



Sustainable prestige: A case study of fabindia as a green masstige brand

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Abstract

Prestige in fashion is undergoing a structural transformation as sustainability, ethics, and cultural authenticity reshape consumer expectations. Traditionally associated with exclusivity, high prices, and limited accessibility, prestige was constructed through scarcity and symbolic distinction [34]. However, contemporary consumers increasingly interpret prestige through responsibility, identity alignment, and meaningful consumption [32, 35]. This shift has enabled the emergence of green masstige, where brands integrate sustainability into aspirational yet accessible offerings [29, 26]. This study examines Fabindia as a representative green masstige brand within the Indian fashion market. Using a qualitative case study approach grounded in secondary data and theoretical integration, the research investigates how sustainability contributes to prestige formation and mass aspirational appeal. The paper integrates masstige theory [29, 28] with consumer psychology frameworks Self-Determination Theory [13, 18] and Moral Identity Theory [5]—to explain emotional and symbolic drivers of green masstige consumption.

Keywords: Green masstige, Sustainable prestige, Fabindia, Masstige marketing, Sustainable fashion, Consumer behavior

1. Introduction

Prestige has historically been central to fashion branding, constructed through exclusivity, high price points, and symbolic distance [34, 3]. Luxury brands traditionally relied on scarcity and restricted access to signal social distinction [2]. In this classical model, prestige was primarily economic and hierarchical. However, shifts in global consumption patterns particularly in emerging markets have transformed aspirational logic. Rising middle-class expansion and increasing accessibility to premium brands have democratized luxury consumption [30, 20]. Masstige brands emerged within this transformation, offering aspirational symbolism at attainable price levels [29, 26]. Research confirms that masstige consumption is driven by identity expression, emotional gratification, and perceived social mobility rather than exclusivity alone [32, 31]. Simultaneously, sustainability has become a defining issue in fashion consumption. The fashion industry is widely criticized for environmental degradation, excessive resource use, and waste generation [17, 15]. Fast fashion models have intensified these impacts [21]. As awareness increases, consumers evaluate brands based on ethical sourcing, environmental responsibility, and transparency [38, 41]. Within this evolving context, green masstige has emerged as a hybrid positioning strategy. Green masstige brands combine sustainability with accessible prestige positioning [14, 26]. Sustainability enhances authenticity and strengthens emotional engagement [35]. Yet, limited

scholarly work explains how sustainability directly reconstructs prestige meaning within masstige brands. Fabindia represents a compelling example. Rooted in artisan networks and natural materials, it combines sustainability with accessible premium positioning. This study therefore explores how sustainability contributes to prestige formation in green masstige contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sustainability in the fashion industry

The fashion industry is among the most resource-intensive sectors globally [17]. Environmental concerns related to water usage, chemical pollution, and textile waste have intensified scrutiny [15]. Fast fashion has accelerated consumption cycles, shortening product lifespans [21]. Sustainable fashion emphasizes responsible sourcing, ethical labor practices, and circular production systems [10, 41]. The triple bottom line framework—economic, environmental, and social performance—supports sustainable business models [24]. Brands integrating sustainability often gain credibility and trust [40]. Importantly, sustainability enhances brand authenticity, which positively influences purchase intention in masstige contexts [14].

2.2 Democratization of luxury and masstige

Luxury has evolved from exclusivity toward accessibility [30]. Masstige brands occupy the middle ground between luxury and

mass markets ^[29]. They provide aspirational symbolism without elite exclusion ^[26]. Empirical studies show that masstige consumption is influenced by symbolic motivations and emotional value ^[32]. Bibliometric analyses confirm masstige as a growing research stream ^[39]. The masstige model has been validated across industries ^[28]. Masstige brands are characterized by aspirational symbolism, accessible pricing, emotional value, and broad distribution ^[37].

2.3 Sustainability–masstige convergence

Sustainability strengthens authenticity and emotional attachment ^[14]. Environmental concern influences brand love in masstige consumers ^[35]. Sustainable positioning enhances perceived prestige by signaling responsibility and moral alignment ^[25]. Sustainable luxury research suggests that ethical positioning does not dilute prestige but can enhance symbolic value ^[41].

2.4 Consumer psychology and emotional drivers

Self-Determination Theory proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive intrinsic motivation ^[13]. Sustainable consumption allows consumers to exercise autonomy (ethical choice), competence (informed decision-making), and relatedness (connection to communities) ^[18]. Moral Identity Theory suggests consumers derive pride and moral satisfaction from ethical purchases ^[5]. These emotions strengthen brand attachment ^[33]. Thus, sustainability may reconstruct prestige by linking consumption with identity and responsibility rather than exclusivity.

Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the evolution of sustainable prestige within the fashion industry.
- To analyze Fabindia's positioning as a green masstige brand.
- To understand how sustainability contributes to authenticity, prestige, and consumer engagement.
- To explore consumer motivations toward sustainable masstige brands.
- To develop a conceptual explanation of how sustainability converts into masstige value.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine Fabindia as a representative example of a green masstige brand. A case study method is appropriate for exploring complex branding phenomena where contextual understanding, cultural relevance, and interpretive insights are essential. Fabindia was selected due to its strong sustainability-oriented positioning, emphasis on traditional craftsmanship, and accessible premium identity within the Indian fashion market. The brand provides a suitable context to explore how sustainability contributes to prestige formation and masstige value creation. The research relies on secondary data sources, including academic literature, brand communications, company narratives, sustainability

statements, product positioning, and publicly available information related to Fabindia's operations and philosophy. These sources were used to understand the brand's sustainability orientation, market positioning, and consumer engagement strategies. In addition, observational insights were incorporated to interpret how Fabindia communicates its values through retail environments, product storytelling, visual identity, and brand messaging. Consumer perception patterns were inferred from publicly expressed narratives, reviews, and engagement trends to understand how sustainability and cultural authenticity influence brand meaning. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring patterns related to sustainability practices, authenticity cues, prestige symbolism, emotional engagement, and accessibility were identified and interpreted. This interpretive process enabled the study to link sustainability initiatives with perceived prestige, identity expression, and masstige positioning. The methodology focuses on developing conceptual insights rather than statistical generalization. The aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of how sustainability-driven branding can shape prestige perceptions and consumer relationships in emerging markets.

4. Findings

The findings reveal that Fabindia's positioning as a green masstige brand is built on the integration of sustainability, cultural authenticity, accessibility, and emotional connection. The brand does not depend on exclusivity to create prestige. Instead, it constructs value through responsibility, meaning, and identity. Fabindia's sustainability orientation is visible across its product development and sourcing practices. The use of natural fabrics, traditional production methods, and artisan-driven manufacturing reinforces environmental responsibility and ethical credibility. Sustainability functions as a foundational philosophy rather than a promotional element. The artisan-centered supply chain strengthens authenticity and social value. Consumers perceive Fabindia purchases as supporting rural livelihoods and preserving traditional craftsmanship. This perception enhances emotional satisfaction and increases perceived product value.

Prestige in Fabindia is shaped by cultural meaning and simplicity. The brand is associated with sophistication, heritage, and responsible living rather than overt status display. This creates a form of prestige rooted in awareness and authenticity. Accessibility also plays a central role. Pricing strategies position Fabindia above fast fashion yet below luxury brands, allowing aspirational consumers to experience premium value without exclusivity. This balance strengthens its masstige positioning. Consumers demonstrate emotional engagement with the brand. Fabindia represents identity, culture, and ethical consumption, which encourages attachment and repeat purchases. The brand becomes a medium through which consumers express values such as sustainability and cultural pride. Retail environments reinforce trust and authenticity. Store aesthetics, storytelling, and product presentation create a meaningful consumption experience

rather than a purely transactional one. Long-term loyalty emerges from alignment between brand philosophy and consumer values. Customers who resonate with sustainability and cultural authenticity often become advocates and repeat buyers.

Sustainability as authenticity signal

Fabindia integrates sustainability into sourcing and production through natural fabrics and artisan partnerships. Sustainability functions structurally rather than as superficial marketing. This aligns with research showing authenticity drives masstige purchase intention [14].

4.1 Cultural authenticity and identity meaning

Fabindia’s brand communication emphasizes heritage and craftsmanship. Cultural storytelling strengthens symbolic value and identity expression [20]. Consumers associate the brand with cultural pride and responsibility.

4.2 Accessible premium positioning

Fabindia’s pricing positions it above fast fashion yet below luxury couture, consistent with masstige criteria [29, 28].

Accessibility enables aspirational inclusion without elite exclusion.

4.3 Emotional and Moral Outcomes

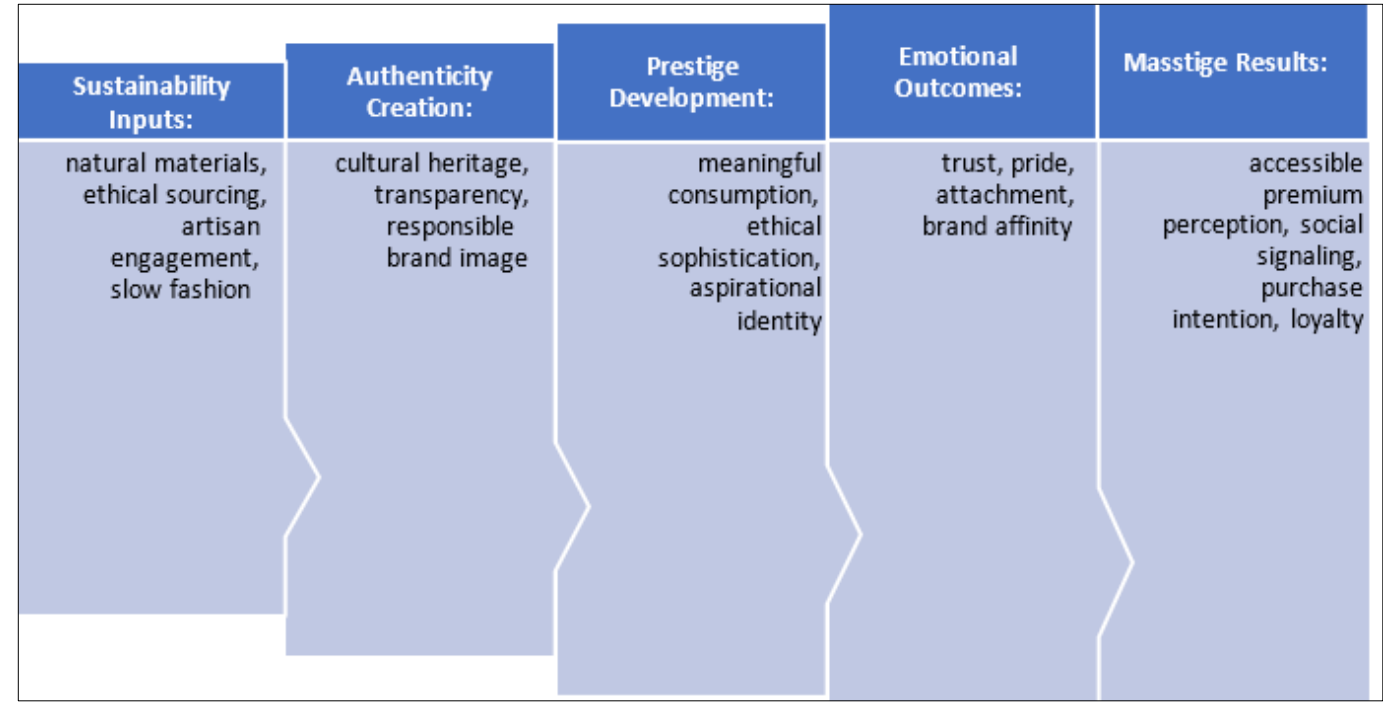
Consumers experience pride and moral satisfaction when purchasing sustainable products [5]. These emotions reinforce attachment and loyalty [33]. Fabindia’s positioning activates similar emotional mechanisms.

4.4 Prestige Reconstruction

Prestige in Fabindia is constructed through ethical sophistication and cultural authenticity rather than scarcity. This reflects a transition from economic prestige to emotional prestige [32].

5. Conceptual model: sustainability-driven masstige prestige

The study proposes a conceptual pathway explaining how sustainability translates into prestige and engagement: This framework integrates masstige theory [29], SDT [13], and Moral Identity Theory [5].



This framework explains how sustainability becomes symbolic capital and drives masstige value.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that sustainability is increasingly redefining the foundations of prestige in fashion. Earlier models of prestige depended heavily on exclusivity, high prices, and limited accessibility. In contrast, contemporary consumers associate prestige with responsibility, authenticity, and cultural relevance [32, 40]. Fabindia demonstrates how sustainability can strengthen aspirational value rather than diminish it. Authenticity emerges as a key mechanism in this transformation. When sustainability is embedded in sourcing, production, and storytelling, it strengthens consumer trust and

emotional engagement [14]. Consumers respond positively to brands that align with meaningful values rather than temporary trends. Masstige positioning is reinforced through accessibility. Consumers aspire to premium value but seek affordability and alignment with personal beliefs [20, 26]. Fabindia bridges this gap by offering products that are aspirational yet attainable. Emotional outcomes further strengthen this positioning. Consumers experience pride and satisfaction when purchases reflect environmental and social responsibility [35]. These emotional benefits deepen brand relationships and encourage loyalty. Cultural storytelling plays an additional role in prestige

formation. Narratives around artisans, heritage, and tradition transform consumption into a symbolic experience ^[36]. Ethical consumption becomes part of identity expression and social signaling ^[26]. The study supports the argument that sustainability enhances brand equity and long-term engagement. Fabindia illustrates a hybrid model where accessibility, authenticity, and responsibility combine to create a contemporary form of prestige relevant to emerging markets. This study demonstrates that sustainability is redefining prestige in fashion. Rather than relying on exclusivity, contemporary prestige increasingly emerges from responsibility and authenticity ^[41]. Fabindia illustrates how sustainability functions as symbolic capital within masstige positioning. Authenticity enhances emotional engagement, while accessibility democratizes aspiration. Emotional outcomes such as pride and moral satisfaction strengthen brand loyalty ^[35]. Thus, green masstige reflects a structural shift in aspirational consumption where prestige is emotionally reconstructed.

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that sustainability and prestige are no longer opposing ideas in contemporary fashion markets. Instead, they increasingly complement and reinforce each other. Fabindia illustrates how ethical production, cultural relevance, and accessible pricing can together create aspirational value for consumers. Prestige is no longer defined only by exclusivity or high price points; it is increasingly shaped by responsibility, authenticity, and meaningful consumption experiences. The findings show that consumers today seek brands that reflect their values, identity, and social awareness. In this context, Fabindia succeeds in positioning itself as a green masstige brand by embedding sustainability into its business philosophy rather than treating it as a marketing strategy. Its focus on natural materials, artisan engagement, and cultural storytelling helps build credibility and emotional resonance. As a result, consumers perceive the brand as both aspirational and responsible, which strengthens trust and long-term engagement. Another important insight is the role of emotional and symbolic value in shaping sustainable prestige. Consumers derive satisfaction not only from product quality but also from the knowledge that their purchases contribute to social and environmental well-being. This alignment between personal values and brand identity fosters deeper attachment, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth. Sustainability therefore becomes a source of symbolic prestige rather than a trade-off against luxury or aspiration. The study also highlights the importance of accessibility in masstige positioning. Fabindia's ability to maintain premium perception while remaining attainable allows a wider consumer base to participate in responsible consumption. This balance between aspiration and affordability strengthens its relevance in emerging markets where middle-class consumers seek both identity expression and value alignment. From a strategic perspective, the findings suggest that future fashion brands must integrate sustainability into their core identity to remain competitive. Ethical sourcing, transparency, cultural relevance, and emotional storytelling are likely to play an increasingly

important role in brand differentiation. Prestige in the future will depend not only on price or exclusivity but also on authenticity, responsibility, and emotional connection with consumers. Overall, the study indicates that green masstige branding represents a significant shift in the fashion industry. It reflects a new consumption logic in which aspiration is linked with ethics, and prestige emerges from meaningful engagement rather than scarcity alone. Fabindia's model provides a useful direction for brands aiming to balance sustainability with aspirational appeal while building long-term consumer relationships. Sustainability and prestige are no longer opposing constructs. Fabindia demonstrates how ethical production, cultural authenticity, and accessible pricing create aspirational value. Prestige in emerging markets is increasingly shaped by identity, responsibility, and emotional meaning rather than exclusivity alone. Green masstige branding reflects a new consumption logic where aspiration aligns with ethics and cultural authenticity.

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