

Branding 'Wellness' in India: A Multimodal Examination of Wellness Products and Services Marketing through Instagram Trends

¹Kulkarni Mrunmai

²Joshi Raghav

³Reddy Madhavi

Abstract

Wellness Industry in India, with its origin in ancient practices like Ayurveda and Ancient Chinese Medicine has evolved from a healthcare focus to a global commercialized sector encompassing various aspects of well-being. The rise of social media platforms, particularly Instagram especially among youngsters, has dramatically reshaped the marketing landscape, positioning it as a powerful medium for brand communication and consumer engagement. Although, the importance of wellness and its online representation has grown, there is a dearth of research into how Indian wellness brands use social media for marketing. Most of the studies focused on Western markets on a generalized approach to wellness, leaving a gap in understanding how Indian brands navigate this space, particularly in areas like physical wellness, nutrition, mental health, personal care, and beauty. This research study addresses this gap by examining existing marketing trends in the Indian wellness sector through a multimodal framework of semiotics combining Roland Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation with Gunther Kress and Van Leeuwen's social semiotics. It offers a detailed analysis of the themes, symbols, and narratives that brands use to promote wellness and highlights the growing role of social media in influencing consumer perceptions and marketing and branding strategies within the wellness space in India. The findings of this research show that all the brands studied in this research carried their own distinct characteristic however almost all of them were rooted in Indian traditions or contexts and in an universal ideal value system in one or the other way

Keywords: *Wellness Industry, Multimodal framework, Semiotics, Social media, Instagram, Branding and marketing*

Introduction

Gone are the days when you'd have B2C sellers standing outside your home and convincing you how their detox juice would help you cleanse yourself internally or how a specific equipment would give you toned body. The marketing landscape has undergone many changes along with time. The brands too have adapted to these changes time and again and have kept themselves up-to-date with the marketing trends. Hence, in this digital era, Social Media marketing has acquired an upper hand in marketing space. With the advent of internet, cell phones and smartphones, progress in communication technology and receptivity by the users social media has become a major part of our lives. Every age demographic right from the youth to some senior citizens have their accounts on social media as a means of recreation and brands won't miss this opportunity for promoting their products and building their brand loyalty. Now-a-days, one of the most notable industry in marketing is the Wellness industry. The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health. Wellness Economy has now become a well flourished industry.

The wellness industry, encompassing a wide range of products and services aimed at improving physical, mental, and emotional health, has experienced significant growth over the past decade. This growth has been fuelled by increasing consumer awareness and demand for holistic health solutions. As increasing numbers of people are desiring to live longer lives, there is an increase in the trend of consciously making choices to live better lives, leading to the embracement of the wellness lifestyle. Social Media has been the biggest support for the marketing and branding of wellness. The two prominent social media sites in the Beauty and Wellness Industry are Facebook

¹M.Sc Student, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune email: mrunkul1601@gmail.com

² M Sc Student, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune; email: imraghavjoshi@gmail.com

³ Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune; email: madhavirk@unipune.ac.in

and Instagram.

There are numerous similarities between the two. However, Instagram is in more vogue because of its features like hashtag search, partnerships with other businesses and offerings giveaways to clients to increase brand followers (Kaur & Kumar, 2020). However, ample amount of research is available on the wellness industry and its social media marketing or the Instagram side of their marketing but the context of the research is that of Western brands and marketing. There are only a couple of researches which focus on Indian brands and their branding and marketing on Instagram. Hence this research will focus on the Indian brands. What makes Instagram relevant to the lives of young Indians? A visual-centric interface and huge popularity among young Indians command a large share of their perceptions and behaviours. In recent years, Instagram has taken on a strong foothold in the lives and perceptions of Indian youth. Since Instagram is a visually-driven platform and is popularly followed by many, it has become a current part of millions of young Indians' daily routine (Dhiman, 2024). Another relevant factor here is that one of the ancient practices of wellness originated in India through Ayurveda which focused on holistic wellness. Hence, popularity of Instagram and the origin of wellness practice serve the purpose of this study.

Instagram's advertising feature offers a variety of ads like stories ads, photo ads, collection ads, slideshow ads and carousel ads. It helps explore wide range of markets. Also, the app helps reach a specific segment of audience or specifically targeted audiences based on options like demographics, behaviours and interests. Various researches have indicated that most of the teens and adults in twenties and early thirties are regular visitors and receptors of this platform and at least one brand is a part of their engagement (Challa and Anute, 2021).

This study provides a dissection of the themes, symbols, and narratives with which brands are using to connect to wellness while also throwing light on the ever-emerging role of social media in the shaping of consumer perceptions as also marketing and branding strategies within the wellness space of India. In a nutshell, it will target the semiotics part of Instagram marketing trends by incorporating and combining two models of semiotics viz. Roland Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation with Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics. The study will also serve as a guidance to brands who want to build a strong digital media presence and a reliable consumer relationship.

Scope: The research study conducted a semiotic analysis of wellness industry in India to analyse the marketing trends that are both prevalent and emerging in the Indian wellness landscape. For this, various brands in the areas of physical wellness, mental wellness, personal care and beauty and nutrition were explored and studied. The analysis was done on the basis of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation and connotation combined with social semiotics. This study examined how wellness brands devised their visual and textual narratives to convey their brand identity so that it resonates with consumer wellness aspirations and so as to cater to the consumers accordingly. The analysis includes a detailed breakdown of the visual elements such as colour schemes, imagery and aesthetics, and symbols; textual elements such as captions, hashtags and metaphors. It also identified distinct semiotic elements that creates each brand's individual identity while highlighting recurring visual and linguistic trends that indicated brand authenticity.

Relevance:

The findings offer insights on how the wellness industry landscape in India is evolving. It proves valuable for wellness brands looking to establish a strong social media presence. This study also acts as a reference for brands seeking to create a strong consumer relationship by identifying specific semiotic strategies applied by the brands selected by the researchers. Academically, the research contributes to utilization of semiotic theories in the domain of digital marketing and also associating traditional semiotics with the modern social media landscape. This research also guides marketers on how to ethically and effectively influence and engage existing as well as potential consumers.

Literature Review

Understanding Wellness

The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as "the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health." The concept of wellness has greatly evolved from the early stages here it meant the mere absence of disease, to this day, where wellness is integrated into a holistic approach to health, including an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and social welfare (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). This multidimensional model of wellness reflects a proactive and preventive philosophy, emphasizing the promotion of health through positive lifestyle choices and holistic practices.

Wellness has become mainstream in modern life, discussed in the media, advertising billboards, public discourse, and even daily conversations. It now shapes lifestyle choice, consumer behaviour, and market trends around the globe. Wellness is no more just about health; the industry has grown into comprehensive, holistic, and attracts the interest of entrepreneurs, investors, and politicians (Yeung, Johnston, & Global Wellness Institute, 2019).

Contrary to the conceptualisation of wellness as something static or passive, it has been defined herein as an "active pursuit," that is, conscious selection, goals, and behaviour directed at optimal well-being and health. In this way, proactive actions distinguish wellness as a concept from similar but often static concepts related to health, happiness, and holistic well-being (Yeung et al., 2019). Though similarity exists between wellness and health, wellness is a larger concept than health, encompassing not only bodily health but also emotional, social, and mental wellbeing, all of which need to work together so true wellness is achieved.

In addition, wellness promotes an intentional and continuous process of self-reflection and choice that fosters holistic well-being. This proactive approach to a healthy lifestyle places wellness not as an end but as an activity per se, emphasising the concept of balance between various aspects of life in order to achieve holistic balance (Yeung et al., 2019).

In recent years, wellness has moved from focusing on individual self-care activities to a wider socio-cultural phenomenon, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to focus on mental and physical health (Baker, 2022). The pandemic intensified consumers' focus on maintaining a balanced lifestyle, which has influenced how wellness brands represent their products and values. Wellness today extends beyond physical exercise and nutrition but involves mindfulness, emotional resilience, and preventive health measures (Saha, 2023). At the same

time, while the definition of wellness has broadened, so too has its economic influence; the global wellness industry has been estimated to be more than \$4.4 trillion dollars for 2021 and continues to grow as consumers increasingly focus on wellness in all aspects of their lives (Global Wellness Institute, 2022).

Wellness in India:

The wellness movement started decades ago but since the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wellness transmuted again (Alice Baker, 2022). This period was a pivotal point in the Indian wellness industry, where consumers and brands started to reassess the importance of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In the contemporary world, the wellness movement has taken a multifaceted definition. This multifaceted definition comprises the aspirations for social acceptance, individuality, and mutual well-being (Saha, 2023). The market size of the wellness industry in India is expected to exhibit a growth rate (CAGR) of 5% during 2024-2025. The rising awareness regarding wellness is driving this growth in the wellness Industry. Although the wellness industry is not so well organized in India still it is expeditiously moving toward consolidation (Saha, 2023). Wellness has always been a trend in India since ancient times. The wellness industry in India has used the potential of Indian homemade remedies and traditional practices to move from being an idea related to luxury services to becoming a lifestyle essential.

The major factor behind this is, that people now want to live a much lengthier and happier life. The total population in the Indian wellness market encompasses 50% of the youth population who are concerned about their well-being and personal appearance. Wellness brands have expanded their focus beyond women, increasingly targeting men with grooming products and services. These factors create a strong base for high demand for wellness products (Saha, 2023). 34% of the population live in urban areas and are well aware of the Indian market and wellness products for enhancing their well-being. The entry of new players and the rising competition between wellness brands have contributed tremendously to the growth of the wellness industry. India is in the top 5 global markets for beauty and wellness having the potential to reach the 1st spot (Saha, 2023).

Instagram:

The evolution of the Instagram platform gained the interest of technology and communication giants like Apple and Android which released Instagram Apps in 2010 and 2012, respectively. The year 2012 has meant a great evolution for the Instagram name, when it was bought by Facebook for 1 billion US Dollars (Forbes.com, 2012).

When it comes to visual marketing, Instagram is a powerful tool as users of the platform can be enticed by or exposed to businesses and organizations strategically curated images. The term “Instagrammable” has even been adopted to describe a moment or thing photogenic enough to post on to the photo-sharing platform, Instagram. Images on social media are held to high aesthetic standards as any user becomes both a photographer and a critic (Jalowska, 2019).

Leeuwen observes, meaning does not come from the use of one mode only—be it a language, or an image—but from a complex interaction of many modes that work in unison to convey one idea. This is particularly useful in the case of Instagram, in which brands are focused on the integration of language (tags), visuals (images and colours), and other interactive elements (comments, likes, and polls) to promote wellness ideas (van Leeuwen, 2005). A key concept to the theory of multimodality is how complex meanings can be constructed by integrating visual language and textual language in the context of Instagram’s communication environment.

Knowledge Gap

While wellness branding has been extensively studied, much of the literature remains focused on Western markets, primarily addressing generalized wellness themes. These studies often overlook how wellness concepts vary significantly across cultures, especially in non-Western contexts where traditional health practices play a central role. In India, for instance, wellness is deeply intertwined with ancient practices like Ayurveda, which significantly influence consumer expectations and perceptions of wellness brands. However, few studies have examined how Indian wellness brands communicate these culturally specific wellness ideals, particularly on visually driven platforms like Instagram. Additionally, semiotic frameworks, including Barthes’ denotation and connotation, are frequently used to analyse marketing but are rarely applied to digital media contexts, particularly within the Indian wellness industry. Instagram allows brands to communicate complex wellness messages through a combination of imagery, language, and cultural symbols, yet there is limited research on how Indian wellness brands employ these semiotic strategies to resonate with consumers. This study aims to address these gaps by analysing how Indian wellness brands utilize semiotic elements on Instagram, exploring the nuanced interplay of cultural wellness values and modern digital branding techniques.

Theoretical framework and Research Method

Multimodality in Social Media: Instagram as a Case Study

In social semiotics, the notion of multimodality is not only relevant but also the most informed within the context of digital posts, such as Instagram, where a message can simply not be in one set mode. Gualberto & Kress, 2018 contend that the text used in the context of social space such as with an Instagram Reel is a multimodal complex of various constituents namely words, sounds,

pictures, motions, and music that are intended to deliver a single concise message. All of these modes constitute an element of the resources that underpin meaning-making, with their interrelation creating a more sophisticated form of communication. With the example of “wellness branding”, this type of multimodal interaction is revealed by how images, captions, hashtags, and videos are adopted in creating narratives about health, beauty, and self-care by brands (Gualberto and Kress ,2018).

In terms of this framework, modes are not seen as fixed but rather as being constructed and reconstructed through social and cultural contexts. The perspective of social semiotics regards the act of meaning-making as an ongoing, interactive process, where the rhetor (the person with the message), the designer (who constructs the message), and the producer (who materializes the message) are sometimes one person. In more specific terms, it might be a wellness influencer on Instagram who comes up with the idea and also makes it. The rhetor is more than active and

evaluative of the context, the target audience, and the semiotic means available to him or her, such questions like “What message do I intend to put across?” and “What semiotic resources do I have?” (Gualberto & Kress, 2018). For example, a brand promoting Ayurvedic products may use local symbols coupled with simple and uncluttered modern designs so as to target a wider audience.

Aim:

The aim of the research is to analyse the marketing trends in the Indian wellness industry on Instagram through a semiotic lens.

Objectives:

- To analyze how wellness brands utilize semiotic framework to convey brand identity and craft narratives that resonate with consumer wellness aspirations on Instagram.
- To explore how wellness brands employ visual elements to build brand identity and differentiate themselves within the wellness industry on social media.

For this research, semiotic analysis serves as the primary method for data collection and for qualitative analysis. By focusing on Instagram posts from various wellness brands, this study investigates the visual and textual elements embedded in brand communications, which are instrumental in constructing brand identity and engagement. The semiotic analysis unfolds in two key stages: denotation and connotation analysis, followed by social semiotic analysis.

Research design and Sampling

This study employed non-probability purposive sampling to select Instagram posts that focused on high engagement with wellness brands. In purposive sampling, items are chosen based on specific criteria that serve the study's objectives rather than random selection. Here, the posts were chosen based on their engagement levels, particularly the number of likes, as likes provide a straightforward indication of audience interest and approval.

The sample was comprised of 50 Instagram posts taken from 5 wellness brands relevant to the Indian market. The selection of the five wellness brands was guided by their overall presence and engagement on Instagram. For each brand, five posts with the highest number of likes were chosen from the period of June 2023 to June 2024. This approach ensures that the content analyzed reflects the most popular and engaging posts. By focusing on these highly engaged posts, this research aims to capture the strategies that wellness brands use to connect with their audiences, allowing for a clearer understanding of how wellness is branded and perceived on Instagram in India.

Semiotic Analysis:

The data analysis presents the qualitative analysis of wellness brands' Instagram posts through lens, using Roland Barthes' framework of denotation and connotation and social semiotics developed by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen.. This is the analysis of 5 wellness brands in

Instagram



kapiva_official  :

Kapiva

2,330 posts 488K followers 22 following

Health/beauty

India's First Modern Ayurvedic Brand Delivering Better Health Outcomes Through Holistic Ayurvedic Solutions

Kapiva is a wellness brand that offers a range of products, including supplements, juices, oils, etc. Kapiva blends Ayurvedic practices with a modern touch. Its posts focus mainly on blending ayurvedic remedies with a modern touch, particularly through a masculine lens. The visual elements in posts heavily rely upon the symbolism of nature and raw ingredients combined with depictions of strength and endurance. Throughout the posts, there is a consistent portrayal of masculine male figures. The message is very clear from the posts that Ayurvedic supplements, especially Kapiva's "Shilajeet Gold", are positioned as integral to achieving modern fitness goals.

Kapiva's logo blends tradition with modern wellness through a minimalist design. Its sleek, sans-serif font and earthy tones reflect simplicity and nature, while the name "Kapiva" symbolizes Ayurveda's three doshas. This balance of clean aesthetics and Ayurvedic heritage underscores Kapiva's commitment to natural, holistic health solutions for today's consumers. In one of the reels, Tiger Shroff, a celebrity and a fitness icon takes center stage as he performs stretching exercises in sportswear at the gym. This is rather a cliché scene — a common gym setting, but with the introduction of Shilajeet Gold as a bodybuilding supplement, it establishes a link with today's era of bodybuilding and medieval traditions of health. The denotation here is straightforward— Tiger Shroff, a well-known celebrity and known fitness enthusiast is associating his strength and physique with Kapiva's product. While the reference is straightforward, the connotation runs deeper. Shroff's muscular build and workout routine serve as symbols of modern masculinity, suggesting that true strength comes from both external training and internal care through traditional remedies.

As Shroff dismisses a character who absurdly suggests usage of steroids to build muscle, the reel uses humour to juxtapose artificial and natural methods of gaining strength. The man seen taking a bath in a purple liquid, holding a rubber duck, visually mocks the idea of using steroids. This highlights the absurdity of relying on synthetic and harmful products. Shroff's calm and

composed response and promotion of "KapivaShilajeet" as the "smart" alternative reinforces the brand's positioning of natural supplements as superior to modern, artificial alternatives. The gold sparkles coming out of the bottle not only show the presence of 24k gold in the product but also emphasize the product's premium quality signifying that while it is rooted in ancient tradition, it offers superior results in the modern context. (depicting herbs revolving around it, Kapiva emphasizes the product's purity and efficacy, positioning it as a traditional yet powerful health solution.)

Kapiva's social semiotic strategy revolves around the redefinition of masculinity. The portrayal of figures like Tiger Shroff using traditional Ayurvedic supplements, the brand normalizes wellness practices for men—an audience often overlooked in the wellness sector. Traditionally, wellness and self-care products have been marketed toward women only, but Kapiva's posts break this norm by showcasing testosterone boosters and supplements as essential for male vitality. The visual codes of strength, endurance, and athleticism speak directly to men who might otherwise dismiss wellness as irrelevant to them. The brand taps into a cultural shift where men's health and self-care are

becoming more accepted, and by aligning itself with traditional, trustworthy remedies, Kapiva positions itself as a brand that honors both tradition and modern health needs. In another reel featuring “Anirudh Sharma”, a fitness model, we see further reinforcement of these themes. The gym setting is familiar, but Anirudh’s explanation that “Shilajeet” is not just for older men—contrary to popular belief—challenges societal misconceptions about natural supplements. The visual of junk food during his speech adds another layer, juxtaposing the unhealthy choices of modern diets with the natural, health-enhancing qualities of Shilajeet. By emphasizing the five herbs in “Shilajeet Gold”—Ashwagandha, Gokshura, Black Musli, and SwarnaBhasma—the reel conveys that this supplement is not only effective but scientifically validated, with lab reports shown to enhance the product's credibility. The cultural relevance of “Ayurveda” in India cannot be overstated. By grounding its marketing in ancient Ayurvedic wisdom, Kapiva aligns itself with the trust and authenticity that Ayurveda represents.

For Indian consumers, Ayurveda is more than just a system of health; it’s part of the cultural fabric, associated with purity, tradition, and efficacy. Kapiva’s visual codes of natural landscapes, herbal imagery, and muscular male figures serve to communicate that the brand honours tradition while providing solutions for modern health challenges. This combination of traditional wisdom and modern fitness makes Kapiva’s semiotic strategy particularly effective in engaging with men who are seeking natural solutions to enhance their physical performance.

Mamaearth: Inner Beauty, Community, and Traditional Wisdom

Instagram



Mamaearth is a beauty and wellness brand that is known for its natural, toxin-free, chemical-free products for men, women, and babies. They offer a wide range of products including skincare, health care, baby care, and much more. The use of green and blue colour in Mamaearth’s posts, especially, in their logo and text on-screen is very consistent. Mamaearth's logo features a clean, modern design with blue and green letters. The blue colour symbolizes trust and purity, while the green colour represents nature and

sustainability, aligning with the brand's eco-friendly and toxin-free values. This colour choice reinforces Mamaearth's commitment to natural ingredients and safe, effective products for wellness and personal care. The use of blue colour gives a sense of stability as blue colour has a calming effect. The usage of green color in brand’s product packaging reinforces this message, as green connotes both nature and sustainability. This usage of green aligns with Mamaearth’s commitment to planting trees for every purchase, visually linking the idea of personal care with environmental care.

Mamaearth’s posts emphasize a distinctive approach to beauty by promoting the values of kindness, inclusivity, and authenticity. Mamaearth frequently includes the traditional themes of Indian festivals and culture in the posts. This helps them to position themselves more than a wellness brand. Throughout the posts, Mamaearth consistently connects its products to acts of kindness, traditional wisdom, and natural ingredients. This positioning of the brand helps promote a holistic view of beauty that encompasses both physical appearance and emotional goodness.

In Mamaearth’s posts, the cultural contexts of festivals like Diwali and Holi are utilized to reinforce

the message that beauty comes from acts of kindness. Each post features a familiar lively scene that captures the essence of these festivals, with traditional decor, flower garlands and festive lights. For instance, it opens in a decorated sweet shop where a customer gives sweets to a salesperson. An older lady notices this small act of generosity and remarks, "You are beautiful." which sets the post's theme that kindness enhances one's beauty. This post's denotation is straightforward: the man is kind. However, the connotation is deeper, associating beauty with selflessness, generosity, and kindness.

Mamaearth's reels often emphasize maternal wisdom and the connection between natural remedies and personal care. One post shows the brand's founder, Ghazal Alagh talking about her mom's home remedies, positioning the brand as a modern extension of traditional knowledge. The reel juxtaposes visuals of homemade ingredients like hing and turmeric with Mamaearth's products, suggesting that the brand honours the wisdom of Indian mothers and their home

remedies. These visuals tell a story: Mamaearth products work well and have roots in cultural traditions and a maternal care. By aligning itself with these values, Mamaearth taps into the cultural reverence for mothers in Indian society, where a mother's knowledge, particularly in matters of health and wellness, is deeply respected.

Man Matters: Modern Masculinity and Emotional Well-being

Instagram



The Man Matters, a wellness brand mainly focuses on men's wellness and grooming products. They have a range of products including hair gummies which are related to healthy hair, anti-dandruff shampoo, and facewash. Man Matters has a very unique social media personality compared to other brands that are related to men's wellness and emotional wellbeing. This brand breaks all stereotypes that are related to men and their health through their posts. The brand utilizes minimal visuals. They consistently use white background with blue text. The use of blue, a colour associated with calm and trust, softens the conversation and makes viewers more receptive to the idea that expressing one's struggles is a valid part of being a man. By keeping the design minimal, the reel focuses attention on Shamani's message about men's internal battles and the cultural pressure to suppress emotions. Man Matters' logo embodies simplicity and strength, using clean lines and a modern, minimalist design in blue and white. The blue symbolizes trust, stability, and masculinity, aligning with the brand's focus on men's wellness. This straightforward aesthetic reflects the brand's commitment to providing reliable, no-nonsense health and self-care solutions for men.

Man Matters focuses on grooming in a way that normalizes self-care for men. In one humorous reel, two men are shown frustrated by conflicting advice on whether they should keep their beard or shave it. The exaggerated hand gestures and light-hearted background music create a relatable scenario for men who often face conflicting social pressures about their appearance. The use of humour here serves to make grooming a non-threatening and fun activity, which can be essential in encouraging men to engage in self-care without feeling judged. The visual representation of a well-groomed man, combined with a narrative that promotes self-confidence, positions grooming as an act of self-respect rather than vanity. Through its reels, Man Matters advocates for a new masculinity that values both appearance and emotional health, encouraging men to break free from

traditional stereotypes and embrace self-care. One of Man Matters' central messages is the normalization of vulnerability among men. The brand shows this effectively through the simple but powerful reel format. For instance, in a post featuring Raj Shamani, a motivational speaker, entrepreneur and Youtuber addresses the unseen and unspoken struggles men face. The text overlay—"Men, how are you doing?"—serves as a direct address to the audience, encouraging introspection and signalling that it's okay to not be okay. The denotation of this reel is straightforward: men need to talk about their feelings.

However, the connotation reveals a broader social critique of toxic masculinity, where emotional vulnerability is seen as weakness. By addressing this issue, Man Matters positions itself as a brand that cares about the holistic well-being of men, not just their physical appearance.

The brand's approach to change the stigma around self-care and challenging rigid gender norms taps into a broader societal discourse about redefining masculinity. Through social semiotics, Man Matters positions itself as an ally in helping men embrace the emotional wellbeing as well as self-care, making the brand's products a part of this emotional and social shift.

Plum: Skincare as Self-Care and Indulgence

Instagram



plumgoodnessglobal :

Plum

379 posts 1,734 followers 6 following

Health/beauty

Made with love in India @plumgoodness

Now officially in 5 Continents!... more

Plum is a beauty and wellness brand that is known for vegan and cruelty-free products for skincare, haircare, body care, and makeup. This brand uses a distinctive visual and narrative strategy across its posts to communicate the brand's values and engage the audience effectively. The Plum logo features the brand name in lowercase with a unique design element: the "u" in "plum" resembles the shape of a plum fruit with a small stem, reinforcing the brand's natural and fruit-inspired identity. The purple color conveys creativity, luxury, and individuality, aligning with Plum's commitment to clean, eco-friendly, and cruelty-free beauty products. This simple yet playful logo reflects the brand's focus on modern, conscious beauty. Plum's use of color—particularly the calming blues and the signature purple of the logo—further enhances the message of tranquillity and freshness. Blue's connotation of calm and trust reinforces the product's promise of hydration, while purple adds a touch of uniqueness and creativity.

Across Plum's Instagram reels, the consistent use of color plays a crucial role in conveying the brand's identity. Purple, in particular, is a dominant color that appears frequently in both product packaging and background elements. In color psychology, purple often connotes creativity, luxury, and individuality, aligning with Plum's brand image as fun, unique, and premium. By utilizing this color, Plum signals that its products are not only effective but also part of a creative and enjoyable self-care ritual. One of the main themes in some of the posts of Plum is the theme of "transparency" and it's a recurring theme. The brand actively involves the viewers in the production process of the product. For instance, a reel shows the production process of "niacinamide serum" with a third person narration. A text overlay—"Formulate the gel cream with us!"—is like an open invitation to the viewers. This signifies that the brand is transparent about its ingredients and formulation process, reinforcing a sense of trust between the brand and its consumers. By showing the entire process of formulation Plum positions itself as a brand that values honesty and openness. These are the qualities that resonate with today's consumers, who are rapidly becoming conscious of what they apply to their skin. In the contemporary modern wellness industry consumers are well aware

and more knowledgeable, Plum’s strategy to position itself with these qualities is a strategic choice.

The visual language of the post has close-up shots of the ingredients and a step-by-step process of formulation connotes purity and integrity. The clear, methodical presentation of how the products are made, coupled with simple, calming background music, enhances the perception that Plum is a brand, consumers can trust to be upfront about what goes into their skincare products.





This narrative of purity, integrity, and honesty is further strengthened by statistics and numbers in Plum’s portrayal. For instance, a reel promoting the “Rice Water and Niacinamide 10% Serum”, the brand emphasize that this product is “Trusted by 1 million+ Bright Faces”. This figure serves as a form of social proof, leveraging the large number of satisfied customers to build credibility. The emphasis on “1 Million+” not only suggests that the product is effective but also that it is inclusive, catering to a wide and diverse audience. In the social context of skincare, where consumers are looking for brands that understand their individual needs, this reel reinforces the idea that Plum is a trusted, widely accepted brand.

Plum also associated itself as a brand who cares about grooming of men. For instance in one reel, a man is shown looking out for products. The brand’s approach to de-stigmatizing self-care and challenging strict gender expectations aligns with a wider societal conversation on reshaping the concept of masculinity.

Cult: Fitness as Fun and Community-Driven

Instagram



wearecult  
cult official
4,723 posts 1.2M followers 277 following
Health & wellness website
Warning: we make consistency contagious.  

Cult is a fitness and wellness brand that offers a range of services including home-workouts, gym access, fitness app. Etc. Through a variety of visual codes, humor, and cultural references, Cult breaks the stereotype of intense fitness regimes, and replaces it with a more accessible and enjoyable approach.

The Cult logo features a stylized, abstract figure that resembles a person with arms and legs outstretched, symbolizing vitality and movement. The colors blue, yellow, and pink add vibrancy, representing energy, optimism, and enthusiasm. This modern, minimal design aligns with Cult's focus on fitness, wellness, and a dynamic lifestyle, capturing the brand's emphasis on active, holistic health.

Some of the Cult’s reels often start with intense visuals but transition into more relaxed, fun, and colourful scenes. It symbolizes the brand’s message that fitness does not need to be intimidating. For instance, the first reel featuring Ranveer Singh, a Bollywood celebrity, begins with Ranveer in a completely sweat-soaked sportswear, in a dimly lit gym performing pushups, accompanied by a dramatic narration that uses motivational words like "HD paseena" and "focus." The denotation here is the typical portrayal of a serious workout, but the connotation lies in the exaggeration of these elements, mocking the conventional fitness ad that glorifies pain and sweat. As Ranveer interrupts the exaggerated serious tone and calls for a shift to more playful music, the reel transitions from dark tones to vibrant colors, symbolizing energy, creativity, and fun. The change in color palette is significant: where dark tones traditionally represent intensity and masculinity in fitness ads, the bright and vibrant colors that follow connote that fitness can be light hearted and accessible.

Ranveer's costume change into a purple tracksuit signifies the shift from seriousness to fun, reflecting Cult's broader branding strategy of making fitness enjoyable and approachable.

Cult's reels place a strong emphasis on inclusivity. The brand positions itself that values fitness as a community-driven activity rather than a solitary pursuit. This is particularly evident in a reel featuring children sharing their perceptions of what their parents do at Cult.Fit. The reel opens with playful music and vibrant imagery, setting a lighthearted tone. The children's humorous responses such as a boy joking that his father eats "cholebhatore" instead of working out break the traditional image of serious gym culture and replace it with something more relatable and fun. The connotation of these responses goes beyond mere humor; it reflects Cult's broader goal of making fitness approachable for all ages and demographics. The inclusion of children in the conversation around fitness positions Cult as a family-friendly brand that emphasizes fun and inclusivity over strict discipline. The playful comments and bright visuals appeal to parents, who are likely to appreciate the idea of fitness as something that can be integrated into daily family life.

In another reel, Cult champions, a group of community members recognized for their dedication share their experiences. The social semiotics of this reel lie in the portrayal of Cult Champions as everyday people rather than elite athletes. The individuals interviewed express their excitement about being part of the Cult community, describing their experiences with humour and warmth. This reel reinforces the idea that fitness is not just about physical achievement but about being part of a supportive, motivating community. The light hearted reference to bribing people with samosas and chocolates to stay consistent reflects Cult's unique approach to balance and moderation, rejecting the idea that fitness requires sacrifice or extreme discipline.

Cult's reels are firmly embedded in the contemporary cultural context where fitness and wellness are increasingly viewed as holistic experiences. This is not just about physical fitness but also about mental health, emotional balance, and community involvement. The Rage Room reel exemplifies this by addressing the need for emotional release through physical activity. The use of imagery such as participants smashing objects and punching bags labelled "Toxic Boss" or "Toxic Ex" speaks directly to the frustrations many people experience in daily life. This reel taps into a growing recognition of the importance of mental and emotional well-being in fitness, offering a space for people to vent their emotions in a productive and cathartic way.

The inclusion of dance and music in many of the reels, particularly the one featuring Hrithik Roshan, Bollywood star underscores the idea that fitness can be both fun and therapeutic. In Indian culture, dance is often associated with celebration and joy, and by integrating dance into fitness routines, Cult taps into a culturally resonant form of movement that is familiar and enjoyable to many people. This positioning of fitness as an activity that can be celebrated and enjoyed in a group setting reflects a shift away from individualistic, goal-oriented fitness and toward a more communal and balanced approach.

Conclusion

All the brands studied in this research carried their own distinct characteristic however almost all of them were rooted in Indian traditions or contexts and in an universal ideal value system in one or the other way. Its but obvious that being an Indian brand and having to cater to the Indian audience they have to do this yet the representation of their roots didn't feel pretentious or overpowering instead it was subtle.

Brands like *Kapiva*, and *MamaEarth* have reflected the blend of traditional and modern through their Instagram content. *Kapiva* blended Ayurveda with modern practices towards a healthy life is based on Ayurveda as its founders are herbalist and have incorporated Ayurveda and herbalist practices in their life as well as brand. *MamaEarth* on the other hand includes traditional themes of Indian festivities in their posts along with frequent portrayal of the line "Mama kasikhaya" that is "Taught by Mom" and "nuskhas" that is 'desi traditional solutions'. Many brands have stuck to their principle of transparency as a way to retain their customer base and to build faith in them. Brands

like *Plum* showcase their actual process of sourcing, production and manufacturing through their posts. They haven't limited their transparency to the About Us section on their websites.

All the brands studied in this research promote the idea of balance of mind, body and soul i.e. having a holistic approach towards wellness rather than focusing on only one aspect while the other is ignored. These brands directly or indirectly by using indexical or non-indexical signs promote the idea of holistic wellness through their posts in order to develop an optimistic attitude in the minds of its viewers. The brands rely on humour to engage viewers as everyone enjoys it. Although, sometimes the posts are purely out of humorous context, which carries an underlying message with it. Because the message is presented in a light-hearted manner, viewers take in and understand the message more patiently and effectively. There is an effective representation on themes of mental health and emotional well-being as these are topics which are talked a lot about and are also looked at through the lens of consideration. Brands like *Man Matters*, *CultFit* had content which had its narrative built around de-stigmatizing mental and emotional well-being taboos and treating it like any other ailment to showcase that it's as important as physical well-being. Some brands focused on destigmatizing gender-specific taboos. Brands like *Man Matters* have voiced out in support of destigmatizing taboos regarding men's emotional and mental health, and being considerate towards them.

Overall, the brands aren't just working as some profit-making companies but are also determined to change the notions regarding wellness and leading the masses on the path of holistic wellness and are standing for them just as a good friend would do.

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