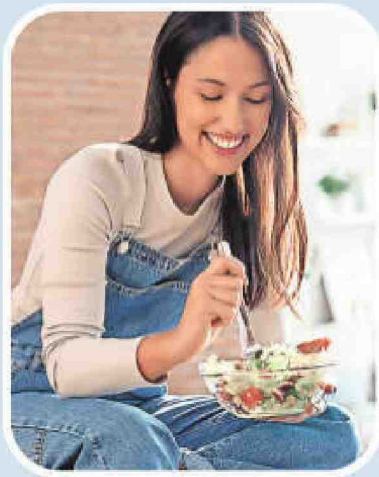




63%

of Indian consumers actively seek healthier products and are willing to pay a premium price, as per reports



India's personal styling market is projected to reach

\$23.8 bn

by 2033, growing at nearly 12% annually, as per a Deloitte report



Over

200,000

young Indians seek help for stress, burnout and emotional distress, as per a five-year review by Mpower, an initiative of Aditya Birla Education Trust



India's skilling and certification market, currently valued at

₹11.5 lakh cr,

is projected to reach

₹14 lakh cr

by FY28, as per a report by Technopak Advisors



India's fitness industry is expanding rapidly, with membership expected to grow from 12.3 mn in 2024 to

23.3 mn

by 2030, as per a 2025 report by Deloitte India & Health & Fitness Association

SUGANDHA MUKHERJEE

ON A WEEKDAY evening in Bengaluru, a mid-career professional logs off from work only to log into a short online class. In Gurugram, a young consultant rehearses articulation drills before a Zoom presentation. In Delhi, a college student books a therapy session because she wants to function better. And in Noida, an IT professional joins a WhatsApp video call with his personal stylist ahead of a corporate event.

Across India, a quiet but structural shift is underway. Spending on oneself is increasingly being treated as strategic. Communication, appearance, fitness, mental health and even food are being reframed as investments into performance, employability and identity.

Communication, confidence & identity

As competition intensifies across workplaces and social settings, individuals are investing in how they present themselves verbally, physically and socially.

The global communications coaching market, valued at \$3.7 billion in 2024 and projected to reach \$9.5 billion by 2035, reflects this shift. Training in public speaking, executive presence, and interpersonal communication is gaining traction across corporate hierarchies.

"Unfortunately, our education systems emphasise theoretical knowledge and scores received in exams as primary input to determine successful performance. I would like to emphasise that knowledge, skills and behaviours must be demonstrated in the role. Mere high scores are not indicators of performance," says Murali Santhanam, CHRO of AscentHR Technologies.

Candidates who have understood the importance of behaviours and attitude characteristics required to be employable certainly benefit from investing time and effort in themselves. "They are easily recognisable in interviews because they have made efforts to modify their behaviours and make it part of their outlook and demeanour," adds Santhanam.

This emphasis on self-presentation extends beyond communication into appearance. Personal styling, once the preserve of luxury consumers, is entering the mainstream. Retailers, such as Shopper's Stop, are expanding personal shopper services, while independent stylists offer curated wardrobe and branding advice. As discretionary spending grows, shoppers, especially millennials and Gen Z, are seeking personalised experiences, rather than purely transactional interactions, particularly in high-involvement categories such as fashion, beauty, and gifting, says a Deloitte report. India's personal styling market is projected to reach \$23.8 billion by 2033, growing at nearly 12% annually.

Platforms such as StyleBuddy offer wardrobe consulting and personal shopping, charging between ₹5,000 and ₹20,000 per session.

Sunaina Saxena, 28, who works at an audit firm in Gurugram, recalls her experience with a personal stylist. "My initial consultation was an eye-opener. We discussed my lifestyle and the image I wanted to project. The stylist's expertise was evident," she says.

She adds, "The stylist worked tirelessly curating a collection that resonated with my personality. I began to carry myself differently, with a newfound poise and assurance... it was one of the best decisions I've made."

This emphasis on self-presentation is being amplified by social media. A proliferation of creators now offers guidance on everything from communication skills to grooming and lifestyle habits, turning self-improvement into a visible and aspirational pursuit.

Even learning is being reshaped within this broader culture of self-investment.

India's skilling and certification market is projected to reach ₹14 lakh million by FY28. Platforms such as Coursera, upGrad and Eruditus have seen sustained demand, particularly for flexible, short-duration programmes. Coursera recorded 54.4 million enrollments in

Investing in MYSELF

From skill acquisition to personal styling, functional consumption to growth therapy, how India's more intentional consumers are spending on themselves for performance, employability & identity

2025, with India emerging as one of its largest markets and leading in generative AI course adoption.

"Today the primary motivation is basically the urgency that if I don't get upskilled... I may not be relevant in my current job," says Anuj Vishwakarma, CEO, higher education, UpGrad. The learner base is widening. "Earlier people with more than 5 years experience used to be about 30-40% but today that contribution itself has increased by about 30%."

Ashwin Damera of Eruditus points to a structural shift. "Senior professionals want to be able to use tech efficiently but at the same time want to remain influential and context-aware," he says. "There's been a 40% spike in leadership programme enrolments."

At the same time, learning is becoming more lifestyle-driven. Beyond professional courses, there is growing interest in hobbies, such as cooking, painting, sport, reflecting a broader move towards self-expression and personal enrichment.

Body, mind and everyday optimisation

If communication and appearance shape perception, health, both physical and mental, is becoming the foundation of performance.

"More people now understand that health cannot be built only in moments of crisis," says Luke Coutinho, integrative lifestyle expert. "They are beginning to see lifestyle as foundational medicine... the baseline that shapes energy, immunity, resilience and recovery. The awareness is growing that deep sleep, stress regulation, movement, nutrition, and emotional balance are not optional add-ons. They are the foundation."

However, he cautions against trend-driven consumption. "Consumers are far more engaged with health than they were a decade ago. They are reading labels, asking questions, and looking for solutions. But there is also a lot of noise. Social media sells speed, and the wellness market often sells convenience before context. Our view is simple: foundations first, products second," he says, adding protein powders, supplements, and wellness foods can have a place, but only when they are chosen with clarity around an individual's needs and goals. "Otherwise, people end up adding products to a system that still lacks sleep, recovery, rhythm, and balance."

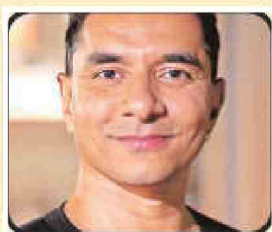
This tension is most visible in food. Nutrition is increasingly being treated as a daily investment. From protein shakes and collagen powders to magnesium strips for sleep and gut-health probiotics, a new category of "functional consumption" is emerging.

Brands such as Yoga Bar have built portfolios around oats, muesli, protein bars and shakes. "India's relationship with food is undergoing a fundamental shift, from sustenance to self-care," says Dr Shantanu Das of ITC. "63% of Indian consumers actively seek healthier products



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and are willing to pay a premium price."

Ritesh Arora of IT Foods, a leading FMCG brand that specialises in a staple like rice, describes a similar evolution: "We are becoming more health conscious, looking at nutrition value... people are starting to look at food as an alternative to medicine... The thing that we eat healthy, we can stay healthy for long."

This is also driving premiumisation. "India is becoming more aspirational today... we are seeing that upward movement in our portfolio as well," he says, pointing to growth in higher-quality and specialised food categories.

Meanwhile, new-age formats are going further. EatFit has launched EatFit Lab, where meals are designed around outcomes around energy, gut health, recovery and cognitive performance. "Consumers

today are sophisticated; they're tracking their protein, prioritising gut health, and looking for ways to boost energy and focus," says Ankit Nagori, CEO of EatFit.

At the same time, a deeper shift is unfolding at the source. Two Brothers Organic Farms, a Pune-based, ECOCERT-certified producer of chemical-free, nutrient-dense foods, founded by Satyajit and Ajinkya Hange, is seeing a move towards mindful consumption. "Earlier, food was largely about convenience or taste, but today, it's becoming a question of trust," says Satyajit Hange, co-founder. "Food is no longer being looked at only as fuel, but as something deeply connected to long-term wellbeing."

According to Hange, the shift often begins small. "Sometimes even something as simple as choosing a more traditionally made ghee, jaggery, or flour... from there, it gradually builds into a deeper, more intentional way of consuming."

The shift is now deeper, says Hange. "People are no longer only asking, 'Is this healthy?' They are also beginning to ask, 'Is this honest?'"

India's fitness industry is expanding rapidly, with membership expected to grow from 12.3 million in 2024 to 23.3 million by 2030. Boutique formats such as yoga, Pilates and HIIT are growing at nearly 19% annually.

This reframing is evident in member motivations. "Many of our members today walk into the gym not just to lose weight or build muscle, but to build confidence, consistency, and mental resilience," says Dr Richa Mishra, vice president-operations, Anytime Fitness India. Fitness, in this context, becomes a mechanism for behavioural change. "Fitness, by its very nature, instills discipline, showing up regularly, pushing limits, and setting goals. Over time, this translates into improved self-belief and a stronger sense of identity." The demographic profile is also shifting. "Yes, there has been a significant rise in younger members, particularly in the 16-22 age group," Mishra notes. "This demographic is far more aware and proactive about their health and appearance than previous generations." Their motivations extend beyond aesthetics. "There is also a strong desire for self-improvement, confidence-building, and social belonging," she says, pointing to the influence of digital culture and global exposure. Notably, mental well-being is increasingly intertwined with physical goals. "A substantial portion of our members today associate fitness with mental well-being and emotional balance... for many, these goals are just as important, if not more, than physical transformation." Social media, however, has introduced both aspiration and pressure. "On one hand, it has significantly increased awareness and motivation. On the other hand, it has also led to heightened expectations and, at times, unrealistic benchmarks," Mishra observes.

Geographically, the trend is no longer urban-centric. "The demand for fitness in

non-metro and tier 2/3 cities is growing rapidly... consumers in these markets are highly aware, digitally connected, and increasingly seeking access to quality fitness infrastructure," she says.

Gyms themselves are evolving in response. "They are becoming community hubs and environments for personal transformation... helping individuals become the best version of themselves, both physically and mentally."

Becoming better mentally

Mental health is following a similar trajectory. If fitness represents external discipline, mental health represents internal alignment, and here too, a significant shift is underway.

Ritika Sinha, COO and founder of Rocket Health, an online mental and sexual healthcare platform, describes the change as both cultural and behavioural. "The shift is most visible in Gen Z and younger millennials. This generation is treating going to therapy the way they treat going to the gym. It is now cool to have a therapist." Crucially, the timing of intervention is changing. "Earlier, people sought support only when something was visibly wrong... That is changing drastically," she says.

Today, many users engage with mental health services proactively. "Even those who are not in crisis are often carrying low energy, disrupted sleep, difficulty concentrating, and a persistent sense of stress or loneliness... The fact that people are no longer waiting for things to become unmanageable is... one of the most positive changes."

The nature of concerns reflects broader societal pressures. "The dominant concern is anxiety. Gen Z is under constant scrutiny on social media, at work, and in their relationships, expectations keep shifting, there is an unspoken pressure to keep evolving at the same pace," Sinha says. "The pressure is real, and they are doing the right thing by seeking support earlier."

Importantly, therapy is being reframed as a tool for self-discovery rather than cor-

rection. "Most people do not arrive with a diagnosis, they arrive with something they are carrying and cannot quite name, a sense of being stuck, of lacking direction," she notes. This aligns mental health more closely with the broader self-improvement narrative. "Just as education shapes your intellect and fitness shapes your body, mental health support is increasingly shaping how people build self-awareness and emotional resilience."

Digital platforms are playing a critical role in expanding access. "About 45% of our users come from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities," Sinha says, highlighting the democratisation of mental health services in a country with significant treatment gaps.

Ekta Bhanushali, a psychologist and relationship coach, describes this shift in sharper terms: "A clear shift from crisis driven help seeking to growth therapy. They want to become better as individuals." Clients often arrive with a trigger but stay for transformation. "So many clients come with a presenting concern but very quickly, they move into deeper identity work. Once they experience it, they immediately use it as a tool for self-development."

The demographic has widened significantly. "Earlier, therapy was solely sought by individuals in their 30s or 40s. Now I see clients from the early 20s... Greater diversity across professions as well, founders, corporate leaders, students, creators."

The motivations have shifted as well. "The mindset... has shifted from 'something is wrong with me' to 'I want to function at my highest potential'."

Bhanushali frames therapy as a form of capital. "Therapy is now being increasingly viewed as a psychological capital... people are seeking therapy as an investment in personal life as well as professional life."

Taken together, these trends point to a redefinition of consumption in India. Individuals are looking at products as they would when adding more money in their SIP pool. In an economy where expectations are rising and lifestyles are evolving rapidly, the most valuable asset may be how consciously someone invests in who they are becoming.

