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When mass meets prestige: The impact of symbolic motivations, inspirations, and purchase intentions for Masstige products

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ABSTRACT

Luxury brands are increasingly targeting the middle class through 'masstige marketing' as the trendy business opportunity,' which combines luxury and mass appeal. This strategy aims to make high-end brands more accessible to a wider audience, catering to the desires and preferences of the middle class. Grounded in the Mass Prestige (Masstige) theory, this study examines the direct and indirect impact of Symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) on Masstige Purchase Intention (MPI) via Inspiration Towards Masstige (ITM) as a mediator. Moreover, the contingent impact of Brand Credibility (BC) between ITM and MPI was assessed. Two independent studies were conducted among consumers of clothing and car brands. Results supported all the hypothesized paths reflecting symbolic motivations as important predictors of MPI directly and through the underlying mechanism of ITM. However, significant differences were observed in the impact size of the Veblen and bandwagon motivations on ITM and MPI among clothing and car brand consumers. Moreover, results revealed that BC significantly interacts with ITM to augment the MPI in both studies. However, this contingent impact was stronger to enhance MPI among the consumers of car brands than clothing brands. Furthermore, study implications and future research directions are presented in detail.

1. Introduction

The rapid economic expansion in the global market has created a sizeable middle class with substantial market potential (Kharas & Gertz, 2010), but many consumers and marketers have yet to embrace the new ways of thinking in seizing this business opportunity (Von Wallpach et al., 2020). The notion of 'new luxury' emerged from the unorthodox marketing of luxury products and services (Eckhardt et al., 2015). 'New luxury' refers to market expansion, affordability, and mass-market availability. This has led to an increased focus on the middle class, the emergence of mass prestige, and significant marketing potential. The "mass prestige," or "masstige," encompasses brands with both "mass" and "prestige" elements (Paul, 2015). Several firms have initiated unconventional methods of creating luxury goods and services that pledge delight, standing, and an exceptional experience for consumers. The notion of 'new luxury' (Eckhardt et al., 2015) appears to have altered the definition of 'luxury' to include market expansion, affordability, and availability in the mass market. With a focus on the middle class, the marketing of luxury brands to the mass market through masstige marketing has emerged as one of the new potential business opportunities (Baber et al., 2020; Ho, Wong, & Brodowsky, 2023; Kumar et al., 2021).

To date, there has been a rising interest among marketing scholars regarding exploring the concept of mass prestige or masstige (Baber et al., 2020; Boisvert, Christodoulides, & Khan, 2023; Kumar et al., 2021; Paul, 2015; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). In general, masstige brands are priced higher than mass-market products (Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021). According to Kumar (2021), this notion is linked to the downward extension of luxury brands to capture a larger masstige market. In simpler terms, these goods are easily accessible to the general public, and customers choose them to indulge in lavish experiences (Jiang et al.,

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2016). Certain academics define masstige as providing affordable or lightweight luxury that has expanded to luxury-lit (Greenberg et al., 2020; Wang & Qiao, 2020). Various organizations, such as Toyota Lexus, Starbucks Reserve Coffee, H&M Conscious Collection, and others, advertise and position their products as masstige. Often, masstige brands aim to target middle-class consumers seeking better quality products at a reasonable price (Baber et al., 2020; Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021; Ishaq et al., 2023). Consequently, the masstige marketing strategy can be perceived as a critical aspect for emerging nations with large numbers of mass consumers and a fundamental paradigm shift in brand management literature.

Upon reviewing the literature, it appears that conducting research on masstige marketing is important due to its unique position at the crossroads of mass-market appeal and prestige positioning (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Understanding the dynamics of masstige products is crucial for businesses aiming to capitalize on this delicate balance, as it involves catering to a broad consumer base while maintaining an air of exclusivity (Nawres et al., 2024). Motivation also helps consumers act and behave in a particular way to achieve desired outcomes. Evidently, some previous research has explored the masstige brands across different dimensions, such as Masstige Marketing (Paul, 2015), Mass Luxury (Shahid & Paul, 2021; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), Mass Prestige, and Prestigious Brands (Kumar & Paul, 2018; Kumar et al., 2021; Paul, 2019). However, previous studies have not fully explored the role of symbolic motivations in inspiring consumers towards masstige brands or creating masstige purchase intentions, which agrees that masstige has not yet emerged as a complete theory (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Hence, there is a need for researchers to develop, refine, and synthesize a robust theoretical base based on the notion of symbolic motivations.

The theories of motivation took a long way in unfolding human psychology and the cognitive role of human development that determines human behavior (Bembenutty et al., 2021; Clegg et al., 2021). Motivation is defined as the attributes that guide and control an individual's behavior (Sunardi et al., 2020). Several intrinsic factors influence consumers' demand and decision-making while purchasing a product to make them happy and satisfied (Donthu et al., 2020; Farmaki et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2022). Motivation serves as a powerful catalyst, shaping consumer actions and influencing their behavior to attain specific desired outcomes (Moutinho, 2012). It functions as a driving force, propelling individuals to make choices aligned with their goals and aspirations (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). By tapping into motivational factors, businesses can strategically tailor products and services to meet consumer needs, creating a symbiotic relationship that fosters satisfaction and loyalty. In essence, understanding and leveraging motivation becomes pivotal in crafting effective strategies for consumer engagement and product development (Bottger et al., 2017; Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021). Moreover, consumers desire prestige and social status (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). At the same time, scholars reported symbolic motivation as a key behind luxury consumption (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). In fact, scholars have highlighted the dire need to explore the factors contributing to consumer decision-making while purchasing prestigious products as a new luxury (Kumar et al., 2021; Shahid & Paul, 2021). Therefore, this study presents an original contribution to the existing literature by investigating the direct and indirect effects of symbolic motivations on consumers' masstige purchasing intentions through inspiration as a mediating factor.

In addition, this study examines the intricacies of motivation through the application of symbolic motivations, which encompass snob motivation, Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation. Simultaneously, inspiration toward a brand or product is considered a transition phase to determine various external factors' impact on consumers' intentions (Schmitt et al., 2021). Oleynick et al. (2014) provided an objective definition of inspiration as an internal state compelling individuals to bring their ideas to fruition. Also, inspiration is a feeling triggered by external stimuli, leading to intentions to behave specifically (Chen et al., 2020). The present research contributes to the existing literature by conceptualizing inspiration towards masstige as an attitude that acts as a mediator in fulfilling middle-class consumers' needs of uniqueness, driven by their symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) and resulting in consumers' intention to purchase masstige products.

Furthermore, brand credibility has gained considerable attention in determining consumers' intentions (Abu Zayyad et al., 2021; Reitsamer & Brunner, 2021). It encompasses all the promises a brand makes to its consumers (Erdem et al., 2006). In parallel, consumers evaluate the brand's worthiness based on its ability to fulfill these promises (Hsiu-Ying Kao et al., 2020). Research reveals that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced significantly by the credibility of a brand (Abu Zayyad et al., 2021; Gupta & Ramachandran, 2021). Nonetheless, no attempt has been made to explore how brand credibility affects consumers' inspiration towards masstige brands and their resulting buying intentions. Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature and provide valuable insights into masstige theory and practice by examining the moderating effect of brand credibility on consumers' intentions to purchase masstige brands based on their inspirations towards these brands.

Based on the abovementioned, the current study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. *First*, this study aims to investigate the impact of symbolic motivations, specifically snob motivation, Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation, on inspiration towards masstige and masstige purchase intentions. *Second*, the relationship between inspiration towards masstige and masstige purchase intentions will be examined. Third, the study will further evaluate the mediating effect of inspiration towards masstige between symbolic motivations (snob motivation, Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation) and masstige purchase intentions. *Last*, this study aims to investigate the moderating role of brand credibility in the relationship between inspiration towards masstige and masstige purchase intentions.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 then presents a review of the literature, theoretical background, and the development of the proposed model, followed by Section 3 on the research methodology, and Section 4 details the results and analysis. Finally, a comprehensive conclusion and discussion are provided at the end of Section 7, which also includes the implications and limitations details.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

The theoretical underpinning of the current research is rooted in the Masstige Theory, an influential framework postulated by Paul (2015, 2018). This theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics of brand management. It highlights the ability of brand managers to create prestigious brands and command a premium price by implementing superior products, promotions, and place strategies. The Masstige Theory (Paul, 2018; 2019) can be succinctly expressed through two fundamental equations:

Premium Price = f (Mass Prestige) and.

Mass Prestige (Masstige) = f (Product, Promotion, Place strategies).

These equations encapsulate the core idea that masstige brands can maintain their premium status without resorting to discounts or compromising on quality. Instead, they rely on offering products of the highest quality, employing effective promotional campaigns, and ensuring optimal placement in the market (Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021). By excelling in these areas, masstige brands strike a delicate balance between accessibility and exclusivity, captivating a wide range of price-conscious consumers (Mansoor & Paul, 2022). Unlike masstige brands, luxury brands have a distinct positioning in the market. They are synonymous with exclusivity, uniqueness, and an aura of unattainability (Husain et al., 2022). Luxury brands deliberately limit their availability, ensuring that only a select few consumers have access to their products, thereby preserving their sense of exclusivity (Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022; Mighani et al., 2021).

Consequently, luxury brands command higher prices, further

contributing to their image of opulence and scarcity. The realm of luxury brands has been extensively explored in previous research, with particular emphasis on understanding the psychological underpinnings and cognitive processes that drive consumers to purchase these exclusive offerings (Bembenutty et al., 2021). However, the current study diverges from this well-trodden path and instead directs its attention towards the role of symbolic motivations in inspiring consumers towards masstige brands. While luxury brands tap into consumers' desires for social status, conspicuous consumption, and self-expression (Kumar et al., 2022), masstige brands leverage symbolic motivations that align with consumers' aspirations for quality, affordability, and value. In today's consumer landscape, where individualism and self-expression are highly valued, consumers seek brands that not only offer functional benefits but also resonate with their personal values, aspirations, and desired self-image (Goering et al., 2022). Masstige brands cater to these psychological needs by embodying the symbolism of prestige, quality, and affordability (Das et al., 2021a). Consumers can enhance their self-concept by choosing masstige brands and projecting a desired image to others. These brands become vehicles for expressing one's identity, preferences, and lifestyle choices and serve as a means of social distinction (Kumar et al., 2021).

In its simplest form, motivation refers to the underlying traits that control and direct human actions (Sunardi et al., 2020). In the context of consumer behavior, motivations are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence purchase intentions (Farmaki et al., 2019). The current study aims to delve into the realm of symbolic motivations and their influence on consumer behavior, specifically within the masstige brand context. By understanding consumers' symbolic meanings and associations with masstige brands, researchers can gain valuable insights into the factors that drive purchase intentions and shape consumers' brand choices. Exploring these motivations will illuminate the interplay between consumer psychology, brand management, and the marketplace dynamics surrounding masstige brands. Additionally, the concept of cognitive congruence can explain the theoretical underpinning for the moderating role of brand credibility in the association between inspiration towards masstige and purchase intentions. According to this theory, when consumers perceive a brand as highly credible, they are likelier to trust and believe in its promises and offerings. As a result, the inspirational effect of masstige brands on consumers' purchase intentions is amplified when the brand's credibility is high, as it reinforces the perception of the brand as a reliable and desirable choice. The theoretical framework of the study is presented in Fig. 1.

2.1. Symbolic motivations masstige purchase intentions and inspiration towards masstige

Shukla and Rosendo-Rios (2021) explained that choosing a mass luxury brand primarily depends on symbolic motivation. Motivation helps a consumer get satisfaction through purchasing decisions (Moutinho, 2012). Similarly, consumers prefer masstige brands based on their symbolic features (Wang & Qiao, 2020). Hence, it can be stated that symbolic motivation significantly influences consumers' masstige purchase intentions. Veblen (1899), in his famous book "The Theory of the Leisure Class," argues that existing motivation theory lacks representation of all types of motivations, especially relating to the luxury purchase intentions that are further related to social class. Besides, Leibenstein (1950) supported Veblen's views by presenting three dimensions of motivation concerning luxury consumption: snob, Veblen, and bandwagon.

In snob, motivation consumers prefer to dissociate themselves from others by buying unique or exclusive products (Leibenstein, 1950). This happens when most consumers start buying the same products, and the demand and price increase. Besides, the higher price is also linked with the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the product (Golob et al., 2020; Keane et al., 2020). Whereas research shows that to attain uniqueness, the consumer prefers luxury goods (Shao et al., 2019). At the same time, masstige brands are considered prestigious with unique designs and features (Paul & Rosenbaum, 2020). Hence, it can be stated that consumers' preference for uniqueness motivates them to purchase masstige brands, and more specifically, the snob motivation encourages them to maintain their unique identity by preferring masstige brands.

Veblen motivation represents the consumers' willingness to purchase expensive, high-priced products to display their social class and wealth (Leibenstein, 1950). The Veblen effect reflects the phenomenon where the demand for the product is directly proportional to the product price and quality (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). Consumers are willing to pay a higher price if the brand depicts uniqueness (Anselmsson et al., 2014). Products with higher quality and unique features influence consumer purchase intentions (Wang & Qiao, 2020). Besides, consumers prefer luxury goods, relate them to their personalities, and purchase higher-priced products as a matter of prestige (Baber et al., 2020). At the same time, Veblen's motivation links price with prestige (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021).

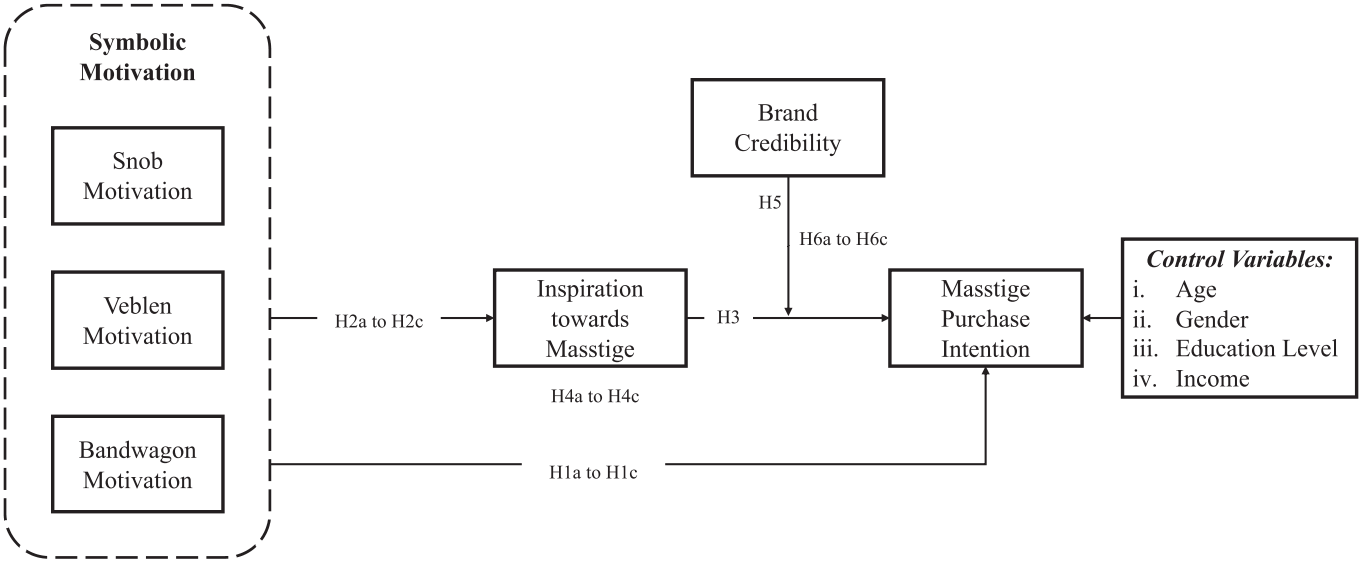


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework of the study.

Moreover, literature shows that the bandwagon motivation enhances the consumers' demand for a product already in demand (Mainolfi, 2020). The bandwagon effect predicts an interesting phenomenon: certain individuals will not purchase a product if other individuals do not buy the same product, regardless of its uniqueness or price (Mainolfi, 2020). Therefore, the behavior of the individuals in a society plays a vital role in determining the bandwagon motivation effect (Oyedele & Goenner, 2021). The bandwagon effect resembles the snob effect in the way that individuals want to maintain their individuality by acquiring products with unique features, but their motivational approach to purchasing these products varies (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). The bandwagon motivation effect is significant in determining consumer purchase intentions if the product is popular and more consumers purchase it at a certain price (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). Past studies have highlighted the positive relationship between various motivations and consumer purchase intentions (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2019; Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Shao et al., 2019). In addition to the existing literature, the current study focuses on the role of symbolic motivations in determining consumers' purchase intentions for masstige brands. Hence, based on the masstige theory and literature support, it is postulated that;

H1: *There is a positive association of a) snob motivation, b) Veblen motivation, and c) bandwagon motivation with masstige purchase intentions.*

The word inspire originated from the Latin word "inspirare," which means the motivation that encourages an individual to transform his idea into reality (Wartiovaara et al., 2019). In the context of marketing, inspiration is a recent phenomenon and is conceptualized as "a customer's temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal" (Bottger et al., 2017, p. 6). Besides, research shows that inspiration is always the driving force for innovation and creativity (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2021) and consists of two important attributes, "inspired by" and "inspired to," which reflect the activation and intention process, respectively (Bottger et al., 2017). These attributes are triggered by external stimuli in marketing communication that transform consumer purchase intentions (Ahmed et al., 2020). Moreover, customers often perceive ideas through marketing offerings that help them broaden their horizons toward a particular product (Wartiovaara et al., 2019). It is also considered both a state and a trait (Bottger et al., 2017). As a trait, inspiration reflects a behavioral activation mechanism triggered by intrinsic motivations leading to experiential processing, absorption, and intentions to behave in a certain manner (Oleynick et al., 2014; Trigeorgis et al., 2021). In contrast, being a state of inspiration has been described as transcendence, motivation, and evocation (Bottger et al., 2017). In other words, it depicts a process through which individuals become aware of better options and experience a sense of excitement, resulting in acting in a specific manner (Hinsch et al., 2020). Previously, various scholars have suggested various internal and external stimuli that evoke a state of inspiration among consumers (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2021; Hsiu-Ying Kao et al., 2020; Oyserman & Schwarz, 2020). At the same time, the researchers of the current study propose a direct positive relation between symbolic motivation and inspiration toward masstige. Hence, it hypothesized that;

H2: *There is a positive association of a) snob motivation, b) Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation with inspiration towards masstige.*

The concept of sharing economy varies from discipline to discipline, and experts define it from the point of view of business administration, economics, and law (Puschmann & Alt, 2016). The recent expansion of the sharing economy in developing countries has significant implications for exploring it further from consumer inspiration and intentions towards masstige brands. In marketing, literature inspiration is a phenomenon that leads consumers toward customer delight and satisfaction (Bottger et al., 2017). Besides, inspiration has been considered a determinant that significantly influences consumer purchase intention (Hinsch et al., 2020). Some researchers considered inspiration a predictor of consumers' purchase intentions (Bottger et al., 2017; Wartiovaara et al., 2019). At the same time, the current study is grounded in the masstige theory and examines the impact of the consumers' inspiration on masstige purchase intentions. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Inspiration towards masstige is positive with masstige purchase intentions.*

2.2. Inspiration towards masstige as a mediator

As mentioned earlier, symbolic motivation has three dimensions, namely, snob, Veblen, and bandwagon (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). These motivations are related to Masstige Theory, which is grounded in marketing mix strategies (Jhamb et al., 2020) and is critical in determining customers' purchase intentions (Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2021). Research also shows that consumers' symbolic motivation can be known as the psychological factor that can significantly influence consumers' behavior and purchase intentions (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). As inspiration is an activation state triggered by psychological factors and social elements (Böttger et al., 2017; Das, Saha, & Roy, 2021), symbolic motivations (i.e., snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) can act as important psychological factors are expected to trigger inspiration towards masstige purchase intentions. Therefore, the current study focused on symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) as a stimulus to inspire consumers towards masstige brands, leading to their purchase intentions. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: *Inspiration towards masstige mediates the association of a) snob motivation, b) Veblen motivation, and c) bandwagon motivation with inspiration towards masstige.*

2.3. Brand credibility as moderator

Erdem and Swait (1998) defined brand credibility as a signal of the believability of the product position information enclosed in a brand, which entails regularly delivering what is promised and, in turn, likely results in consumers' positive intentions to buy such brands (Kim et al., 2020; Nayeem et al., 2019). In fact, the literature reveals brand credibility as one of the most important factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions (Erdem, 2014) because it can increase perceived quality, decrease information costs, decrease perceived risk, and increase consumers' expected utility of the products and services (Baek & King, 2011; Kumar et al., 2021; Singh & Banerjee, 2021). The concept is considered a combination of two major components: brand trustworthiness and expertise in the eyes of consumers (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). Expertise relates to a company's capacity to meet its commitments, whereas trustworthiness refers to a company's desire to keep its promises (Batra, 2019; Reitsamer & Brunner, 2021; Yaseen & Mazahir, 2019). Drawing from this notion, brand credibility precedes customer perceptions and intentions for a brand, such as promoting customer brand assessments, contemplation, and decision-making (Erdem & Swait, 1998). In other words, brand credibility is likely to reduce consumers' perceived risk towards a product, and as a result, it can enhance consumers' inspiration and, in turn, improve the desired utility of consumers (Mandler et al., 2021). Therefore, we analyzed the interactive impact of brand credibility with consumers' inspiration towards masstige to augment their intentions to purchase masstige brands/products. Hence, it is hypothesized that;

H5: *Brand credibility moderates the association of inspiration towards masstige with masstige purchase intentions, such that the association is stronger in the case of the higher values of the brand credibility.*

We further argue that the effect of symbolic motivations (i.e., snob motivation, Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation) on masstige purchase intention via inspiration towards masstige is not uniform across customers' perceptions of brand credibility. Brand credibility is mainly a cognitive evaluation of the trust and competence of the brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998). If such a cognitive evaluation is imbued with positive (i.e., affective) brand experiences, the customer is more likely to form stronger connections with the brand or vice versa (Mandler, 2021). Given the potential utility of brands as signals, brand credibility has been identified as a key moderator variable in influencing the overall process of customer persuasion and decision-making. In particular, when customers are attached to or have positive perceptions of a particular Masstige brand product, it is reasonable to assume that high brand credibility can enhance the positive perception of symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) on inspiration towards Masstige, which in turn influences purchase intention. Thus, researchers formulated the hypotheses as follows:

H6: *Brand credibility moderates the mediation relationship of a) snob motivation, b) Veblen motivation, and c) bandwagon motivation on masstige purchase intention through inspiration towards masstige, such that this relationship is stronger in higher levels of brand credibility.*

Control variables such as gender, age, education level, monthly spending through the app, and frequency of app use were included in the model to avoid confounding variables or spurious results from these proposed hypotheses (Fig. 1). The reason for this is most research indicates that users who are female, well-educated, younger, and have a higher income are more likely to acquire masstige products (Luo et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2021).

3. Research methodology

After carefully assessing the literature and developing the framework of the study, two independent studies were conducted to assess the research objectives. Study 1 was conducted among the consumers of clothing brands, where a cross-sectional research design with a mall intercepts survey technique was used. The primary data was collected from the respondents visiting the shopping malls in the twin cities, i.e., Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. During this process, the authors politely stopped the customers in the shopping malls and requested them to participate voluntarily in a survey (Mansoor & Paul, 2021). Those willing to participate in the survey were guided about the nature and context of the study. They were invited to the research facility located in the mall to fill out the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts, i.e., i) questions related to the respondents' demographic information and ii) items related to the study constructs. Before handling the questionnaire, respondents were asked to think about the prominent and affordable luxury clothing brands that fall under the masstige category and record their responses accordingly. Respondents who could not provide answers about the masstige clothing brand that they purchased could not move to the next section of the survey. The data collection process started on December 10, 2020. This process continued for four months from the start of the data collection procedure. Till April 15, 2021, 960 respondents participated in the survey. All the responses were scrutinized further, and after careful screening, 47 questionnaires were found with unengaged patterns and 39 with missing values, which were excluded from further analysis. Hence, the remaining 874 complete responses were used in the analysis part.

Subsequently, Study 2 was conducted among car consumers visiting various car showrooms in twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Formal consent was obtained from the owners/managers of showrooms to request that the customers/prospects visiting the showrooms participate in a survey. The rest of the procedure was the same as for Study 1. The data collection process for Study 2 started on March 01, 2021. Till July 10, 2021, 590 respondents participated in the survey. All the responses were scrutinized further, and after careful screening, 52 questionnaires were found with unengaged patterns and missing values, which were excluded from further analysis. Hence, a final data set of 538 respondents was generated for study 2.

The selection of Pakistan as the study location was grounded in its direct relevance to the research context and the unique characteristics of the target population. Pakistan boasts a diverse consumer market characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural, economic, and demographic variables (Ishaq et al., 2023). Besides, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, as twin cities, exhibit distinctive features in terms of socio-economic profiles and consumer preferences (Mansoor & Paul, 2022). By concentrating on this geographic region, the study sought to capture the nuanced and context-specific dynamics that influence consumer behavior. Besides, within the evolving landscape of Pakistan's emerging economy, characterized by a burgeoning middle-class demographic (Gilal et al., 2022; Mansoor & Paul, 2022), our strategic choice to center our study on the clothing and car brands sectors resonates harmoniously with the essence of masstige marketing. This concept encapsulates the astute provision of luxury offerings tailored to meet the expanding aspirations of the masses (Paul, 2019). Furthermore, the decision to focus exclusively on Pakistan was guided by the need to establish a consistent and culturally relevant foundation for the study, allowing for meaningful comparisons between two distinct product categories within a specific socio-cultural context.

3.1. Measures of the Study.

A structured questionnaire consisting of 28 well-established items was designed (see Table 2) to measure the constructs of the study. A three-item scale derived from Wiedmann et al. (2009) measured snob motivation. A six-item scale adapted from O'cass and McEwen (2004) was used to measure the Veblen motivations. At the same time, bandwagon motivation was measured with a five-item scale adapted from Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012). Moreover, inspiration towards masstige and masstige purchase intentions were measured with a four-item scale derived from Das, Saha, and Balaji (2021) and Spears and Singh (2004), respectively. Finally, a six-item scale by Erdem and Swait (2004) was used to measure brand credibility. All the responses were recorded as 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Prior to data collection, pre-tests were carried out with both the clothing and car target groups, the results of which helped us to fine-tune the questions to improve their readability. Six specialists in the field of this study were also consulted to ensure that the instruments were as complete as possible.

3.1. 3.2 Respondents' profile

The descriptive statistics revealed many differences in Study 1 and Study 2 participants based on the difference in product categories in both studies. For instance, the proportion of female participation was higher for Study 1 than for Study 2. Moreover, for Study 1, most respondents were 18 to 40 years old and were unmarried compared to Study 2. In terms of income, in Study 1, about 50 % of the participants reported income levels less than 60 K. In contrast, in Study 2, about 70 % of the participants reported 60 K or above income level. This might be because of the high cost of purchasing cars compared to clothing based on product nature. Furthermore, Table 1 depicts a detailed summary of the respondents' profiles.

3.2. Common method bias (CMB) evaluation

Significant efforts were made to reduce common method B\bias (CMB). Procedurally, the survey (i) offered precise contextual details on the cover page, (ii) provided clear instructions to clarify uncertain or ambiguous terms, and (iii) assured respondents of their anonymity to alleviate discomfort or apprehension (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Statistically, we conducted the full collinearity test as recommended by Kock and Lynn (2012). The findings suggest that CMB is not problematic in both studies (clothing and cars), as the variance inflation factors (VIFs) ranged between 1.013 and 1.988, as shown in

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristics.

Variables		Study 1 (Clothing)	Study 2 (Cars)
Gender	Male	39.70 %	63.9 %
	Female	60.30 %	36.1 %
Age	18–25 years	22.1 %	16.4 %
	26–40 years	22.7 %	19.0 %
	41–55 years	30.0 %	33.8 %
	55and above	25.2 %	30.8 %
Marital Status	Married	36.5 %	66.4 %
	Unmarried	63.5 %	33.6 %
Education	Undergraduate	14.0 %	4.8 %
	Graduate	51.8 %	42.6 %
	Post-graduate	34.2 %	52.6 %
Occupation	Students	18.3 %	14.8 %
	Employees	26.7 %	23.7 %
	Businessman	31.9 %	32.9 %
	Others	23.1 %	28.6 %
Income	10 K-30 K	18.6 %	11.7 %
	31–60 K	30.5 %	18.6 %
	61–90 K	24.5 %	24.7 %
	91–120 k	17.8 %	27.5 %
	120 K and above	8.6 %	17.5 %

Table 2. These values are well within the acceptable limit of 3.3 (Kock and Lynn, 2012; Noor et al., 2021).

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Model estimation

Data analysis was done using SmartPLS 4 (Cheah, Magno, & Cassia, 2023; Ringle et al., 2022) by conducting partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). We used PLS-SEM for three reasons. First, PLS-SEM aligns with our research goals, which lean towards theory building rather than purely confirmatory purposes, as it is adept at testing and exploring models (Cheah, Amaro, & Roldán, 2023; Hair et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023). Second, Cheah et al. (2021) and Sarstedt et al. (2020) found that PLS-SEM excels in evaluating research models populated with numerous constructs and complex relationships, such as the conditional mediation effect of brand credibility.Third, PLS-SEM outperforms its counterparts when the research objective is predictive or exploratory (Hair et al., 2022), characteristics that are consistent with our study (Cheah, Kersten, Ringle, & Wallenburg, 2023; Shmueli et al., 2019). To assess the PLS-SEM findings, we adopt the methods and standards introduced by (Hair et al., 2019; Ringle et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2022).

Table 2
Factor loadings, reliability, convergent validity, and full collinearity.

	Study 1 (Clothing)					Study 2 (Cars)				
Constructs/Items	**Loading**	**AVE**	**CR**	**CA**	**FC**	**Loading**	**AVE**	**CR**	**CA**	**FC**
Snob Motivation		**0.699**	**0.874**	**0.786**	**1.609**		**0.726**	**0.888**	**0.812**	**1.647**
SM1: I buy prestigious brands to differentiate myself from others.	0.717					0.746				
SM2: I believe that prestigious brands are unique.	0.907					0.896				
SM3: I own true prestigious products.	0.873					0.905				
Veblen Motivation		**0.663**	**0.922**	**0.899**	**1.492**		**0.645**	**0.916**	**0.889**	**1.486**
VM1: A product is more valuable to me if it has some show-off appeal.	0.815					0.819				
VM2: I will pay more for a product if it has status.	0.825					0.751				
VM3: I am interested in new products with status.	0.875					0.901				
VM4: I would buy a product just because it has status.	0.76					0.753				
VM5: I can gain respect when I use prestigious fashion clothes/cars.	0.808					0.809				
VM6: I wear/use prestigious fashion clothes/cars because they are easy to be noticed by others.	0.799					0.777				
Bandwagon Motivation		**0.638**	**0.898**	**0.858**	**1.820**		**0.633**	**0.896**	**0.855**	**1.829**
BM1: To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.	0.783					0.784				
BM2: I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same masstige brands and products that others purchase.	0.83					0.843				
BM3: I like to know what brands and products make a good impression on others.	0.806					0.799				
BM4: I buy masstige clothes/cars because they are worn/used by many celebrities.	0.84					0.837				
BM5: I buy certain masstige clothes/cars because they are fashionable/ trendy.	0.729					0.709				
Inspiration Towards Masstige		**0.787**	**0.936**	**0.909**	**1.661**		**0.794**	**0.939**	**0.913**	**1.761**
ITM1: Masstige luxuries excite me in a way.	0.886					0.876				
ITM2: Masstige luxuries stimulate my thinking.	0.904					0.904				
ITM3: Masstige luxuries give me a new view.	0.885					0.896				
ITM4: I am inspired by masstige luxuries.	0.872					0.886				
Masstige Purchase Intentions		**0.743**	**0.92**	**0.884**	**1.958**		**0.73**	**0.915**	**0.876**	**1.988**
MPI1: I intend to buy a masstige luxury product within six months.	0.811					0.82				
MPI2: I have a very high purchase interest for masstige brands.	0.889					0.88				
MPI3: I will probably buy a masstige luxury brand within six months.	0.894					0.899				
MPI4: I will definitely buy a masstige luxury brand in the next six months.	0.85					0.816				
Brand Credibility		**0.573**	**0.889**	**0.854**	**1.283**		**0.556**	**0.882**	**0.855**	**1.013**
BC1: The clothing/car brand (I buy/use) reminds me of someone who is competent and knows what he/she is doing.	0.751					0.719				
BC2: The clothing/cars brand (I buy/use) has the ability to deliver what it promises.	0.786					0.738				
BC3: The clothing/cars brand (I buy/use) delivers what it promises.	0.808					0.721				
BC4: The clothing/cars brand (I buy/use) product claims are believable.	0.712					0.745				
BC5: The clothing/car brand (I buy/use) has a name I can trust.	0.771					0.823				
BC6: The clothing/car brand (I buy/use) does not pretend to be something it is not.	0.709					0.722				

Note: CR = composite reliability, also referred to as rho_c; AVE = average variance extracted; CA = Cronbach alpha; FC = full collinearity.

4.2. Measurement model

In the measurement models (Table 2), we observed that almost all the outer loadings exceed 0.708, indicating good indicator reliability above 0.5. The construct reliability was assured based on values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability above 0.7. Moreover, the average variance extracted for the reflectively measured constructs surpasses 0.5, thereby confirming convergent validity.

Furthermore, to establish the discriminant validity of the measures, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was checked (Ringle et al., 2023). The HTMT outcome exhibits that each construct reported a value lower than 0.85, thereby affirming the discriminant validity for both studies (Table 3). To validate this finding, the study also evaluated the HTMT bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals derived from bootstrapping with 10,000 samples. The upper bound of the 95 % one-sided bootstrap confidence interval for the HTMT value is less than the 0.85 threshold value, indicating that all constructs are empirically distinct (Table 3). Thus, discriminant validity for both studies was established (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019; Hair et al., 2020).

4.3. Structural model

The results of the structural model for both studies are presented in Fig. 2 (Panel A and Panel B) and Table 4. Our findings show that the variance inflation factor (VIF) for both studies (clothing and cars) is below the value of 3.33 (ranging from 1210 to 1.704), indicating that collinearity is not an issue for this data (Hair et al., 2019).

Subsequently, we used bootstrapping re-samples (10,000 samples, suggested by Becker et al., 2023; Hwang et al., 2023) to estimate our proposed hypotheses. For Study 1, Snob ($\beta = 0.465$), Veblen ($\beta = 0.075$), and bandwagon ($\beta = 0.211$) motivations have a positive significance on the inspiration towards masstige, as indicated by the percentile confidence interval result. Thus, H1a to H1c was supported with an explanatory power (or the coefficient of determination: R^2) of 38.3 %. In addition, snob motivation ($\beta = 0.152$), Veblen motivation ($\beta = 0.240$), bandwagon motivation ($\beta = 0.371$), and inspiration towards Masstige have a positive significance on the Masstige purchase intention ($p < 0.05$). Thus, H2a, H2b, H2c and H3 were supported. Overall, these relationships explained 47.1 % of the variance in Masstige purchase intention, especially after controlling the insignificant effect of age, gender, education level, and income level that was insignificant ($p > 0.05$). Simultaneously, we assessed the indirect effect using Nitzl et al. (2016). As shown in Table 5, inspiration towards Masstige significantly mediates ($p < 0.05$) the relationship between snob motivation ($\beta = 0.066$), Veblen motivation ($\beta = 0.011$), and bandwagon motivation ($\beta = 0.030$) on Masstige purchase intentions through "complementary partial mediation" (Nitzl et al., 2016). Thus, H4a to H4c were supported, indicating that inspiration towards Masstige plays a crucial concept in bridging the relationship between symbolic motivations and Masstige purchase intentions.

Meanwhile, Study 2 demonstrates analogous findings to Study 1, as evidenced by the percentile confidence interval result. Specifically, the direct and indirect impact of symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) were significant after controlling for age, gender, education level, and income level ($p > 0.05$). Overall, the results indicate that all three symbolic motivations explain 40.3 % of the variation in inspiration towards Masstige, while together (symbolic motivations and inspiration towards Masstige), they explain 46.8 % of Masstige purchase intention. In addition, inspiration towards Masstige is a significant mediator of the relationship between snob motivation, Veblen motivation, and bandwagon motivation in Masstige purchase intentions through "complementary partial mediation" (Nitzl et al., 2016). Therefore, H1a to H4c hypotheses received support.

Subsequently, the two-stage approach was used to examine the contingent effect of BC on the association of ITM and MPI (Becker et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2021). For this purpose, the interaction terms BC*ITM were made in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 1, the interaction term (BC*ITM) has a significant positive effect on MPI of 0.059 ($p < 0.05$). Jointly, these results suggest that the relationship between ITM and MPI is 0.142 for an average level of BC. For higher levels of BC (i.e., for every standard deviation unit increase of BC), the relationship between ITM and MPI increases by the size of the interaction term (i.e., $0.142 + 0.059 = 0.201$). On the contrary, for lower levels of BC (i.e., for every standard deviation unit decrease of BC), the association between ITM and MPI decreases by the size of the interaction term (i.e., 0.142—0.059 = 0.083). Separately, the interaction term (BC*ITM) of Study 2 has a significant positive effect on MPI of 0.079 ($p < 0.05$). Jointly, these results suggest that the relationship between ITM and MPI is 0.169 for an average level of BC. For higher levels of BC, the relationship between ITM and MPI increases by the size of the interaction term (i.e., $0.169 + 0.079 = 0.248$). On the contrary, for lower levels of BC, the association between ITM and MPI decreases by the size of the interaction term (i.e.,

Table 3
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio correlation.

Study	Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 (Clothing)	1. Brand Credibility						
	2. Bandwagon Motivation	0.324 [0.258; 0.394]					
	3. Inspiration towards Masstige	0.451 [0.382; 0.517]	0.490 [0.423; 0.554]				
	4. Masstige Purchase Intention	0.239 [0.172; 0.313]	0.703 [0.651; 0.754]	0.523 [0.458; 0.584]			
	5. Snob Motivation	0.392 [0.312; 0.469]	0.466 [0.392; 0.538]	0.663 [0.603; 0.720]	0.529 [0.464; 0.591]		
	6. Veblen Motivation	0.103 [0.087; 0.157]	0.560 [0.502; 0.615]	0.350 [0.281; 0.417]	0.573 [0.519; 0.625]	0.338 [0.271; 0.409]	
2 (Cars)	1. Brand Credibility						
	2. Bandwagon Motivation	0.075 [0.060; 0.174]					
	3. Inspiration towards Masstige	0.049 [0.040; 0.139]	0.521 [0.438; 0.600]				
	4. Masstige Purchase Intention	0.091 [0.059; 0.182]	0.700 [0.633; 0.763]	0.569 [0.491; 0.642]			
	5. Snob Motivation	0.090 [0.050; 0.183]	0.470 [0.376; 0.559]	0.671 [0.598; 0.736]	0.554 [0.474; 0.630]		
	6. Veblen Motivation	0.072 [0.062; 0.159]	0.569 [0.496; 0.638]	0.375 [0.287; 0.458]	0.570 [0.501; 0.635]	0.315 [0.230; 0.405]	

Note: The values in the bracket represent both the lower and upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval.

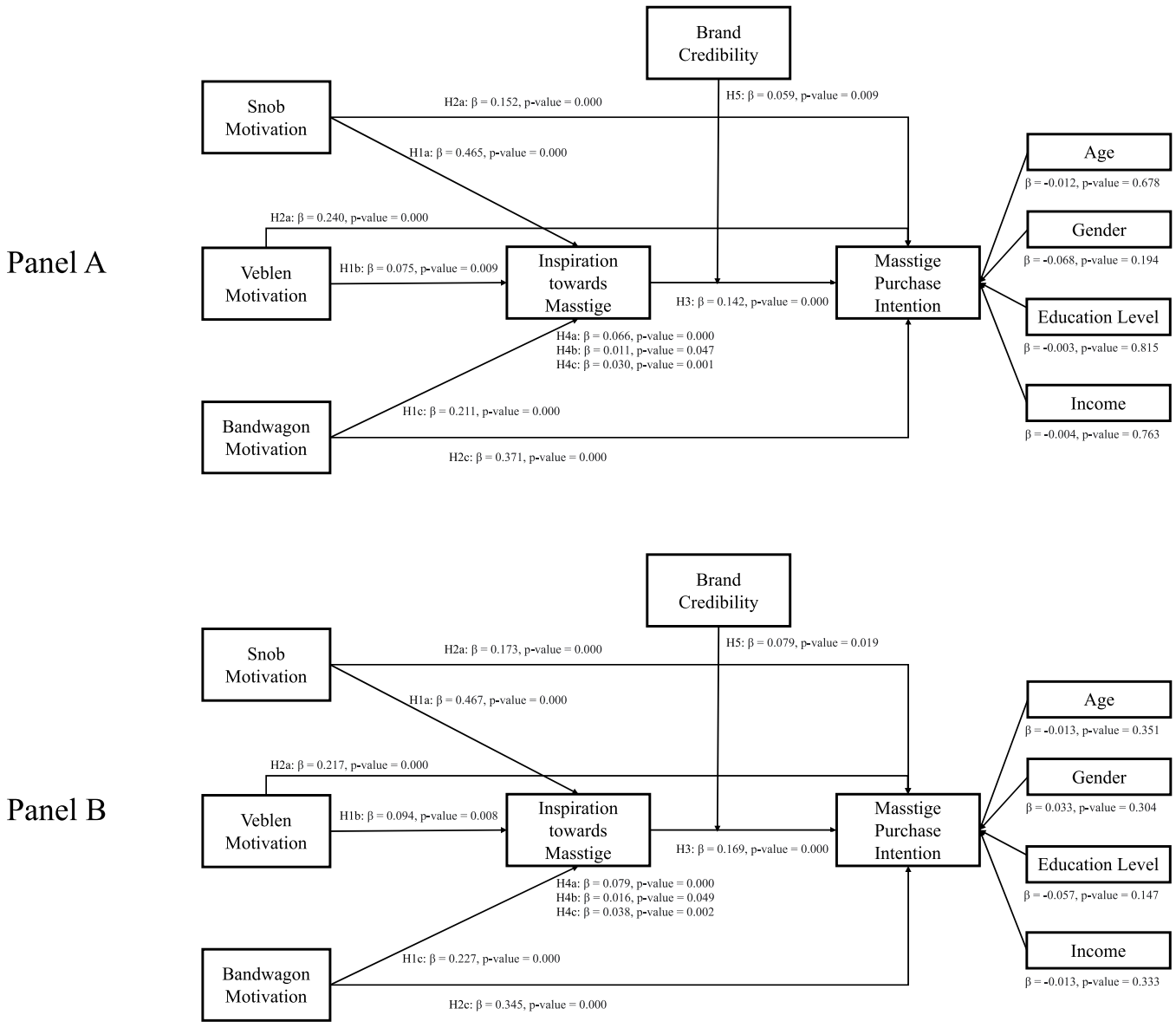


Fig. 2. Panel A is about PLS-SEM Results for Study 1(Clothing) and Panel B is about PLS-SEM Results for Study 2 (Cars).

0.169—0.079 = 0.090).

Fig. 3 (Panel A and Panel B) depict an enhanced MPI level among consumers of cars and clothing brands due to the interactive effect of BC*ITM. The lines labeled for higher BC values have a steeper gradient for both studies than those labeled for lower BC values. However, the gradient for the contingent impact of BC in enhancing MPI initiated by ITM is steeper for the consumers of car brands than clothing brands. But overall, the positive values of the moderator show that consumers are more likely to buy masstige brands when they are credible in their offerings and deliver the same product as promised. Thus, H5 has been supported for both studies.

Importantly, a small difference (2 %) was also found for the contingent impact of BC in boasting the MPI among the consumers of Study 1 (ß = 0.059) and Study 2 (ß = 0.079) (see Table 5). These results show that consumers who intend to buy cars focus more on BC and spend more time collecting information about different car brands and models than those who intend to buy clothes. This might be because of the higher prices involved in buying cars. This might also be because consumers of clothing brands make instant decisions and focus more on the designs and uniqueness than on spending more time searching for brands' credibility.

Overall, there is corroborative evidence of our findings because the difference in the standardized beta value is minimal, ranging from 0.002 to 0.027 (Table 5). Importantly, our findings depict the similar explanatory power of both studies in determining consumers' ITM and MPI for both clothing brands and cars.

4.4. Conditional mediation analysis

We embarked on the conditional mediation analysis (Cheah et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020) to examine whether BC strengthened or weakened the mediating effects of symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, bandwagon) on MPI. As indicated in Table 6, the index of conditional mediation only supports H6b for both studies, as the CI excludes zero but not for H6a and H6c.

Exploring H6b further, the standardized beta values of the conditional mediation effect for ITM escalate from low to high BC levels. In particular, both ends of CI remain positive, signifying the significance of BC effects across all levels: low, medium, and high. These findings highlight the importance of considering varying levels of BC when

Table 4
Results of the Structural Model for Study 1 and Study 2.

Study	Path	Relationship	Std Beta	LB	UB	Significant? ($p < 0.05$)	VIF	R^2	$Q^2predict$	Type of Mediation
1 (Clothing)	Direct	H1a: SM → ITM	0.465	0.410	0.518	Yes	1.212	0.383	0.371	
		H1b: VM → ITM	0.075	0.023	0.128	Yes	1.371			
		H1c: BM → ITM	0.211	0.155	0.266	Yes	1.478			
		H2a: SM → MPI	0.152	0.103	0.202	Yes	1.564	0.489	0.471	
		H2b: VM → MPI	0.240	0.191	0.286	Yes	1.380			
		H2c: BM → MPI	0.371	0.313	0.427	Yes	1.550			
		H3: ITM → MPI	0.142	0.086	0.198	Yes	1.621			
	Indirect*	H4a: SM → ITM → MPI	0.066	0.035	0.100	Yes				Partial Mediation
		H4b: VM → ITM → MPI	0.011	0.002	0.024	Yes				Partial Mediation
		H4c: BM → ITM → MPI	0.030	0.014	0.050	Yes				Partial Mediation
	Interaction	H5: ITM x BC → MPI	0.059	0.022	0.095	Yes				
	Control Variable	Age → MPI	−0.012	−0.064	0.039	No				
		Gender → MPI	−0.068	−0.168	0.029	No				
		Education Level → MPI	−0.003	−0.055	0.048	No				
		Income → MPI	−0.004	−0.055	0.047	No				
2 (Cars)	Direct	H1a: SM → ITM	0.467	0.398	0.530	Yes	1.210	0.412	0.403	
		H1b: VM → ITM	0.094	0.030	0.159	Yes	1.371			
		H1c: BM → ITM	0.227	0.156	0.296	Yes	1.507			
		H2a: SM → MPI	0.173	0.105	0.241	Yes	1.587			
		H2b: VM → MPI	0.217	0.157	0.274	Yes	1.394			
		H2c: BM → MPI	0.345	0.276	0.418	Yes	1.597			
		H3: ITM → MPI	0.169	0.092	0.241	Yes	1.704			
	Indirect*	H4a: SM → ITM → MPI	0.079	0.037	0.124	Yes		0.504	0.468	Partial Mediation
		H4b: VM → ITM → MPI	0.016	0.004	0.036	Yes				Partial Mediation
		H4c: BM → ITM → MPI	0.038	0.018	0.068	Yes				Partial Mediation
	Interaction	H5: ITM x BC → MPI	0.079	0.022	0.139	Yes				
	Control Variable	Age → MPI	−0.013	−0.080	0.051	No				
		Gender → MPI	0.033	−0.097	0.157	No				
		Education Level → MPI	−0.057	−0.124	0.008	No				
		Income → MPI	−0.013	−0.069	0.046	No				

Note: SM = Snob Motivation; VM = Veblen Motivation; BM = Bandwagon Motivations; ITM = Inspiration Towards Masstige; MPI = Masstige Purchase Intentions; BC = Brand Credibility; * = The indirect effect is tested using a two-tailed test with 97.5 % percentile confidence interval, while the rest is tested using a one-tailed test with 95 % percentile confidence interval.

Table 5
Corroborative Evidence from both Study 1 and Study 2.

Relationship	Std Beta (clothing)	Std Beta (cars)	Difference in Std Beta
H1a: SM → ITM	0.465	0.467	−0.002 (Cars)
H1b: VM → ITM	0.075	0.094	−0.019 (Cars)
H1c: BM → ITM	0.211	0.227	−0.016 (Cars)
H2a: SM → MPI	0.152	0.173	−0.021 (Cars)
H2b: VM → MPI	0.240	0.217	0.023 (Clothing)
H2c: BM → MPI	0.371	0.345	0.026 (Clothing)
H3: ITM → MPI	0.142	0.169	−0.027 (Cars)
H4a: SM → ITM → MPI	0.066	0.079	−0.013 (Cars)
H4b: VM → ITM → MPI	0.011	0.016	−0.005 (Cars)
H4c: BM → ITM → MPI	0.030	0.038	−0.008 (Cars)
H5: ITM x BC → MPI	0.059	0.079	−0.020 (Cars)

Note: SM = Snob Motivation; VM = Veblen Motivation; BM = Bandwagon Motivations; ITM = Inspiration Towards Masstige; MPI = Masstige Purchase Intentions; BC = Brand Credibility.

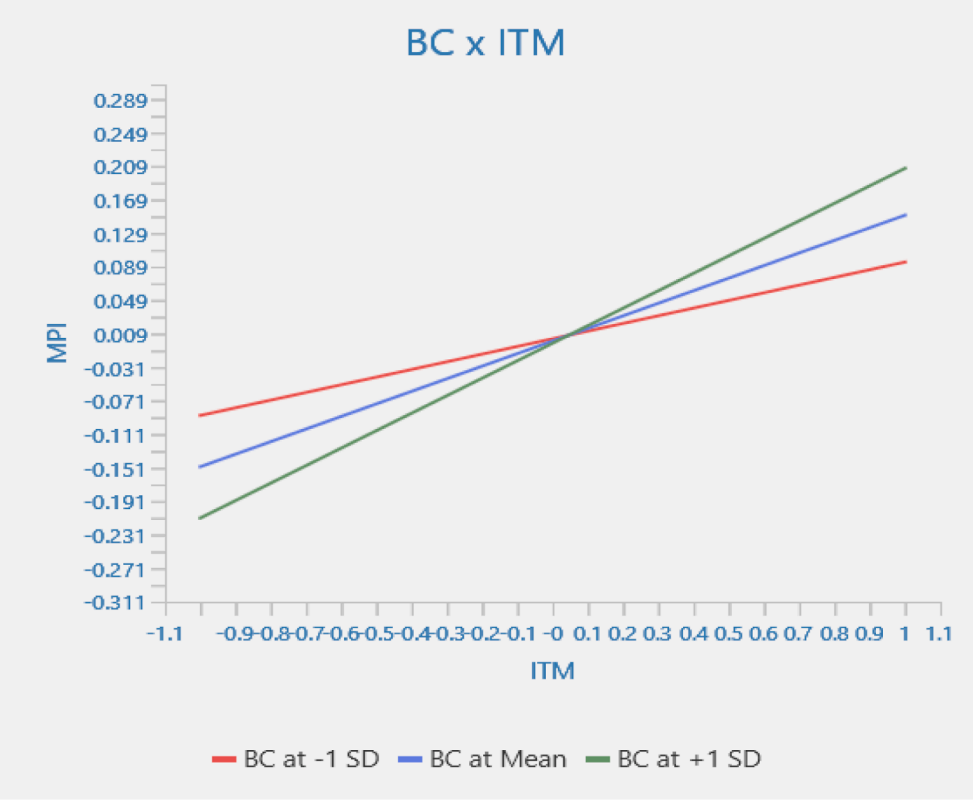
contemplating the mediation effect of ITM in enhancing the relationship between VM and MPI in both studies.

4.5. Predictive Assessment

The model's out-of-sample predictive relevance was tested using the PLS*predict* procedure (Becker et al., 2023; Chin et al., 2020; Ringle et al., 2023; Shmueli et al., 2016; Shmueli et al., 2019). For the target construct in the model (i.e., inspiration towards masstige and masstige purchase intentions), all $Q^2predict$ values (i.e., the indicator average prediction benchmark) are greater than zero (Table 4), indicating that the model has predictive relevance. Furthermore, predictive validity was assessed by using Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) to compare the PLS-SEM model's predictive power to that of the linear model (LM) (Shmueli et al., 2019; Teeroovengadum et al., 2023). All indicators of ITM have smaller prediction errors for PLS-SEM-based prediction than the corresponding values in LM, representing that the model has strong predictive power. In contrast, not all indicators of MPI have smaller prediction errors for PLS-SEM-based prediction than the corresponding values in LM, representing that the model has medium predictive power (Table 7). To corroborate the result from PLSpredict, this study assessed the cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT) that offers a more comprehensive inferential test for the predictive model in predicting all endogenous items and constructs simultaneously (Liengaard et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2023). Based on Table 7, our findings show that the PLS-SEM model can beat the naïve indicator average (IA) prediction benchmark, as indicated by the significantly negative average loss difference in CVPAT. In addition, we find that the model exhibits a lower average loss than the LM prediction benchmark for the MPI construct (but not for ITM); the difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Hence, the MPI construct has some predictive power that allows it to overcome the IA benchmark but is not enough to pass the more conservative LM benchmark. However, the overall result still indicates that our proposed model has a strong predictive power when investigating both IA and LM benchmarks ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, we conclude our proposed model exhibits strong predictive validity to represent a new observation of the target population for both studies.

Lastly, we analyze the model fit using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). In Study 1, we find that both the saturated and estimated models have SRMR values of 0.062 and 0.068. Similarly, our result shows that both saturated and estimated models have SRMR values of 0.056 and 0.057 in Study 2. Thus, both studies support the model fit criteria because the values are below 0.80 (see Henseler et al.,

Panel A



Panel B

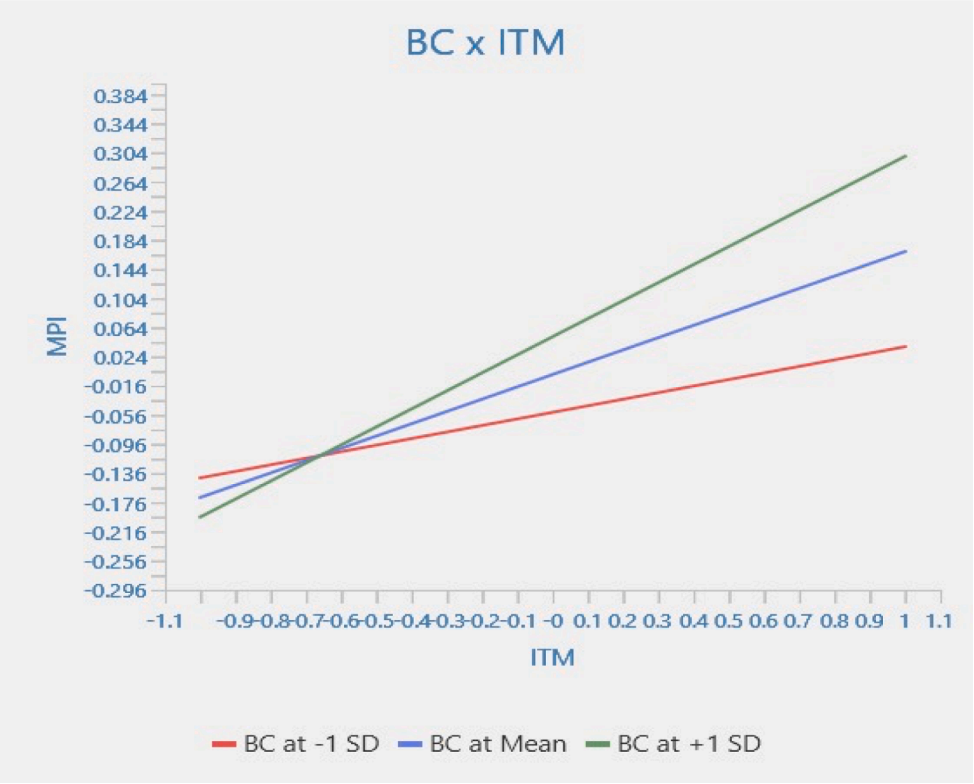


Fig. 3. Panel A is a simple slope analysis of the two-way interaction effect BC*ITM on MPI (Study 1), while Panel B is a simple slope analysis of the two-way interaction effect BC*ITM on MPI (Study 2).

Table 6
Assessment of the conditional mediation model.

Hypothesis	Conditional mediation effect	Study 2 (Clothing)				Study 3 (Cars)			
			95 % Percentile CI				95 % Percentile CI		
		Std Beta	LB	UB	Significant? ($p < 0.05$)	Std. Beta	LB	UB	Significant? ($p < 0.05$)
H6a (SM → ITM → MPI)	Index of conditional mediation BC (Moderator)	0.001	−0.031	0.021	No	0.006	−0.039	0.055	No
	Low	0.043	0.014	0.073	Yes	0.042	0.001	0.087	Yes
	Medium	0.070	0.043	0.098	Yes	0.079	0.044	0.117	Yes
	High	0.097	0.063	0.133	Yes	0.116	0.072	0.163	Yes
H6b (VM → ITM → MPI)	Index of conditional mediation BC (Moderator)	0.010	0.001	0.019	Yes	0.009	0.001	0.021	Yes
	Low	0.007	0.002	0.016	Yes	0.008	0.001	0.024	Yes
	Medium	0.011	0.004	0.023	Yes	0.016	0.005	0.033	Yes
	High	0.016	0.005	0.032	Yes	0.023	0.008	0.046	Yes
H6c (BM → ITM → MPI)	Index of conditional mediation BC (Moderator)	0.005	−0.039	0.017	No	0.002	−0.039	0.028	No
	Low	0.019	0.006	0.037	Yes	0.020	0.001	0.045	Yes
	Medium	0.032	0.017	0.049	Yes	0.038	0.021	0.063	Yes
	High	0.044	0.026	0.066	Yes	0.056	0.034	0.088	Yes

Note**:** SM = Snob Motivation; VM = Veblen Motivation; BM = Bandwagon Motivations; ITM = Inspiration Towards Masstige; MPI = Masstige Purchase Intentions; BC = Brand Credibility; CI = Confidence interval. LB = Lower bound. UB = Upper bound.

Table 7
PL*Spredict* and CVPAT results.

Study	Construct	Item	PL*Spredict*				CVPAT		
			Q^2*predict*	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	Decision	IA average loss difference (p-value)	LM average loss difference (p-value)	Decision
1 (Clothing)	ITM	ITM1	0.33	1.587	1.595	Strong	−1.102 (0.000)	−0.127 (0.011)	Strong Predictive Validity
		ITM2	0.309	1.593	1.601				
		ITM3	0.273	1.615	1.623				
		ITM4	0.273	1.671	1.676				
	MPI	MPI1	0.321	1.604	1.605	Medium	−1.313 (0.000)	−0.002 (0.951)	Predictive Validity
		MPI2	0.331	1.56	1.564				
		MPI3	0.373	1.501	1.497				
		MPI4	0.371	1.597	1.594				
	Overall						−1.207 (0.000)	−0.064 (0.024)	Strong Predictive Validity
2 (Cars)	ITM	ITM1	0.326	1.569	1.583	Strong	−1.169 (0.000)	−0.076 (0.045)	Strong Predictive Validity
		ITM2	0.328	1.548	1.570				
		ITM3	0.308	1.551	1.569				
		ITM4	0.316	1.643	1.647				
	MPI	MPI1	0.313	1.536	1.548	Medium	−1.185 (0.000)	−0.034 (0.272)	Predictive Validity
		MPI2	0.351	1.455	1.466				
		MPI3	0.373	1.457	1.460				
		MPI4	0.337	1.594	1.595				
	Overall						−1.177 (0.000)	−0.055 (0.026)	Strong Predictive Validity

Note: ITM = Inspiration towards Masstige; MPI = Masstige Purchase Intention; CVPAT = cross-validated predictive ability test; IA = indicator average; LM = linear model; RMSE = root-mean-square error.

2016).

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Findings

The results of both studies depict that symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) are important predictors of consumers' MPI. Likewise, results showed a positive influence of symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon) on consumers' ITM. This represents those various extrinsic motivations that inspire consumers towards masstige brands. Besides, masstige brands are unique in designs and are considered prestigious based on their luxurious features (Shao et al., 2019). Hence, it can be stated that symbolic motivations act as triggers to inspire consumers to represent themselves as part of such prestigious brands (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2014). Consequently, a sense of being associated with the masstige brands creates an urge or positive intention in individuals to buy such brands. In addition to the positive impact of symbolic motivations in creating MPI among consumers of clothing brands and cars, we observed substantial differences in the impact size of Veblen and bandwagon motivations among consumers of both categories. For instance, Veblen motivations impact the ITM of car brand consumers more than clothing brand consumers. This might be because Veblen's motivations reflect the show-off appeal and status consciousness (Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021). At the same time, cars are more expensive and thought to be a sign of status (Paul, 2018). Hence, Veblen motivations strongly impact car brand consumers' ITM.

In contrast, results showed that bandwagon motivations impact the MPI of clothing brand consumers more than car brands. This might be because bandwagon motivations measure the use of prestigious brands

by others, celebrities, etc. (Mainolfi, 2020). It also focuses on the fashionable nature of the products (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). At the same time, people get inspired by celebrities and their peers for apparel (Kim & Seock, 2019). In contrast, when buying cars, consumers mostly focus on uniqueness and status (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2021). Hence, bandwagon motivations strongly impact the MPI of clothing brand consumers. In addition, results revealed that in both studies, snob motivations positively and significantly impacted the ITM and MPI of the consumers. Since snob motivations reflect the differential and unique nature of the brands (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019). Hence, regardless of product type or category, they strongly inspire consumers towards masstige brands and enhance their intentions to buy such brands.

Moreover, this study supports the mediatory role of the ITM symbolic motivations and MPI. Previously, ITM has been proven to mediate the association between the need for uniqueness and purchase intentions (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). At the same time, the current study findings are a valuable addition to the existing body of literature depicting that symbolic motivation stimulates consumers towards masstige brands. Since masstige brands are considered an affordable luxury when consumers want to differentiate themselves from others (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Leibenstein, 1950), they are status-conscious (Veblen, 1899) and idealize others (Oyedele & Goenner, 2021; Shukla & Rosendo-Rios, 2021) they get inspired by the unique and affordable luxurious features of the masstige brands and as a result, depict MPI. Finally, the results of the current study revealed that when brand credibility interacts with consumers' inspiration towards masstige, it improves their intentions to buy them. These findings are incremental to the existing body of literature. Since brand credibility reflects the authenticity of the brands (Kim et al., 2020), it can be used by marketing managers to target the already inspired consumers with masstige brands to augment their intentions to buy such brands.

5.2. Theoretical implications

'The masstige phenomenon has emerged as a focal point of scholarly discourse and professional deliberations within the field of marketing and branding (Kumar et al., 2020). Ourle past research predominantly examined masstige as a downward extension of luxury products (Das et al., 2021). Our study takes a pioneering approach by delving into key constructs such as symbolic motivation (including snob, Veblen, and bandwagon effects), inspiration, and brand credibility to elucidate consumer intentions towards masstige brands. Conducted through two distinct studies targeting consumers of clothing and car brands in Pakistan, our research provides valuable insights. Recognizing the highly-involvement nature of clothing as a product category, influenced by considerations of both value and personal expression, we contrast this with cars, where substantial financial investment plays a significant role. This deliberate exploration allows us to uncover unique dynamics within each sector. In the context of clothing, consumers grapple with myriad choices, considering not only the financial aspects but also the personal and expressive nature of their purchases (Ho et al., 2023). Our study sheds light on the intricate interplay of symbolic motivations, inspiration, and brand credibility within the masstige context in this sector. Turning our attention to the automotive sector, where cars are recognized as high-involvement products, our research delves into the complexities of consumer decision-making (Moorlock et al., 2023). Here, the financial stakes are higher, and cars represent status, lifestyle, and aspiration. We explore how symbolic motivations intersect with financial considerations to shape consumer intentions in this sector.

Moreover, our findings underscore the substantial influence of symbolic motivations on consumers' masstige purchase intentions. Particularly, the study establishes that symbolic motivations significantly shape middle-class consumers' inclination toward masstige products. Notably, while snob motivations exhibit a comparable impact on Intention Toward Masstige (ITM) and Masstige Purchase Intentions (MPI) among consumers of both clothing and car brands, distinct patterns emerge for Veblen and bandwagon motivations. The predictive differences identified in the impact size of Veblen and bandwagon motivations on ITM and MPI across both product categories contribute nuanced insights, as detailed in the findings section. This study extends the scholarly discourse by providing valuable insights that researchers can leverage to explore and expand this line of inquiry in diverse contextual settings and across various product lines. Furthermore, our research makes a notable contribution to the existing literature by examining the moderating role of brand credibility. The positive contingent impact of brand credibility in augmenting MPI reveals crucial theoretical implications for scholars focused on masstige brands.

The conditional mediation analysis in our study also introduces theoretical novelty by unveiling the nuanced role of BC in shaping the mediating effects of symbolic motivations on MPI). Specifically, the support for H6b across both studies signifies a crucial advancement in understanding how varying levels of BC can significantly influence the relationship between VM and MPI. This finding introduces a new layer of complexity to existing theories by highlighting the distinct significance of Veblen motivations in both product categories, transcending traditional perceptions, and underscores the dynamic interplay between symbolic motivations, brand credibility, and consumer purchase intentions. Hence, our work highlights the unique and influential role of Veblen motivations, offering a substantial theoretical advancement for scholars and practitioners in the masstige branding domain. Furthermore, the predictive differences unveiled for the moderating role of brand credibility between cars (high-involvement brands in terms of cost) and clothing brands offer valuable insights for marketing scholars. These insights not only enrich the theoretical landscape but also lay the foundation for future explorations. In essence, our study not only expands theoretical frameworks but also contributes fresh perspectives and new dimensions to the academic discourse on masstige marketing.

5.3. Practical implications

The findings of this study help brand managers devise strategies to understand the role of symbolic motivations and their impact on consumers' masstige purchase intentions across sharing economies. The result allows managers to understand motivation on a broader horizon by applying symbolic motivations (snob, Veblen, and bandwagon). Moreover, policymakers and marketers can use predictive differences in results for different product categories based on the consumers' involvement levels and intensities to position their masstige strategies accordingly. For managers in the clothing industry, our study underscores the significance of understanding and leveraging symbolic motivations. Crafting marketing campaigns (i.e., advertising) that resonate with the snob, Veblen, and bandwagon effects can enhance brand appeal and drive masstige sales. Additionally, our findings suggest that fostering consumer inspiration is a key strategy for influencing middle-class consumers' preferences toward masstige clothing brands. In the automotive sector, managers can draw insights from the comparative analysis of symbolic motivations. Tailoring marketing strategies based on the identified differences in the impact of Veblen and bandwagon motivations can lead to more effective campaigns and a stronger connection with the target audience.

Simultaneously, the positive relationship between inspiration and intentions helps international brands who want to enter countries with emerging markets like China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, etc. Consumer inspiration is ultimately the reflection of consumer purchase intentions. Moreover, the positive moderating values of brand credibility show that consumers will prefer to buy masstige brands more when they have good credibility of that brand in their minds. Therefore, brand managers must pay attention to improving the brand credibility in the eyes of their consumers, through which they can enhance their sales by fulfilling the promises they made in their marketing communications. They should prioritize efforts to build and maintain a credible brand

image, as this not only positively influences masstige purchase intentions but also serves as a foundation for long-term customer loyalty. The result further revealed that the consumers who intend to buy cars focus more on brand credibility and spend more time collecting information about different car brands and models than those who intend to buy clothes. Hence, the brand managers of the involved brands in terms of finances should be more careful in their marketing communications and promise realistic deliverable features of their brands to increase their purchase intentions.

5.4. Limitations and future research directions

Although the present study contributed significant theoretical and practical implications, it still has some limitations that can be conceptualized as an opportunity for future research. For instance, this study is based on two independent studies among consumers of clothing and car brands. However, both studies used a cross-sectional research design to collect data. In contrast, future researchers can utilize time-lagged or longitudinal research design to collect data from the study respondents to devise some valuable insights for the consistency of the response over time. Moreover, results are limited to two types of masstige products/brands (clothing and cars) and do not reflect the overall masstige products. Future researchers can apply the same theoretical model to other masstige luxury lifestyle products, i.e., cosmetics, footwear, jewelry, laptops, cell phones, etc. Besides, conducting the same study on other sharing economies having different socio-economic factors could be an interesting opportunity for further research. Moreover, future studies can extend the current study by examining the symbolic motivation impact on consumer behavior while taking purchase intention as a mediator. Finally, future researchers can analyze masstige purchase intentions by studying the moderating effect of consumers' personality traits on the relationship between symbolic motivation and consumer purchase intentions to gain valuable insights into consumers' psychology regarding their inspirations towards masstige brands. Moreover, COVID 19 has resulted in structural changes in consumer behavior (Gordon-Wilson, 2021; Yap et al., 2021; Rayburn et al., 2021; Kursan Milaković, 2021; Nayal et al., 2021). For example, online transactions have become part of people's life in many sectors including healthcare, hospitality, financial services, food delivery etc. (Siddiqui et al., 2022; Chakraborty & Paul, 2022; Purohit, Arora & Paul, 2022; Chopdar et al., 2022). As an outcome, we need new theories, scales, methods and paradigms to carry out research studies in the post-pandemic era to analyze the new processes, patterns and problems.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Mahnaz Mansoor: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Justin Paul:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Abid Saeed:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Jun Hwa Cheah:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Software.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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