sustainable beauty products often carry premium pricing that exceeds Gen Z's current budgets. However, the gap also reflects information asymmetries, with consumers uncertain about which brands genuinely embody sustainable practices versus those engaging in green washing. Additionally, competing priorities such as product efficacy, aesthetic preferences, and social validation may override sustainability considerations in specific purchase decisions.

Masstige brands are uniquely positioned to address this sustainability paradox by integrating environmental and ethical practices at accessible price points. By achieving economies of scale that luxury brands may not pursue and maintaining higher standards than mass-market competitors, masstige brands can offer genuine sustainability at prices Gen Z consumers can afford. This positioning resolves the tension between values and constraints, enabling consumers to align purchases with beliefs without financial sacrifice. The role of influencers in communicating sustainability credentials proves particularly important. Micro-influencers who authentically embody environmental values can effectively build green brand perceptions among Gen Z audiences. However, this communication must be substantive rather than superficial, as Gen Z consumers demonstrate sophisticated ability to detect green washing and performative sustainability claims. Brands must therefore ensure that sustainability messaging reflects genuine operational commitments rather than merely marketing positioning.

Omnichannel Expectations and Seamless Experience Design

Gen Z's digital nativity coexists with continued appreciation for physical retail experiences, creating expectations for seamless omnichannel integration rather than purely online or offline engagement. The most successful beauty retailers, exemplified by Nykaa's strategy in India, integrate online and offline touch points to offer flexibility, convenience, and personalized experiences that accommodate diverse consumer preferences and shopping contexts.

The omnichannel imperative reflects Gen Z's pragmatic approach to channel selection based on specific needs and contexts. Online channels excel for research, price comparison, and convenient repurchase of familiar products. Physical stores enable sensory evaluation, immediate gratification, and social shopping experiences. Gen Z consumers expect to move fluidly between channels without friction, researching products online before testing in stores, or discovering products in physical retail before purchasing online at better prices. Brands that create artificial barriers between channels or fail to maintain consistent experiences across touch points risk losing Gen Z customers to more integrated competitors.

Technology integration enhances both online and offline experiences in ways that resonate with Gen Z preferences. Virtual try-on tools reduce purchase uncertainty for online shopping, while AI-powered product recommendations personalize the discovery process. In physical stores, mobile apps can provide additional product information, reviews, and personalized offers that enhance the in-store experience. Augmented reality features enable experimentation with different looks without physical application. These technologies align with Gen Z's expectations for

innovative, engaging retail experiences that leverage digital capabilities. Data-driven personalization represents a critical component of effective omnichannel strategies. Gen Z consumers expect brands to remember their preferences, purchase history, and browsing behavior across channels, delivering relevant recommendations and communications rather than generic messaging. However, this personalization must be balanced with privacy concerns, as Gen Z demonstrates heightened awareness of data collection practices and expectations for transparent, ethical data use. Brands that successfully navigate this balance delivering personalized value while respecting privacy can build trust and loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

RESEARCH GAPS

Despite growing scholarly attention to Gen Z consumer behavior and masstige brand strategies, significant research gaps persist that limit comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon in the Indian context.

- Existing literature lacks integrated frameworks that combine factors such as influencer credibility, sustainability, price sensitivity, and digital engagement to explain Gen Z masstige beauty consumption in India.
- Research on the Indian masstige beauty market is still limited, especially regarding the unique influence of regional diversity, cultural values, and digital growth on consumer behaviour.
- Aspirational consumption in emerging markets like India remains underexplored, particularly how Gen Z consumers use masstige beauty products to balance affordability with luxury aspirations.
- Most studies are cross-sectional, with limited longitudinal research examining how Gen Z beauty preferences and purchasing patterns change over time.
- Current research often treats Gen Z as a homogeneous group, overlooking differences based on region, income, education, and urbanrural background within India.
- The process through which social media influence converts into actual purchase behaviour requires deeper investigation, especially in the context of influencer marketing and digital engagement.
- Limited research examines the long-term sustainability and future adaptability of masstige beauty business models in India's rapidly evolving market environment.

OBJECTIVES

Based on the identified research gaps and the synthesis of existing literature, this review establishes three interconnected objectives that guide the analysis and frame future research directions:

Objective 1: To examine the growth of masstige beauty brands among Indian Gen Z consumers.

This objective aims to examine the growth of masstige beauty brands in India and their increasing popularity among Gen Z consumers. It focuses on factors such as digital expansion, rising purchasing power, social media influence, and the growth of e-commerce platforms that have supported the masstige beauty segment. The objective also explores how masstige brands position themselves between mass-market and luxury brands to attract young consumers and build brand loyalty.

Objective 2: To analyze the factors influencing Gen Z preference toward masstige cosmetic brands.

This objective focuses on identifying and examining the multifaceted factors that shape Gen Z consumers' preferences for masstige beauty brands over alternative options. It encompasses psychological factors such as identity construction and aspirational motives, social factors including peer influence and social media engagement, economic factors related to value consciousness and affordability, and ethical factors concerning sustainability and corporate responsibility. The objective also involves understanding how these factors interact and their relative importance in purchase decisions. By comprehensively analyzing preference drivers, this objective enables more effective targeting and positioning strategies.

Objective 3: To identify emerging consumer trends shaping the Indian masstige beauty market.

This objective focuses on identifying emerging trends shaping Gen Z consumer behaviour in the Indian masstige beauty market. It examines developments such as AI-based personalization, virtual try-on technologies, sustainability expectations, changing influencer marketing strategies, evolving shopping channels, and new beauty preferences. Understanding these trends can help brands adapt to changing consumer needs and develop effective future strategies.

Proposed three objectives provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Gen Z consumers and masstige beauty brands in India. It also helps to examine current market trends, consumer preferences, and future opportunities while offering both academic insights and practical implications for the beauty industry.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This literature review contributes several important theoretical insights to consumer behavior scholarship.

- This review enhances understanding of Gen Z consumer behaviour by highlighting key traits such as authenticity, digital awareness, sustainability concerns, and value-based decision making. These characteristics represent major changes in consumer behaviour and are relevant beyond the beauty industry.
- The study also advances luxury consumption theory through the concept of “masstige” brands, which combine affordability with premium experiences. This challenges the traditional luxury versus mass-market divide, especially in emerging markets like India.
- The findings on social media influence show that credible and micro-influencers are more effective in shaping purchase decisions, while trust plays an important role in linking brand reputation and buying intention.
- The review also explains the sustainability challenges, where consumers support sustainability in principle but do not always purchase sustainable products. Masstige brands may help bridge this gap by offering affordable sustainable options.
- Finally, the study extends identity and symbolic consumption theories by showing how Gen Z consumers use beauty brands to express personal and social identity in a digitally connected and culturally hybrid environment.

Managerial Implications

The review yields numerous actionable implications for beauty brand managers, retailers, and marketing practitioners targeting Indian Gen Z consumers.

- Brands targeting Gen Z should focus on authenticity in both actions and communication, as consumers can easily identify insincere marketing. Brand values, influencer partnerships, and product claims must genuinely reflect real practices and effectiveness.
- Influencer marketing should prioritize credibility over follower count. Micro-influencers with strong audience trust and genuine brand alignment are often more effective than large influencers.
- Sustainability is now essential for Gen Z-focused brands. Companies should make real improvements in packaging, sourcing, and production, while avoiding green washing through transparent communication and credible certifications.
- Brands should also provide smooth omnichannel experiences, allowing consumers to move easily between online and offline shopping. Personalization should be balanced with respect for data privacy.
- Masstige brands need to communicate value beyond price by emphasizing quality, ethics, effectiveness, and identity alignment. Regional differences across India should also be considered, with strategies adapted for different cities and consumer groups.
- Brands should build strong consumer communities where users can share experiences and engage with the brand, helping increase trust, loyalty, and organic promotion.

CONCLUSION

This literature review examined the relationship between Gen Z consumer behaviour and masstige beauty brands in India. The findings show that Indian Gen Z consumers are strongly influenced by authenticity, digital engagement, sustainability concerns, value consciousness, and identity expression. Masstige beauty brands successfully attract these consumers by offering premium experiences at affordable prices. The review highlights several important insights. Authenticity is the most important factor influencing brand trust and purchase decisions. Gen Z consumers also evaluate products based not only on price, but also on quality, ethics, symbolism, and personal values. Social media platforms play a major role in shaping beauty trends, consumer knowledge, and purchase validation. At the same time, the sustainability paradox where consumers value sustainability but face affordability constraints creates both challenges and opportunities for masstige brands. Beauty consumption also functions as a way for Gen Z consumers to express identity and aspirations.

The Indian market adds unique dimensions to these trends due to regional diversity, changing digital infrastructure, and the blend of traditional and global beauty ideals. However, significant research gaps remain, including limited studies on Indian masstige beauty markets, lack of integrated theoretical frameworks, and insufficient understanding of long-term consumer behaviour and social media influence mechanisms. Future research should focus on developing comprehensive frameworks, conducting longitudinal and comparative studies, and exploring the lived experiences of diverse Gen Z consumers. Overall, the growth of masstige beauty in India reflects broader social and cultural changes in how young consumers express values, aspirations, and identity. Understanding these evolving preferences will be essential for brands, marketers, and researchers in the future.

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