

The Moderating Role of Perceived Product Organicity on Masstige Product Consumption Intention: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

'Masstige' refers to mass prestige, where prestige brands leverage middle-class consumers' purchasing power through 'affordable luxury' positioning. To develop effective marketing strategies, marketers must understand the motivators driving the purchase intention of masstige brands (PIMB). This study aims to identify consumer characteristics influencing masstige purchase intention and examine product-related factors such as brand equity and perceived product organicity. Perceived product organicity includes attributes such as 'organic,' 'eco-friendly,' 'green,' 'biodegradable', and 'sustainable', which relate to consumer health and environmental consciousness. A survey of masstige consumers identified three consumer characteristics—Need for exclusivity, Hedonism and Extended self—as key predictors of PIMB. Product-related factors influenced consumer adoption of organic masstige products, with brand equity emerging as a significant antecedent of purchase behaviour. These findings align with the literature on consumer traits and sustainability features of masstige consumption. A conceptual model was developed to examine the motivators of the intention to purchase masstige products.

Keywords: *Sustainable Consumption, Affordable Luxury, Green Masstige Product, Perceived Product Organicity*

JEL Classification: M31

Introduction

The concept of 'Masstige' products—combining mass and prestige—has gained prominence in academic and managerial domains. Positioned between mass-market and luxury goods, masstige brands provide luxury value at an accessible price (Paul, 2019). This positioning is

particularly appealing to emerging markets such as India, where middle-class affluence and brand consciousness drive growth (Kumar et al., 2021).

There is also a parallel movement towards sustainable and organic consumption. Concerns about environmental issues, health, and ethics have led consumers to evaluate products based on perceived organicity—how natural, authentic, eco-friendly, and health-enhancing they are (Lee & Yun, 2015). While organicity is mainly linked to food, cosmetics, and apparel, its role in masstige consumption remains underexplored. This is important because masstige consumers seek both prestige and reassurance, which organicity can bridge.

Prior studies on masstige consumption have examined consumer characteristics such as need for uniqueness, hedonism, and extended self in shaping purchase intentions (Truong, McColl & Kitchen, 2009; Jain & Mishra, 2020). Consumers with strong sustainability orientations may perceive brands with higher organicity as more credible, strengthening the link between brand characteristics and purchase intention.

Despite the increasing focus on sustainability and organicity in consumer decisions, limited research exists on their moderating role in the masstige context. This study proposes a framework that integrates perceived product organicity (PPO) as a moderator between consumer characteristics and masstige product purchase intention.

This study contributes to theory and practice by extending the masstige consumption literature through sustainability perceptions in consumer behaviour models. This study provides insights for marketers to differentiate masstige brands through organic positioning, thereby meeting consumers' demand for eco-conscious prestige products.

Literature Review

The concept of masstige—mass prestige—bridges the gap between mass-market and luxury consumption. Unlike traditional luxury brands, masstige brands democratise prestige at affordable prices (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009). Consumers choose masstige brands for their functionality, self-expression, and status (Paul, 2019). In emerging markets such as India, rising incomes and brand awareness have driven masstige adoption (Jain & Mishra, 2020). This consumption balances rational price-value and emotional prestige.

1. Purchase Intention of Masstige Brands

Purchase intention has long been central to consumer behaviour research as a predictor of actual purchase behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). For masstige brands, which balance prestige with mass-market accessibility, purchase intention is influenced by psychological, social, and brand-related factors (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Unlike luxury brands that target exclusivity, masstige brands appeal to middle-class consumers by offering affordable prestige (Paul, 2019).

Consumer purchase intention toward masstige brands is driven by intrinsic motivators such as uniqueness, hedonism, and self-extension through products (Berger & Heath, 2007; Dittmar, 2005). Brand equity perceptions, including quality and brand image, shape favourable attitudes (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Keller, 2003). Studies show that consumers are less price-conscious with masstige brands that have strong equity and symbolic appeal (Shukla, 2012; Jain & Mishra, 2020).

Masstige purchase intentions are influenced by sociocultural factors. In emerging economies such as India, the middle class links masstige consumption to social mobility and aspirational

lifestyles (Sharda & Bhat, 2019). Research shows that cultural values such as collectivism and status consciousness moderate the relationship between consumer characteristics and purchase intentions (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Controversies remain regarding whether hedonic or utilitarian values drive masstige purchase intention. While some scholars argue that hedonic motivations dominate (Husic & Cicic, 2009), others suggest that functional quality and value remain important (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). These debates highlight the need for context-specific studies in emerging markets, where consumers balance affordability and aspirational consumption.

The literature suggests that the purchase intention for masstige brands is shaped by psychological needs, brand equity, and cultural dynamics. Gaps remain in understanding the interactions of these factors across products and demographics.

2. Antecedents of Purchase Intention in Masstige Context

Research has identified three key consumer characteristics driving masstige purchase intention. First, the Need for Exclusivity (NFE) leads consumers to seek masstige products to differentiate themselves while maintaining social prestige (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Second, Hedonism or emotional gratification from consumption shapes purchase behaviour (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Third, the extended self-concept, where brands serve as symbolic extensions of identity, with masstige products offering accessible self-expression (Belk, 1988). These characteristics highlight the interactions between aspirational consumption and affordability in masstige behaviour (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

3. Brand Equity (BE):

Brand equity has been conceptualised as the added value a brand name confers on a product, influencing consumer perceptions and purchase decisions (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993). In marketing, brand equity shapes consumer perceptions and behaviour (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). In the masstige context, where luxury positioning meets accessibility, brand equity legitimises product prestige while ensuring broad consumer acceptance (Paul, 2019; Shukla, 2012). Brand equity directly influences purchase intention and moderates the effects of other antecedents on consumer decision-making. Our Brand Equity construct includes two dimensions: perceived product quality and brand image.

Perceived product quality refers to a consumer's assessment of a product's overall excellence (Zeithaml, 1988). High quality reduces risks, enhances consumer trust, and creates positive brand associations (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). In masstige brands, quality signals that the brand is competent and worthy of its prestigious positioning (Heine & Phan, 2011). As a moderator, quality perceptions may enhance the influence of consumer characteristics on purchase intention by assuring that the product reflects their aspirations.

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand (Keller, 1993). A favourable brand image creates value, strengthens attachment, and enhances loyalty (Keller, 2016). In masstige consumption, brand image becomes influential in justifying consumer motivations such as hedonism and status expression (Shukla & Purani, 2012). As a moderator, it intensifies the relationship between these motivations and purchase intention, since consumers perceive the brand as fulfilling their functional, social, and identity needs.

4. Perceived Product Organicity (PPO)

Perceived Product Organicity refers to consumers' evaluation of a product's naturalness and authenticity (Lee & Yun, 2015). Studies on food, cosmetics, and apparel show that organicity

cues enhance trust, quality, and ethical alignment (Chen, 2010). Organicity links to consumer identity, as eco-consciousness serves as a marker of modern prestige (García-de-Frutos, Ortega-Egea, & Martínez-del-Río, 2018). Sustainable consumption drives brand choices in emerging markets (White et al., 2019). For masstige brands, organicity creates dual value: strengthening prestige while appealing to sustainability-conscious consumers, particularly important where younger consumers value social recognition and ethical consumption (Nagar & Sharma, 2021).

5. Moderating Role of Brand Equity (BE) in Masstige product consumption:

Research has traditionally focused on the direct effect of brand equity on outcomes such as loyalty, premium pricing, and purchase intention (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000; Keller, 2016). However, the literature increasingly recognises the moderating role of brand equity in strengthening the relationship between consumer antecedents and behavioural intentions. Strong brand equity enhances consumers' willingness to pay and purchase likelihood (Keller, 2013). In masstige contexts, brand equity moderates how consumers interpret product organicity and its symbolic benefits (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2019).

High brand equity reduces consumer uncertainty and strengthens the link between motivational drivers and purchase intention (Shukla, 2012; Jain & Mishra, 2020). When brand equity is high, consumers' intrinsic characteristics are more likely to translate into purchase behaviour, as the brand is seen as credible in fulfilling symbolic needs (Heine & Phan, 2011; Khan, 2016). In the context of low brand equity, motivational antecedents may fail to generate purchase intention due to a perceived lack of quality or image fit (Zeithaml, 1988; Shukla & Purani, 2012).

Recent studies have highlighted specific dimensions of brand equity that enhance its moderating influence. Perceived quality increases consumer confidence in functional performance, reinforcing antecedents such as price consciousness and extended self (Yoo et al., 2000). Brand image, through symbolic associations, amplifies antecedents such as hedonism and uniqueness (Keller, 2016). Thus, brand equity determines whether consumer motivations translate into purchase intentions, particularly in masstige consumption, where prestige and accessibility must be balanced (Paul, 2019).

6. Moderating Role of Perceived Product Organicity in Masstige product consumption

Despite the growing attention to organic consumption, its role in masstige contexts remains underexplored. Organicity can moderate the relationship between consumer characteristics and purchase intentions. For the Need for Exclusivity, organic attributes amplify differentiation, as consumers view eco-friendly products as rare and progressive. Consumers use green products to signal their status (Griskevicius et al., 2010). For Hedonism, organic products enhance pleasure by providing satisfaction beyond material prestige. For the Extended self, organicity enriches identity expression through eco-conscious masstige purchases. Thus, perceived organicity may directly influence attitudes and shape existing predictors of masstige purchase intention.

7. Research Gap and Theoretical Contribution

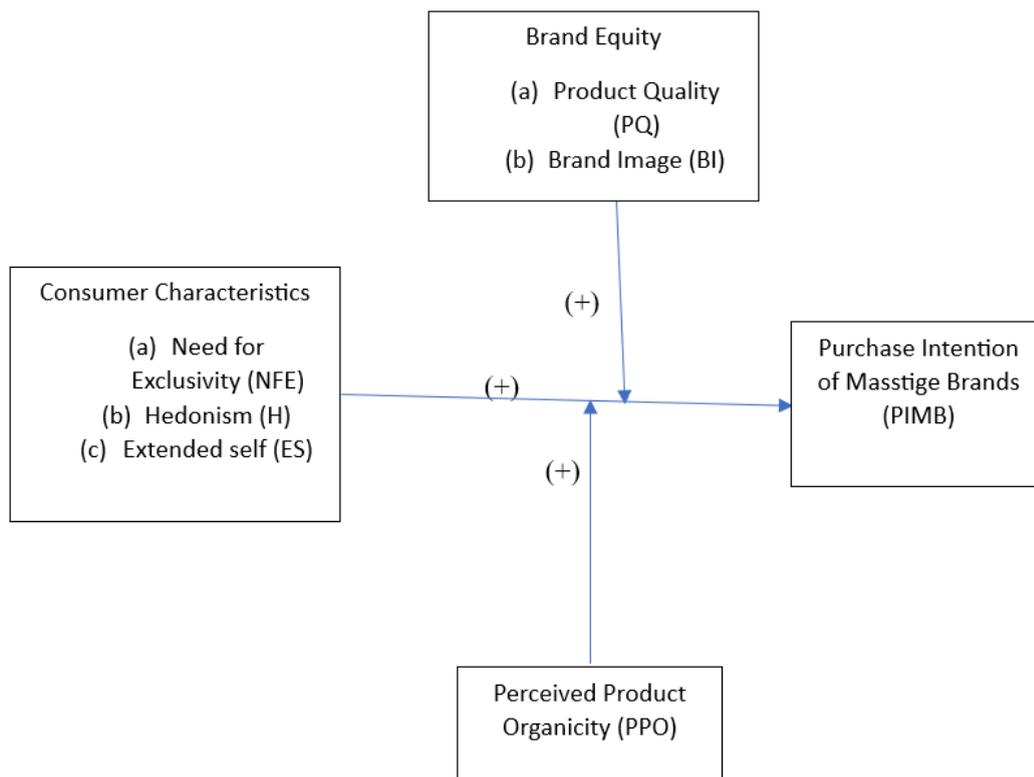
While substantial research exists on masstige consumption and sustainability separately, their intersection has received limited attention. However, no study has systematically examined how organicity moderates consumer motivation in masstige contexts. This study proposes a framework integrating perceived product organicity as a moderator, extending the masstige

consumption literature into sustainability research and offering insights for marketers to craft hybrid positioning strategies that balance prestige with eco-consciousness.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework builds on research on masstige consumption (Truong et al., 2009; Paul, 2019) and sustainability-oriented consumer behaviour (Lee & Yun, 2015; García-de-Frutos et al., 2018). This study posits that consumer characteristics such as Need for Exclusivity, Hedonism, and Extended Self influence the purchase intention of Masstige Brands. Brand Equity and Perceived Product Organicity (PPO) are introduced as moderators, suggesting that when consumers perceive masstige products with high brand equity as natural and eco-friendly, the relationship between consumer characteristics and purchase intention strengthens. This framework integrates theories of self-concept and symbolic consumption (Belk, 1988) and experiential consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) while extending them to the sustainability context, showing how sustainability cues can augment prestige-driven consumer motives. Figure 1 depicts the relationships mentioned in the conceptual framework.

Fig 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework among Consumer characteristics and Purchase Intention of Masstige Brands with moderating roles of Brand Equity and Perceived Product Organicity



(+) indicates hypothesized relationship

Source: Developed by author

Hypotheses Development

1. Need for Exclusivity and Purchase Intention

Consumers desire products that enhance individuality. Masstige products carry prestige associations that help fulfil this need (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Therefore:

H1: Need for Exclusivity (NFE) positively influences the purchase intention of masstige brands (PIMB).

2. Hedonism and Purchase Intention

Hedonic motivation refers to pleasure derived from consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Masstige products deliver symbolic value that appeals to hedonic desires.

H2: Hedonism positively influences the purchase intention of masstige brands.

3. Extended Self and Purchase Intention

According to Belk (1988), possessions symbolise self-identity. Masstige products signal prestige at accessible prices.

H3: Extended self positively influences purchase intention of masstige brands.

4. Moderating Role of Brand Equity

When product quality and brand image are favourable, consumers are more likely to purchase masstige products (Khan, 2016; Jain & Mishra, 2020). Weak brand equity may dilute these relationships as consumers hesitate to convert motivations into purchase intentions. Brand equity thus moderates masstige consumption.

H4: Brand Equity moderates the relationship between consumer antecedents (Need for Exclusivity, Hedonism and Extended self) and purchase intention of masstige brands, such that the relationships are stronger under conditions of high brand equity.

5. Moderating Role of Perceived Product Organicity

Perceived product organicity, defined as consumers' belief that a product is natural and environmentally responsible, influences consumption behaviour (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011). In masstige brands, organicity enhances product quality, credibility and brand image associations. Consumers who perceive masstige products as organic experience higher trust and stronger value alignment, reinforcing the link between brand equity and purchase intention (Nguyen et al., 2020). Thus, perceived product organicity moderates the relationship between consumer characteristics and masstige product purchase intention.

H5: Perceived product organicity positively moderates the relationship between Consumer characteristics (Need for Exclusivity, Hedonism and Extended self) and purchase intention of masstige brands, such that the relationship is stronger when perceived product organicity is high.

Research Methodology

Since this study is conceptual, the methodology integrates existing theories and findings to develop a framework linking consumer characteristics, masstige product consumption intention, and the moderating roles of Brand Equity and Perceived Product Organicity. A mixed-method approach was adopted to develop the conceptual model used in this study. An exploratory survey was conducted among 36 respondents who were either existing customers of masstige products or expressed an intention to purchase a masstige brand within the next year. The identified antecedents were the need for exclusivity, hedonism, and extended self. The existing literature was then extensively reviewed using keyword searches, reference searches, and exploration of databases such as Ebsco, ProQuest, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar, among others. A sample of the keywords used are 'Masstige', 'Green marketing', 'Purchase intention', 'Prestige, and Affordable luxury. The study includes prior research on

masstige consumption, sustainability, and brand equity published during the last three decades, considering the relevance of 'Luxury marketing' for masstige products. The framework synthesises literature on luxury marketing, green consumption, and masstige branding.

This conceptual framework enables future empirical validation using structural equation modelling (SEM). Data collection from Indian masstige consumers can use established scales (e.g. Need for Uniqueness: Tian et al., 2001; Hedonism: Babin et al., 1994; Perceived Organicity: García-de-Frutos et al., 2018). Moderation analysis was used to test how perceived product organicity and Brand Equity affect consumer characteristic–purchase intention relationships.

Theoretical Implications

This study enhances masstige consumption research by incorporating sustainability perceptions, specifically Perceived Product Organicity (PPO), into the framework. Prior studies focused on affordability, prestige, and symbolic consumption (Paul, 2019; Kumar et al., 2020), but this study shows how organicity perceptions influence purchase intentions in masstige. This research links intrinsic consumer traits (e.g. need for uniqueness, hedonism, extended self, and price consciousness) with sustainability-driven brand cues, bridging consumer behaviour theories (Belk, 1988; Tian et al., 2001) and green consumption literature (García-de-Frutos et al., 2018). It highlights the symbolic identity and ethical responsibility of masstige decisions. By viewing Perceived Product Organicity and Brand Equity as moderating variables, the framework extends the understanding of contextual factors in consumer–brand relationships, aligning with signalling and self-concept theories, suggesting that organicity cues affect the relevance of consumer characteristics in purchase intentions. This study enriches the debate on luxury and masstige brands' alignment with sustainability, offering a model showing how organicity perceptions may redefine masstige products' symbolic and experiential meanings in emerging markets such as India.

Managerial Implications

For masstige brands, highlighting organic attributes (eco-friendly materials and sustainable sourcing) can strengthen consumer trust and justify premium pricing. Marketers should communicate organicity in advertising to reinforce their brand credibility and attract ethical consumers. Consumer traits such as hedonism, uniqueness, and price consciousness interact with perceived organicity, enabling marketers to segment customers based on psychological traits. Eco-conscious hedonists may respond to campaigns that combine pleasure and ethics, while price-conscious consumers need to be framed in terms of long-term value. Organicity cues enhance brand equity via sustainability associations. Managers can use certifications and endorsements to strengthen authenticity perceptions, thereby reinforcing consumer loyalty to masstige brands. Traditionally, masstige has focused on affordable prestige. Managers should embed sustainability in brand narratives to increase relevance among millennials and Gen Z, who prioritise sustainability. Global brands in India and emerging economies position their products as prestigious and organic to overcome greenwashing scepticism, allowing luxury brands to localise while aligning with evolving consumer values.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Scope for Future Research

This study develops a framework to examine the antecedents of masstige product consumption intention and explores the moderating role of perceived product organicity. By integrating the literature on masstige branding, consumer characteristics, and sustainable consumption, this study shows how organicity perceptions strengthen consumer trust and

purchase intention. The framework positions organicity as a symbolic cue of authenticity and aspirational values. Managerially, this study shows that brands in emerging markets must align masstige positioning with sustainability values to appeal to consumers' aspirations while building brand equity.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the framework is conceptual and lacks empirical evidence. Second, it focuses on Indian masstige consumers, limiting the generalisability of the findings across cultures. Consumer characteristics are treated broadly; variables such as cultural values and environmental consciousness could provide richer insights. Third, the assumed positive role of perceived product organicity neglects potential negative effects like consumer scepticism about "greenwashing."

Several avenues for future research have emerged. Future research should test this model using quantitative methods with large-scale consumer surveys. In addition, studies can explore the moderating role of organicity across developed and emerging markets or between collectivist and individualist cultures. By adopting longitudinal designs, researchers can track how organicity influences brand loyalty in the masstige sector. Future studies could analyse how digital campaigns and online cues shape perceptions of organicity. Finally, variables such as environmental concerns and cultural orientation may provide a better understanding of the role of organicity.

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