



Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Masstige Marketing : Balancing Exclusivity with Accessibility (A Theory- Building Conceptual Framework)

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) quickly reshaping the forms of accessibility, aspirational value, and symbolic prestige in modern consumer markets. AI can be used to scale the creation of individualized and emotionally connotative experiences, but the risk of over-automation threatens to strip the exclusivity which aspirational value is based on. To fill this gap, this paper proposes a conceptual model that builds a theory-based framework, the Masstige-AI Equilibrium Framework (MAIEF), which explained how the marketing process mediated by AI can simultaneously destabilize and democratize prestige. Taking an integrative conceptual perspective, the paper combined the existing literature on consumer psychology, branding and AI ethics to determine the core mechanisms connecting AI marketing capabilities and the masstige brand equity. The framework proposed that the personalization through AI increases perceived accessibility and emotional engagement while the personalization's relationship to perceived exclusivity is curvilinear with both under and over-automation weakening symbolic value. The central mediating process through which AI affects brand outcomes is consumer perception and the moderating effect of ethical AI practices as a mechanism that maintains accessibility-exclusivity equilibrium. At the managerial level, the framework provides decision-based advice on how to balance the level of AI intensity, adopt limited personalization, maintain a symbolic distance in the digital environments, and institutionalize ethical AI governance. On a larger scale, it suggests that the sustainability of the masstige branding in the long run will not depend on the degree of automation but on the ability of companies to balance technological intelligence with values that focus on people.

Keywords: Masstige-AI Equilibrium Framework (MAIEF); masstige marketing; artificial intelligence in marketing; aspirational branding; ethical AI; consumer perception; brand equity; accessibility-exclusivity balance.

1 Introduction

The accelerated implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing has radically altered the way in which brands generate value, communicate with customers and make

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markets more accessible [1,2], revolutionizing marketing from a firm-driven communication process to an adaptive, data-driven system [3,4]. Simultaneously, another approach has been emerged, which is called masstige marketing, which is situated between the "mass and luxury" segments and allows a brand to democratize prestige without neglecting the symbolic exclusivity [5,6]. Originating from the notion of "luxury for the masses" [7], masstige has evolved form of a distribution and pricing strategy, into a multidimensional concept, including the identity creation, aspirational consumption, and value of emotionality [8,9] [10,11]. The modern consumer is becoming much more interested in a brand that is technologically sophisticated and has a truly authentic meaning, expecting a brand where the consumer can have a personalized experience without experiencing the loss of prestige. AI-driven marketing features in form of recommendations systems, generative content, predictive analytics, and automated customer interfaces have enabled marketers to provide more personalized and emotion-tapping brand experiences at scale [12,13]. These technologies allow the luxury to be digitalized and democratized by converting prestige as scarcity into the algorithmically selected and widely available experience [14,15].

This shift has enhanced the redefinition of the masstige consumption in the post-COVID marketplace where experience authenticity and digital interaction have become the primary value-creating elements [15]. Nevertheless, this development also exacerbates the main paradox of masstige marketing, the desire to seek exclusivity and accessibility at the same time. Although AI boosts the personalization, relevance, and reach, too much automation and hyper-democratization can blur the symbolic distance and weaken the sense of prestige upon which masstige brands depends [16,17]. Further, the status signaling alone no longer dominates in the masstige consumption. The current studies emphasize the increasing significance of intrinsic motivation like authenticity, emotional satisfaction, and self-expression [13]. These motivations can be optimized by AI-mediated interactions with personalized experience, however, there is the risk of ethical issues concerning algorithmic bias, manipulation, data privacy, and loss of human warmth in brand relationships [18].

Although the importance of AI in marketing increases and the scope of masstige research is growing, the two streams are still not closely related. The existing frameworks of prestige as an element of emotional value, consumer perception, and accessibility, such as the "Masstige Pyramid", the "Masstige Mean Score" (MMS) [8] and "MasCal scale" [11], do not consider the impact of AI-based automation and personalization on brand equity. Empirically validated models that place emotion, pride, and status in masstige consumption [10], and the "Motivation-Desire-Outcome" (MDO) framework [13] do not focus on the effects of AI interfaces in relation to these psychological factors. Meanwhile, the literature regarding AI-in-marketing has placed a vast emphasis on the results of performance, efficiency in personalization, and customer experience, with little consideration of the symbolic prestige and aspirational branding processes. The generalized ethical discussions of AI in marketing lacks specificity and pays little attention to the dissimilarity of masstige brands, where technological democratization may destroy exclusiveness and ethical misalignment may weaken trust and authenticity.

Although despite the recent findings that put an emphasis on the need to align the digital transformation with human values in masstige context [17,18], a conceptual framework that integrates the abilities of AI, ethical governance, as well as the balance between accessibility and exclusivity, is still lacking. The three important gaps were identified. First, there is no theoretical integration of masstige marketing and AI-driven brand management. Second, psychological and ethical implications of algorithmic marketing for symbolic prestige are not yet thoroughly examined. Third, the literature does not have an equilibrium conceptualization on how technological intelligence can be used to increase accessibility without degrading aspirational value. In order to fill these gaps, the present study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the role of AI marketing capabilities in changing the accessibility-exclusivity balance in masstige branding?

RQ2: How does AI affect masstige brand equity through consumer perception mechanisms?

RQ3: How do ethical practices of AI moderate these relationships to maintain symbolic prestige?

In this study, the Masstige-AI Equilibrium Framework (MAIEF) is developed as a conceptual model of theory building that clarifies how AI-mediated marketing as a process that can democratize and endanger prestige. There are four main theoretical contributions made by the study. First, it applies the concept of masstige theory to the AI-mediated marketplace through incorporating both technological capability and symbolic brand value creation. Second, it presents an equilibrium logic, suggesting that neither under- nor over-automation can reinforce the results of masstige, and an optimal level of AI intensity sustains the good balance between accessibility and exclusivity. Third, it conceptualizes ethical AI practices as a moderating mechanism that would maintain trust, authenticity, and emotional warmth in technology-mediated brand experiences. Fourth, it locates consumer perception as the key mediating process between AI capability and sustainable masstige brand equity. By bridging the gaps between consumer psychology, branding theory, and AI ethics, the proposed framework offers a testable foundation for future empirical research and a way to examine aspirational branding from a techno-ethical perspective.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. Section 2 describes the method of review and the development of the theory. Section 3 includes a systematic literature review of the basics of masstige marketing, AI marketing capabilities and their integration. Section 4 elaborates the MAIEF, its core constructs, logic, and boundary conditions, and research propositions. The theoretical, managerial, and societal implications are addressed in section 5, including the need to regulate AI intensity and aspiration to establish ethical AI governance as part of the masstige branding. Section 6 presents a research agenda in the future to be validated empirically. Section 7 concludes the study.

2 Review Approach and Method for Theory Development

2.1 Conceptual Theory-Building Design

The study used a theory-building conceptual research design in developing the MAIEF. The goal is not to empirically test causal relationships but to integrate fragmented yet complementary literature streams to produce a new theoretically consistent and empirically testable theoretical framework. The conceptual research is especially suitable in emerging domains where theoretical integration lags fast-changing technological and market trends. Prior research has examined AI in marketing, masstige marketing, and ethical AI in isolation, but their systematic integration remains limited. The research is based on an integrative theory-building method whereby a review of the previous existing research is carried out, and synthesized to determine the core constructs, mechanisms and conditions of the boundaries. This approach allows building new conceptual linkages and clarification of relationships that have not been studied simultaneously in the existing models. Rather than offering a descriptive narrative of existing studies, the structure of this review is designed to help the development of theory by: (1) identifying dominant conceptualizations in each literature stream, (2) discussing their limitations in the context of AI-mediated branding, and (3) integrating them into a coherent explanatory framework.

2.2 Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

The literature review was carried out with a structured and transparent search process to ensure conceptual coverage and depth in the theory. Relevant publications were identified by using "Google Scholar" database. The search used combinations of keywords including "masstige marketing, mass prestige, AI in marketing, luxury democratization, generative AI and branding, consumer perception, algorithmic personalization, brand equity, AI ethics, algorithmic fairness and responsible marketing". The selection process was carried out on three criteria. First, priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles in order to ensure academic rigor and conceptual reliability. Second, seminal and highly cited works were included in order to establish the theoretical foundations of masstige marketing and AI-enabled branding. Third, recent research was emphasized to reflect the rapid pace of changes in AI technologies and ethical debates in marketing. Studies were excluded if they: (1) addressed AI only from a technical or engineering perspective without any marketing or consumer relevance, (2) dealt with luxury or mass marketing, without any theoretical implication regarding the dynamics of prestige-accessibility, or (3) did not have any conceptual relevance to consumer perception, branding, or ethical governance. This ensured that the selected body of literature contributed to the development of theory rather than coverage in a descriptive manner.

2.3 Thematic Synthesis and Construct Identification

The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic synthesis in order to construct a systematic theory. The process occurred in three stages. First of all, some core constructs within each domain were extracted. The key areas focused on by masstige research include "accessibility, emotional value, symbolic prestige, identity expression,

and consumer perception"; key areas focused on by AI-in-marketing include "personalization, generative content, predictive analytics, automation and data-driven decision-making"; and key areas focused on by ethical AI include "transparency, privacy, fairness, trust and responsible governance". Second, a cross-domain comparison revealed crucial conceptual tensions as well as missing linkages. Masstige studies describe the creation of prestige but say nothing about the role of AI-enabled scalability; AI marketing research is concerned with efficiency and personalization and ignores the symbolic aspiration; and ethical AI literature promotes trust and fairness, while overlooking the duality of accessibility and exclusivity that is the essence of masstige branding. These disconnections suggested an integrative equilibrium perspective. In the third stage, the constructs were reorganized in a causal logic. AI marketing capabilities were positioned as the primary enabling mechanism, the mediating process of consumer perception through which the symbolic value is formed, and the moderating condition of ethical AI practice which stabilizes the authenticity and trust. Contextual boundary conditions - "product consumer traits, category, market environment" - were added to capture variation in the equilibrium point. This systematic synthesis led to the MAIEF, a theory building model that describes the non-linear balance of accessibility versus exclusivity of AI mediated branding and develops propositions for future empirical validation.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Masstige Marketing Foundations

The concept of masstige marketing is a redefinition of classic luxury in terms of having to reconcile the mass accessibility with the symbolic prestige. The notion "luxury of the masses", that was defined by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) [7], made it possible to recognize that the premium value could be democratized without impairing the aspirational appeal. Based on this, Paul (2015) [8] conceptualized masstige as the strategic marketing mix that generates "mass prestige" that is operationalized via the Masstige Pyramid Model and the MMS. This piece of work changed the notion of prestige as a scarcity-based phenomenon into a measurable and scalable phenomenon of market. Further studies expanded the concept of masstige beyond economically available to social and psychological value creation. MasCal scale proved that perceived mass prestige is based on brand trust, emotional attachment, and social recognition besides financial attainability [11]. Pride, emotion and self-expression are the main drivers of masstige purchase intention, and luxury has been redefined as an affective, identity-relevant experience as opposed to a status-based signal [10]. This perspective was reinforced by the MDO framework which highlighted masstige consumption as a psychologically driven process in which intrinsic fulfilment and symbolic meaning play a central role [13]. Digital exposure, urbanization and growth of aspirational middle-class markets have also influenced the development of the concept. The changes that happened in the post-pandemic period boosted the transition to the digital mediation and experience-based forms of luxury [16,17]. Masstige brands become more cultural intermediaries that allow social movements and reinforce consumer self-concept [17]. This theoretical

evolution is summarized in Table 1, which depicts a shift in terms of price-prestige trade-offs toward experientially and emotionally based form of aspirational consumption aligned with digital democratization.

Table 1. Theoretical Evolution of Masstige Marketing

Author(s)	Core Contribution	Key Dimensions	Theoretical Insights
Silverstein & Fiske (2003) [7]	Introduced “luxury for the masses” and the democratization of prestige	Affordability, aspiration, accessibility	Establishes the foundational accessibility-prestige paradox.
Paul (2015) [8]	Masstige Pyramid Model and MMS	Price-prestige balance, emotional value, scalability	Provides measurable structure for mass prestige formation.
Ishaq et al. (2023) [11].	MasCal scale for perceived masstige value	Emotional attachment, trust, social recognition	Positions consumer perception as central to prestige creation.
Chatterjee et al. (2023) [10]	Empirical validation of pride, emotion, and status	Emotional connection, self-expression	Demonstrates affective drivers of masstige consumption.
Fatima (2024) [17]	Masstige as a cultural equilibrium	Empathy, inclusivity, symbolic prestige	Introduces the inclusivity-exclusivity balance logic.
Roy et al. (2025) [13]	MDO framework	Intrinsic motivation, fulfilment, identity expression	Provides psychological mechanism for aspirational consumption.
Dinç (2025) [16]	Post-pandemic drivers of masstige	Digital exposure, accessibility, social mobility	Links digital democratization to prestige transformation.
Wang et al. (2022) [15]	Redefinition of luxury in digital environments	Experiential value, authenticity, digital access	Establishes digital foundation for AI-mediated masstige.

3.2 AI Capabilities in Contemporary Marketing

AI has transformed the marketing by enabling the data-driven, real-time, highly and personalized consumer-focus. Strategically, AI is not only a means of operational tool, but a new market learning and customer interface design, which employs and replaces

human intelligence in service and marketing services [3,19]. Predictive analytics and machine learning can enable companies to discover aspirational consumer groups, predict buying interest and perform demand forecasting with new levels of accuracy [20,21]. Recommendation systems and personalization engines increase perceived relevance and emotional appeal through customization of brand interactions to personal preferences which increases engagement and loyalty [22]. Generative AI and virtual brand agents can also create new digital brand experiences: they allow creating aspirational content and having personalized service experiences at significant scale. Those technologies turn digital communication into a novel kind of symbolic capital, in which algorithmic curation becomes an alternative to physical scarcity as a signifier of exclusivity [15]. Within the masstige context, these capabilities help brands to provide individualized prestige experiences at scale supporting aspirational inclusivity and emotional satisfaction [13]. Meanwhile, the ethical issues that accompany algorithmic decision-making and automation are serious. The problems of privacy, bias, lack of transparency, and a perception of manipulation affect consumer trust and brand authenticity directly [23–25]. Skepticism can be raised through highly optimized and impersonal AI-mediated communication, and emotional connection and credibility can be strengthened with transparent and human-centered digital storytelling [17,18]. Table 2 systematizes the strategic functions of AI capabilities in masstige value creation and proves that these technologies at the same time improve accessibility and allow the creation of exclusivity through curated experience.

Table 2: AI Capabilities and Their Strategic Role in Masstige Value Creation

AI Capability	Application in Masstige Branding	Strategic Role in Accessibility–Exclusivity Balance	Theoretical Implication
Predictive analytics	Identification of aspirational consumer segments	Expands market accessibility without mass commodification	Enables scalable aspiration [13,16].
Recommendation systems	Personalized product and content curation	Creates perceived selectivity within large audiences	Simulates individualized prestige [8,17].
Chatbots & virtual brand agents	Real-time interactive brand service	Increases experiential accessibility while maintaining intimacy	Digitally reproduces luxury service logic [17,18].
Generative AI content	Creation of aspirational visual and narrative storytelling	Strengthens symbolic and emotional brand value	Scalable cultural relevance [10,17].
Dynamic personalization engines	Behavioral and psychographic targeting	Enhances relevance but risks over-democratization	Introduces non-linear prestige effects [16,17,26].
AI ethical governance tools	Fairness monitoring, privacy protection, transparency	Preserves trust and authenticity	Moderating mechanism for brand equity [17,18].

3.3 The Intersection of AI and Masstige Branding

The intersection of AI and masstige marketing gives rise to an innovative paradigm where prestige is destabilized and democratized at the same time. AI can be used to deliver personalized luxury to a large audience, increase access to aspirational consumption and redefine exclusivity by creating the interactions that are digitally curated [15]. This conforms to the internalized drive of masstige consumer, personalization leads to greater emotional fulfilment and self-expression and brand intimacy [13]. Nonetheless, AI-based experiences also pose a threat to symbolic distance between the nuanced distinction on which aspirational value is based. As personalization is projected everywhere and brand experiences are homogenized by means of algorithmic optimization, the rarity attributed to prestige might be weakened [17]. This risk is especially severe in the case of masstige since the brand is at the same time relying on the extensive availability and preserved exclusivity. Over democratization can result into commodification and lack of personalization can make them less relevant and less engaging. These dynamics are mediated through consumer perceptions. The perceived fairness, authenticity, and trust define the extent to which standardized interactions based on AI foster or reduce symbolic value. Customers used digital brand communication in an ethical perspective, preferring open, understanding, and human-related experiences to just efficiency-based interactions [17,18]. This results in the transformation of ethical AI into a means of control as well as a tool of strategic resources to maintain prestige. The essence of ethical alignment is one that is distinctly amplified in the masstige branding. In classic luxury, exclusivity is formally secured through scarcity whereas in the mass markets symbolic value is less central.

Masstige brands, on the other hand, use a fine balance between scale and aspiration. Ethical failures of AI deployment can thus have a dual erosive impact by lowering levels of trust and prestige at the same time. Thematic integration of literature reviewed is presented in Table 3, and it is the conceptual basis under which the theory development was performed. The synthesis determines the AI-enabled personalization to be the facilitating process, consumer perception to be the mediating process in which the symbolic value is created, ethical engagement to be the moderating condition, and sustainable brand equity to be the outcome. The synthesis identifies “AI capability - consumer perception - brand equity” as the core causal chain, with ethical AI as the moderating condition and equilibrium as the governing logic. The literature review shows that masstige theory describes the creation of prestige as an emotional and cultural category, and AI marketing research describes the creation of personalization and scalability as technologically possible. Transparency, fairness, and trust in digital interactions are explained by ethical AI studies. Nevertheless, these streams are still conceptually disjointed and lack a coherent account on how the use of masstige brands can be one that can perpetuate aspirational value in AI-mediated contexts. In this regard, this study developed

the MAIEF to explain the effect of AI capabilities in the brand equity via consumer perception and how ethical AI practices can control this aspect to maintain the equilibrium between accessibility and the exclusivity.

Table 3: Cross-Domain Thematic Synthesis and Construct Development for MAIEF

Thematic Domain	Key Insight from Literature	Role in MAIEF	Construct Type
Digital democratization of luxury	Prestige increasingly mediated through digital access and experiences [16][17]	Enables aspirational inclusivity	Contextual driver
Emotional and identity value	Pride, fulfilment, and self-expression drive masstige consumption [10][13]	Mechanism linking experience to symbolic value	Mediator (consumer perception)
AI-enabled personalization	Data-driven relevance enhances engagement and intimacy [16][22]	Primary enabling mechanism	Independent variable
Authenticity and ethical engagement	Transparency, empathy, and fairness sustain trust [17] [18]	Regulates AI impact on perception	Moderator
Trust and symbolic prestige	Emotional credibility determines long-term brand equity [11][16]	Final aspirational outcome	Dependent variable
Risk of over-democratization	Excessive automation reduces perceived exclusivity [17]	Justifies equilibrium (non-linear logic)	Boundary condition

4 The Masstige - AI Equilibrium Framework (MAIEF)

4.1 Conceptual Foundations of MAIEF

The growing use of AI in branding contexts mandates a theoretical restructuring of the relationship between prestige and accessibility in its ability to simultaneously construct and maintain. Traditional masstige models described the symbolic value in terms of marketing mix configurations and consumer perceptions [8,11], while the recent frameworks in psychology focus on intrinsic motivation, identity expression and emotional fulfilment [10,13]. However, these models do not consider the technological mediation of experiences of brands. At the same time, literature on AI in marketing explains automation, personalization, and efficiency but does not explain the relationship between these capabilities, aspirational value and symbolic distance. The MAIEF brings these streams together by suggesting that the AI-driven marketing functions affect the masstige brand equity by affecting consumer perception and are controlled by ethical AI practices to maintain the balance between accessibility

and exclusivity. The framework approaches prestige formation as a dynamic and non-linear process with both inadequate and excessive AI deployment having the potential to undermine symbolic value. In this way, MAIEF is extending the concept of masstige theory into AI mediated marketplaces and proposing a techno-ethical logic of aspirational branding.

4.2 Definition of Core Constructs

- **AI Marketing Capabilities:** AI marketing capabilities are the use of machine learning, recommendation systems, predictive analytics, generative content and virtual brand agents for enabling automated, data-driven, and personalized engagement with consumers [16,27]. These capabilities increase relevance, interactivity, and accessibility through experience in the form of scaled, individualized prestige encounters. In masstige situations, AI becomes the main enabling mechanism of aspirational inclusivity.
- **Perceived Accessibility:** Perceived accessibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive a brand to be attainable, with respect to interaction, opportunity to purchase and experiential participation [7,16]. A greater perception of this is created through AI-driven personalization by customizing communication and offerings to individual needs, thereby achieving an enlargement of aspirational reach without necessarily reducing price barriers.
- **Perceived Exclusivity:** Perceived exclusivity indicates the consumer's feelings of symbolic exclusivity, uniqueness, and selective belonging with respect to a brand [8,11]. It is sustained by controlled experiences that have been curated, by differentiated storytelling, and by controlled access to prestige-enhancing interaction. Excessive standardization and over-automation may diminish this perception through the creation of homogeneous encounters with brands.
- **Authenticity:** It refers to the perceived genuineness, emotional warmth and culture specific nature of AI-mediated brand interactions. The aspects of human-centered design, transparent communication and value-based personalization reinforce authenticity that is crucial for aspirational consumption [17,18].
- **Trust and Perceived Manipulation:** Trust is consumer confidence in the fairness, transparency, and integrity of AI-enabled brand practice while perceived manipulation is consumer concern for the misuse of data, algorithmic bias, and opaque decision-making [28,29]. These sorts of perceptions are the determinants of whether AI builds or destroys symbolic value.
- **Masstige Brand Equity:** Masstige brand equity is defined as the sum of perception of prestige, emotional attachment, loyalty and symbolic value by results of successful balance of accessibility and exclusivity [8,11].
- **Ethical AI Practices:** Ethical AI practices are transparent, fair, privacy-preserving and empathetic implementation of intelligent systems ensuring responsible personalization and avoiding algorithmic manipulation [17,18]. Within MAIEF, ethical AI is a moderating mechanism for the preservation of authenticity, and trust.

4.3 Equilibrium Logic (Curvilinear Perspective)

The central theoretical premise of MAIEF is that there is a non-linear relationship between AI deployment and masstige brand equity. This curvilinear effect is consistent with the "too-much-of-a-good-thing" logic in marketing and organizational research that suggests strategic resources bring about value only to a certain optimum level, beyond which their effects become detrimental [26,30].

- Under-automation: Low levels of adoption of AI limit the personalization of experience, limit the accessibility of experience and weaken the relevance to consumers; this limits the aspirational reach.
- Over-automation: High levels of AI adoption create limitations to personalization, accessibility to experience and consumer relevance, limiting aspirational reach.
- Optimal AI Intensity: At moderate levels, AI allows for individual and emotionally resonant brand experiences with curated exclusivity. This is the equilibrium point where accessibility and symbolic prestige are balanced together.

4.4 Mediating Mechanisms: Consumer Perception

Consumer perception is the core mediating process through which AI capabilities affect masstige brand equity. Personalized interactions positively affect emotional engagement, self-expression and perceived brand intimacy [10,13], which in turn improves symbolic attachment and loyalty. However, negative perceptions associated with inauthenticity or manipulation weaken this relationship. Thus, the impact of AI on brand equity is indirect and dependent on consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations of experiences mediated by AI. Prior research on algorithmic decision-making demonstrates that consumers systematically categorized their evaluation of AI in terms of competence, perceived warmth, and transparency, which affects adoption, trust, and perceived personalization benefits [28,29,31].

4.5 Moderating Role of Ethical AI

Ethical AI practices govern the effect of AI capabilities in consumer perception. Transparency, fairness, and consent-based personalization help to generate trust and authenticity and reinforce the positive impact of AI. In contrast, opaque and exploitative AI deployment is a source of perceived manipulation that causes prestige dilution to accelerate. Ethical AI therefore acts as the mechanism to hold the balance of accessibility vs exclusivity and can make sustainable aspirational branding [25,29].

4.6 Boundary Conditions of the Framework

The equilibrium point proposed in MAIEF varies across contexts.

- Product and Service Category: There are different levels of tolerance for AI mediated personalization in different product categories (e.g., fashion, hospitality, digital luxury).
- Consumer Traits: Consumer need for uniqueness, privacy concern and digital readiness lead to response to AI-enabled interactions and how accessibility can make consumers more or less prestigious.

- **Market and Regulatory Context:** Data governance regimes, technological infrastructure and cultural attitudes towards AI impact the effectiveness of ethical AI practices and the authenticity of genuine AI.

4.7 Conceptual Model of MAIEF

The framework's proposed that: AI marketing capabilities → influence perceived accessibility and exclusivity → influence perceived consumer perception (authenticity, trust, emotional value) → influence masstige brand equity. Ethical AI practices moderate the relation of AI capabilities to consumer perception while contextual boundary conditions affect the equilibrium point. The conceptual structure of the proposed relationships is shown in Figure 1.

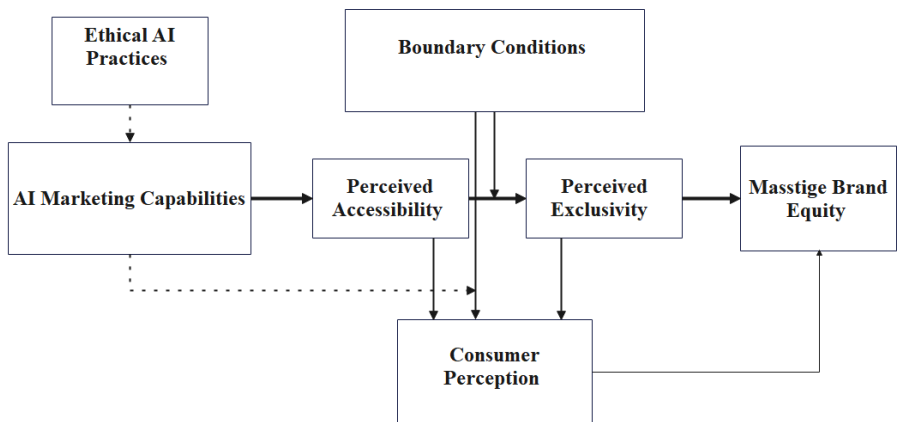


Figure 1: Proposed MAIEF

4.8 Propositions for Future Empirical Testing

- P1:** AI marketing capabilities positively influence perceived accessibility.
- P2:** AI marketing capabilities exhibit an inverted U-shaped relationship with perceived exclusivity.
- P3:** Consumer perception mediates the relationship between AI marketing capabilities and masstige brand equity.
- P4:** Authenticity and trust positively influence masstige brand equity.
- P5:** Ethical AI practices positively moderate the relationship between AI marketing capabilities and consumer perception.
- P6:** Perceived manipulation negatively moderates the effect of AI marketing capabilities on consumer perception.

P7: Consumer need for uniqueness shifts the equilibrium point toward lower levels of AI intensity.

P8: Consumer privacy concern strengthens the moderating role of ethical AI practices.

P9: The equilibrium point varies across product and service categories.

5 Discussion and Implications

The MAIEF describes how AI mediated brand experience can simultaneously enhance accessibility and preserve prestige as long as it is driven by ethical and human-centered design. By conceptualizing the relationship between AI deployment and masstige brand equity as non-linear and perception-driven, the framework advances beyond the traditional economic and socio-psychological sets of explanations of masstige and introduces a techno-ethical logic of aspirational branding.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

- **Extension of Masstige Theory into AI-Mediated Markets:** This study extends masstige theory to include intelligent technological mediation in the accessibility-prestige paradox. Earlier models have explained mass prestige in terms of pricing, distribution, and emotional value creation [8,11], and psychological models have focused on intrinsic motivation and expression of identity [10,13]. MAIEF shows how in the digital realms, prestige is being co-created through AI enabled interactions. As a result, accessibility is no longer measured by market reach and digital participation is personalized, experiential and exclusivity are maintained through curated symbolic difference rather than physical scarcity. This reconceptualization frames AI capability as having a structural element in aspirational value formation.
- **Techno-Ethical Branding Logic:** The framework presents ethical AI as a fundamental theoretical mechanism instead of addressing it as a contextual variable. Previous research has approached ethics mostly as a governance or compliance issue [17,18]. In contrast, MAIEF demonstrates that the transparency, fairness and empathetic personalization have a direct impact on authenticity and trust which are essential for symbolic prestige. Ethical AI thus operates like a value-creation process, which manages the balance between inclusiveness and exclusiveness.
- **Redefinition of Prestige as Responsible Intelligence:** The results indicate a change in the meaning of prestige from material scarcity to responsible and humanized intelligence [3,13]. In AI mediated markets, aspirational value is increasingly obtained from emotionally resonant, culturally consistent and ethically governed brand experiences. Prestige is thus associated with trustworthiness, authenticity, and capacity for symbolic differentiation of individual encounters in scale.

5.2 Managerial Implications Calibrating AI for Masstige

The MAIEF offers a framework to make decisions for managers who wish to introduce AI without compromising aspirational value.

5.2.1 Calibrating AI Intensity

- Managers need to avoid over-automating , as well as under-automating.
- Low AI intensity makes it less relevant and experientially accessible.
- Too much automation causes standardized interactions and prestige dilution.

Some of the ways by which the optimal AI intensity can be achieved are:

- AI for insights generation, along with the human-led storytelling.
- Limiting the frequency of automated interactions in high symbolic touch-points.
- Applying tiered personalization that is in line with customer value and brand positioning

5.2.2 Maintaining Symbolic Distance in Digital Environments

Symbolic exclusivity could be ensured by digitally mediated curation as opposed to physical scarcity. Some practical ways are:

- Digitally based experiences with invitations.
- Virtual products or access that is limited edition.
- Algorithmic selectivity to premium interactions.
- Differentiated levels of content for different consumer segments.

These mechanisms enable brands to have scale accessibility without losing the perceived rarity of the brand.

5.2.3 Limited Strategies of Personalization

Instead of hyper-personalization, however, masstige brands should embrace bounded personalization in which:

- Not all the brand elements are customized.
- Personalization is opt-in and explicit.
- The use of data is contextual and minimal.

This guarantees individuality but does not undermine brand coherence and symbolic value.

5.3 Ethical AI Governance in Masstige Branding

Ethical AI becomes a strategic resource for sustaining brand equity.

Transparency Mechanisms:

- Consumers are facing disclosure for AI.
- Explanation of the logic in recommendations.
- Visible data-use dashboards.

Data Strategies Based on Consent:

- Granular systems of permission.
- Value exchange for data sharing.
- Privacy first personalization models.

Algorithmic Fairness Audits:

- Regular bias testing.
- Inclusive training data sets.
- Third party ethical certification.

Pricing Fairness Policies:

- Avoidance of abusive dynamic pricing.
- Similar way of signaling prestige across segments.
- Perception based price differentiation instead of opaque automation.

Through these practices ethical governance provides strength in building trust and aspirational authenticity.

5.4 Societal and Policy Implications

At a societal level MAIEF helps with the development of inclusive aspiration by allowing for a greater participation in prestige experiences without the problem of reinforcing structural exclusion. Responsible AI deployment enables brands to democratize access without losing cultural and symbolic value.

For policymakers, the framework offers the importance of:

- Standardized AI transparency requirements.
- Consumer data protection regulations.
- Ethical certification systems for AI branding.

Such measures boost consumer welfare and provide equitable competitive environments in the luxury and mass-making digital markets.

6 Future Research Agenda

The MAIEF provides a significant theory-building foundation which requires empirical validation through various methodological traditions and market situations. Future research can investigate the causal relationships, boundary conditions, and equilibrium dynamics that are proposed in this study using experimental, survey-based and mixed methods approaches, as well as cross-cultural and generational comparisons.

6.1 Experimental Research designs

Experimental designs offer the rigorous test of MAIEF's non-linear equilibrium as they manipulate AI intensity and ethical transparency to study the impact on such things as accessibility, exclusivity, authenticity, trust, and brand equity. Factorial and Immersive scenarios-based experiments can determine the “inverted U-shaped” AI-exclusivity relationship and validate the mediating effect of consumer perception and moderating effect of ethical AI to provide robust evidence of causality for the framework.

6.2 Model Testing Using Survey Based Models (SEM / PLS-SEM)

Survey-based research can be used to test the complete structural model of MAIEF using covariance-based SEM or PLS-SEM, based on the research objectives.

A structural model may include:

- **Independent variable:** AI marketing capabilities (interactivity, personalization, automation).

- **Mediator:** Consumer perception (emotional value, trust, authenticity, perceived manipulation).
- **Moderator:** Ethical practices in AI (transparency, fairness, privacy assurance).
- **Dependent variable:** Masstige brand equity (prestige, loyalty, symbol value).

PLS-SEM is well-suited for theory development and prediction in complex models with mediation and moderation which allows testing of the curvilinear AI-exclusivity relationship, multi-group comparisons, and boundary conditions like need for uniqueness and privacy concern. Longitudinal surveys can also help to identify changes in aspirational brand relationships over time, as a result of repeated AI-mediated interactions.

6.3 Mixed-Method Approaches

Mixed-method designs allow for a greater understanding of the psychological and cultural dynamics of AI mediated masstige consumption by combining qualitative understandings with quantitative validation. Sequential approaches, configurational analysis and the integration of managerial and consumer perspectives, enable that the equilibrium logic is analyzed as a context-sensitive multi-causal phenomenon instead of a linear effect.

7 Conclusion

This study sets out to explain how masstige brands can maintain aspirational value in AI mediated marketplaces where accessibility and exclusivity need to coexist. By integrating the ideas of masstige theory, AI-enabled marketing, and ethical branding the paper developed the MAIEF which is a theory-building model of prestige formation as a technologically mediated, perception-driven, and ethically regulated process. The research has four main contributions. First, it builds on masstige theory in a digital and intelligent marketing context by introducing AI capabilities as a structural source of aspirational value, not as an operational tool. In the case of AI-mediated context, the nature of accessibility is increasingly achieved by individualized experiential involvement and exclusivity is achieved by symbolic curated differentiation. Second, the framework introduces an equilibrium logic, which shows that the relationship between AI deployment and masstige brand equity is non-linear. Both under-automation and over-automation diminish the strength of symbolic value, while an optimal level of AI intensity allows individualized but differentiated brand experiences. Third, the research defines ethical AI practices as a fundamental value-creation mechanism that stabilizes this equilibrium by enhancing authenticity and trust. Prestige is therefore redefined not in terms of scarcity simply, but of responsible and human-centered intelligence. Fourth, the framework points out consumer perception as the key mediating process through which AI enabled interactions translate into long-term masstige brand equity. Taken together, these insights re-define masstige branding as a techno-ethical and experience branding in which a symbolic value is co-created through intelligent, transparent and empathetic interactions. AI does not substitute the cultural and emotional grounds of prestige, but rather, when well and responsibly used, augments them by allowing for scalable yet meaningful personalization. In this sense, modern prestige develops based

on the capacity of the brand to unite technological sophistication with ethical management and human warmth. the MAIEF offers a conceptual framework for understanding aspirational consumption in the increasing digital markets and offers a testable framework for future empirical research.

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