



The Changing Face of Masculinity in India:

Impact on the Beauty Category

July 2021

Beauty + Masculinity

Two terms historically not seen together are now sharing space and garnering attention by marketers around the world... *including India.*

The male grooming market in India, valued at INR 140.50 Bn in 2018 is expected to grow to INR 319.82 Bn by 2024 with an annual growth rate of 15.14% during the forecast period 2018-2024.

We decided to take a closer look... to understand the evolving notions of masculinity in India and what it means for men and their engagement with the beauty category.

Masculinity in India

It's no secret that being born male in India has historically come with privileges that are not always awarded to females.

Boys were encouraged from a young age to express their 'masculinity' through predetermined patriarchal gender roles.

Experiencing preferential treatment since childhood, they were given the freedom of choice across all areas of their lives... and were able exercise those freedoms to a much greater degree than their female counterparts.

This resulted in a form of '**Carefree Masculinity**' that continued well into manhood.

= An attitude toward masculinity which granted men more independence and freedom than women, where they could live out their lives with fewer rules and greater opportunity.



So what did this mean for grooming? Or lack thereof...

As a result, men felt less of an obligation to groom.

Partly because their attention was elsewhere; progressing their education, pursuing their careers, taking care of family, engaging in their social lives...

... And partly because it was considered *more 'manly'* to not care about grooming.

Which meant minimal effort was put into 'cleaning up' i.e. looser fitting clothes, less kept hair, casual beards

Frankly, grooming was not how they assessed their worth.

However, things are changing in a major way.

Over time, we've been seeing a shift in masculinity due to key socio-cultural changes impacting what it means to be a man in India today.

*Female
Empowerment*

Physical Status

*Personal
Branding*

*Professional
Grooming*



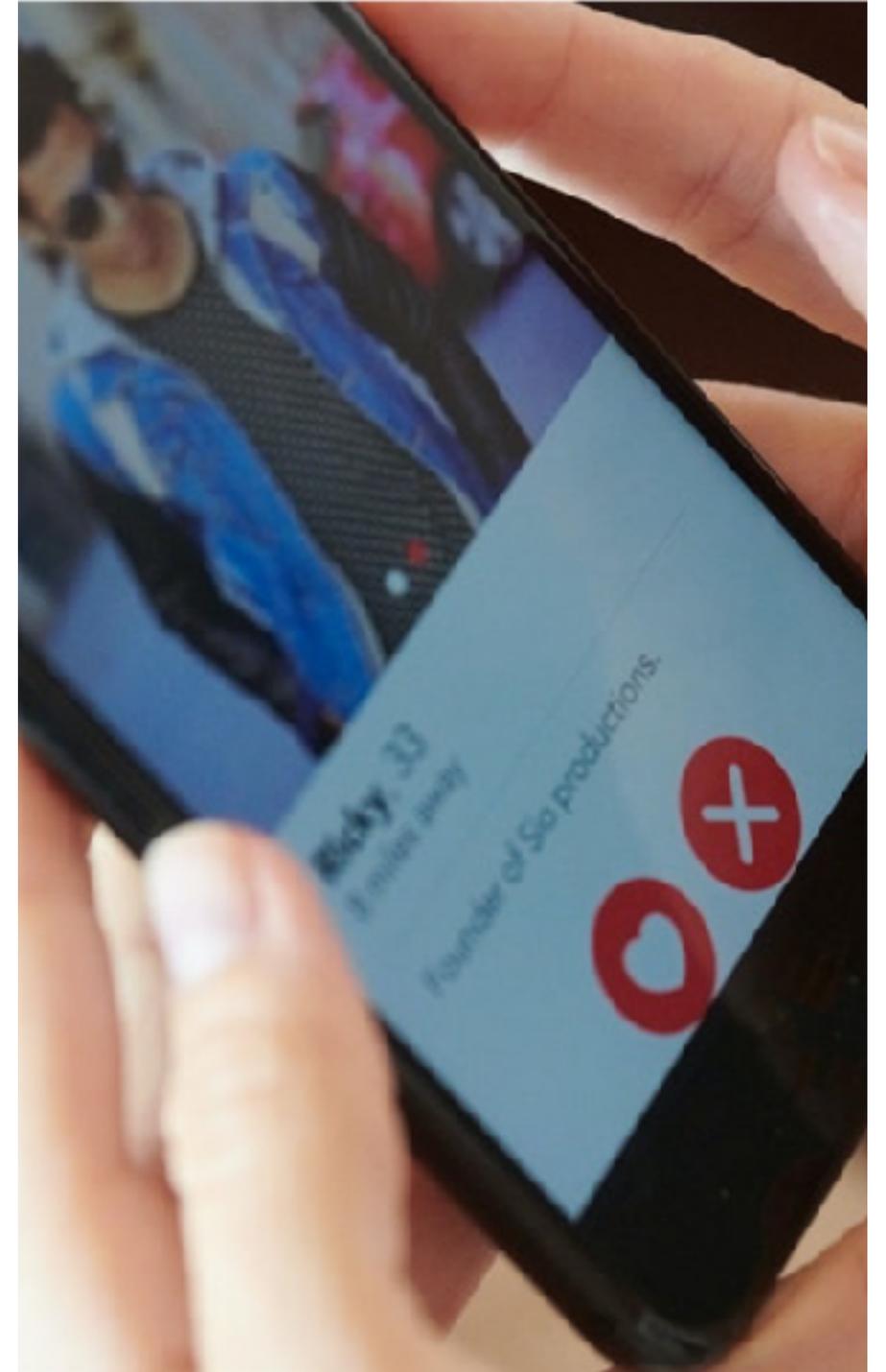
Female Empowerment

The upliftment of women's status in Indian society is beginning to shift gender dynamics.

Movements in female empowerment have led to more women becoming financially independent and finally having a say in how they want to live their lives (e.g., choosing a career path, voicing their opinions openly, etc).

... Which includes taking control of finding suitable matches for themselves.

With dating apps, matrimonial websites and exposure to meeting people through work and friends, it is now much more common for women to find men *they* are interested in... and reject those they're not.



Physical Status

Physical signifiers of socio-economic status means men strive to look “classy”.

In India, it used to be what a man **owned** defined his socio-economic status e.g., a fancy car, a house in an upscale area, luxury brand items...

But as the world has become more image conscious, a man's physical appearance also signifies his social worth.

- A well toned body... to show others they take good care of themselves, their health.
- An even/glowing skin tone... to communicate good hygiene.
- Neatly groomed facial hair... to convey living with intention, a sense of control.

It shows the world they have the financial resources to invest in their appearance (i.e., expensive skincare, clinical treatments, gym memberships, diets).



Personal Branding

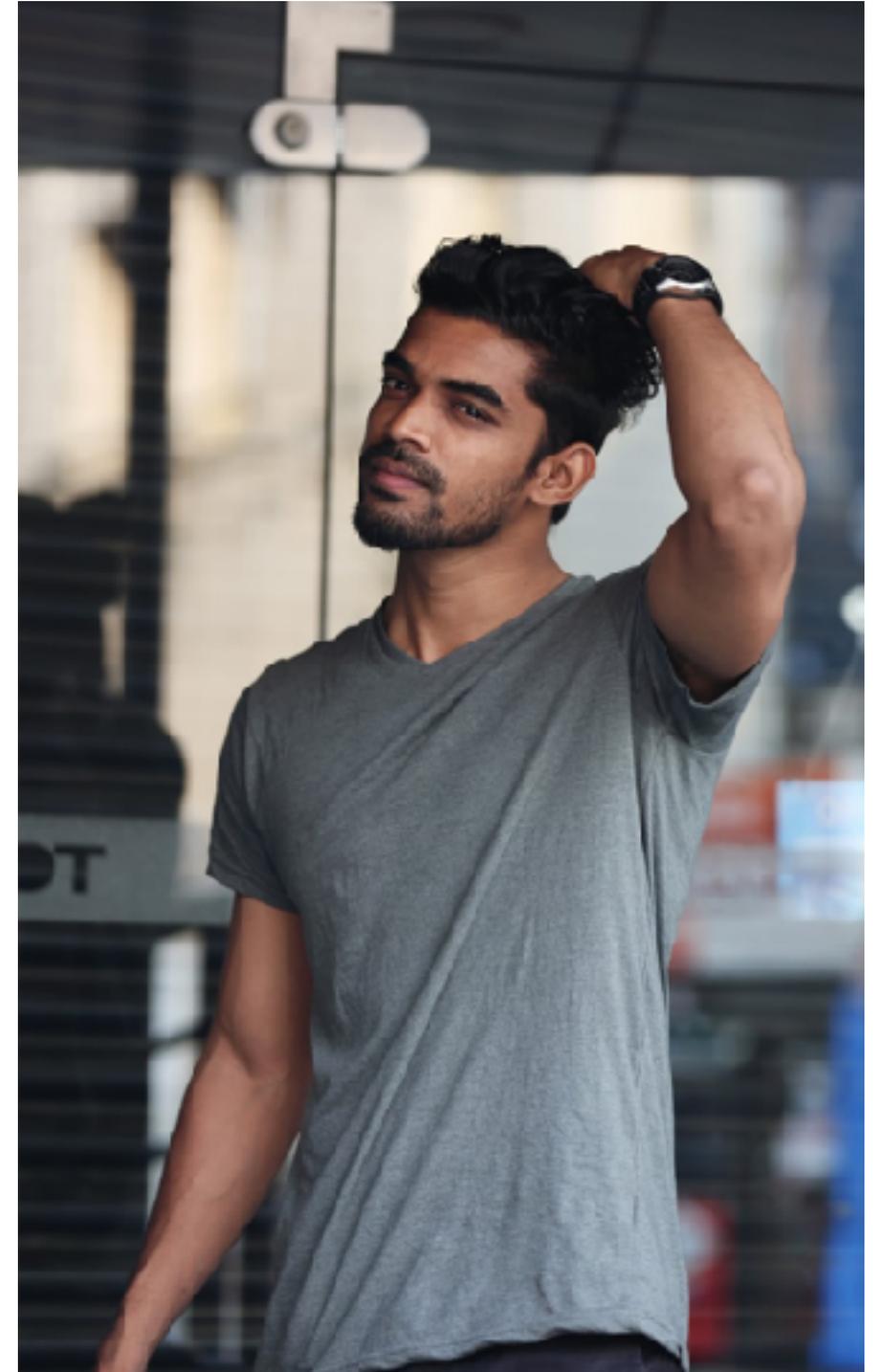
Social media pressures men to constantly present their 'best selves' to the world.

Exposure to global cultures through social media has encouraged young Indian men to explore grooming ideologies from the West i.e. opening up to the idea of makeup amongst men, concealing minor "imperfections", targeting pigmentations, anti-ageing.

- Over a fifth (22%) of male consumers aged 18-34 follow a beauty blogger/Instagram/social media personality... however their motivations might differ.

Where men in the West talk about grooming in the space of self care... most men in India continue to look towards grooming as a way to impress others.

As first timers in the beauty and grooming space, Indian men often compare themselves to online celebrities and photoshopped/filtered images, making them feel a little more conscious of their appearance.



Professional Grooming

Men in India know they need to be groomed to get the job done.

Historically, people's looks have impacted their work opportunities, especially in client facing positions. However, this phenomenon is more prevalent now.

Today, 8 out of 10 men in India believe that being well groomed resulted in direct professional benefits like better job opportunities and promotions...

This is because men are seen as more competent if they are well groomed.

- It helps to make a good impression at work. If he takes good care of himself, then he is more likely to take good care of his work obligations.
- Helps him to feel in control and gain respect and authority amongst work colleagues.



As a result: Masculinity is becoming more... well, progressive.

With changing times, increased awareness regarding gender issues, and a “woke” culture, Indian men’s understanding and expression of masculinity is evolving.

They are leaving behind unconditional male privilege and tradition, and taking progressive stands in all spheres of their life (e.g., treating women as equals, shattering gender roles, expressing their own vulnerabilities and being open to change).

- Which isn’t always easy... as many remain under the watchful eye of older generations of men who may not be as accepting of such change.

Nonetheless, they’re discovering that a carefree notion of masculinity no longer serves them.

The result... **‘Progressive Masculinity’** = An attitude toward masculinity which is more introspective and self aware, where men are thoughtful about their impact on the world as they reach their full potential.

So what does this mean for grooming?

Now the average Indian man spends 42 minutes a day on grooming... which says a lot.

Being more thoughtful of how they present themselves to the world, grooming has become a bigger part in how they assess their worth.

- More open to trying/adopting grooming and skincare routines i.e. multi benefit products that are less time-consuming like after shave and face/beard wash.
- Primarily shop from derma cosmetic brands that lie in the intersection between skincare and cosmetics (Avène, Bioderma, Dermalogica, etc).
- Determined to achieve a “neat and clean” look i.e. trimmed/groomed facial hair, even toned skin, a controlled/toned physique.

Not only does this help to increase their sense of confidence but it also makes them feel like they belong to a more progressive generation of men.



BUT: Indian men are still transitioning into this new space

It's only human for them to continue to have tensions around the category.

Social shaming [Internal barrier]

Being new to the male grooming space, men worry that excessive involvement with the category might lead to shaming within their social networks.

This could be anything from being called out as too effeminate amongst male peers, to questioning their sexuality.

Stepping into the unknown [External barrier]

Being new to the male grooming space, men can find it difficult to navigate their way around the beauty category... especially in retail spaces where beauty floors are designed to be female-friendly i.e. brands segregate product display by categories like skin, body, hair, MEN...implying that the majority of the space caters to women.

Thus, they continue to look for guidance on how to fit into this new yet exciting space.

What does this mean for brands?

As there is still some resistance in using skincare and makeup, brands must be supportive and approach this audience cautiously yet empathetically, as Indian men make their way into the category.

Men are more open to skincare and makeup brands that:



Are positioned as gender neutral and accessible to men

Create a more gender neutral brand mix (product, packaging and communication) by using colours and text that attracts men, messaging that is not just focused towards women, and products that have ingredients that cater to the male skin type (i.e., Warpaint at John Lewis).



Are a bridge between wellness and beauty

Products and brands that lean into 'holistic wellness' and self-improvement trends, to counter shame associated with beauty products (Forest Essentials plays well in this space).



Offer immediate solutions to their problems

Men are less interested in long-term product regimes; require too much commitment. They want products that can give them immediate, noticeable results (i.e., tinted moisturisers, spot correctors, etc). *Convenience and efficacy are everything.*



Lead with dermacosmetics

Position makeup with skincare benefits (i.e., CC creams, tints, etc... Clinique is a favourite in this space)!... to help them justify their use of makeup.

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